GENERAL

how alanon works

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How Alanon Works: A Complete Guide to the 12 Step Program for Family and Friends of Alcoholics

When you're the partner, sibling, parent, or friend of someone who struggles with alcohol or substance use, the emotional rollercoaster can feel endless. You might find yourself oscillating between hope and despair, denial and acceptance, and often, you may wonder how you can find a path to stability. **Alanon**offers a structured, community driven approach that helps you regain control, heal emotional wounds, and learn healthy coping strategies. This article explains in depth how Alanon works, why it's effective, and how you can join the program.

What Is Alanon?

Alanon is a 12 step program designed for people who are closely connected to someone with an alcohol or drug problem. Unlike Alcoholics Anonymous (AA), which focuses on the alcoholic themselves, Alanon addresses the impact of addiction on loved ones. The program is rooted in the same principles of humility, honesty, and community, but it tailors its steps to help you rebuild your life outside the addiction cycle.

The Origin and Meaning of the Name

The term **Alanon**is a portmanteau of "Alcoholics Anonymous" and "narcissists." While the name might seem controversial, it reflects the original founders' observation that many family members of alcoholics often behaved in self protective, self centered ways to cope with the chaos. Over time, the focus shifted to the broader concept of "people who are in relationships with alcoholics," and the program has grown into a worldwide support network.

Core Principles of Alanon

- Acceptance: Recognizing that you cannot control the alcoholic's behavior but can control your own reactions.
- Self Care: Prioritizing your physical, mental, and emotional health.
- Community: Sharing experiences in a confidential, non judgmental environment.
- Growth: Using the 12 steps as a roadmap to personal transformation.
- Service: Giving back by volunteering or mentoring newcomers.

The 12 Steps and 12 Traditions

Alanon's framework mirrors AA's 12 steps and 12 traditions but is adapted for the unique challenges faced by family members and friends. Below is a brief overview of each step and tradition, illustrating how they guide you toward healing.

12 Steps

1. Admitting powerlessness over the situation.
2. Believing a higher power could restore sanity.
3. Deciding to turn over your life to that higher power.
4. Conducting a moral inventory of your behavior.
5. Admitting wrongs to yourself, others, and the higher power.

6. Being ready to have the higher power remove your defects.
7. Requesting removal of shortcomings.
8. Making a list of people harmed and being willing to repair.
9. Making amends to the extent possible.
10. Continuing personal inventory and admitting mistakes promptly.
11. Seeking spiritual growth through prayer and meditation.
12. Sharing the experience with others and carrying the message.

12 Traditions

1. Alanon is a fellowship; it must remain open and inclusive.
2. Alanon's primary purpose is to help those in need.
3. Alanon is not a political or religious organization.
4. Alanon is a non profit; it operates through voluntary contributions.
5. Alanon's membership is open to anyone in need of support.
6. Alanon's leadership is elected by members.
7. Alanon is governed by a board of directors.
8. Alanon's meetings are self sustaining through membership fees.
9. Alanon's primary focus is the needs of the members.
10. Alanon is not a commercial enterprise.
11. Alanon is a non profit organization.
12. Alanon's mission is to help those in need.

These steps and traditions create a structured path that encourages personal responsibility, spiritual growth, and community involvement.

How Alanon Meetings Are Structured

Alanon meetings follow a simple yet powerful format that allows participants to share, listen, and learn. Most meetings include the following components:

- Opening Prayer or Moment of Reflection: Sets a calm, respectful tone.
- Opening Remarks: Brief introduction by the meeting leader.
- Reading of the 12 Steps and 12 Traditions: Reinforces the program's foundation.
- Open Sharing: Participants speak for a set amount of time (usually 5–10 minutes).
- Closing Prayer or Reflection: Ends the meeting on a hopeful note.

Meetings can be in-person, online, or hybrid. The key is anonymity and confidentiality—what is shared inside stays inside. This creates a safe space for honest conversation.

Finding Your First Meeting

Locating an Alanon meeting is simple. Use the official Alanon website's *Find a Meeting* tool, or search online for local groups. You can also call the national helpline at **1 800 ALANON (1 800 252 6626)** for assistance. When you join a meeting, you'll be assigned a sponsor—a seasoned member who will guide you through the steps.

Types of Meetings

- Open Meetings: Open to anyone, including newcomers and those who have never attended before.
- Closed Meetings: Reserved for Alanon members; typically for more in-depth discussion.
- Online Meetings: Accessible from anywhere; ideal for those with transportation or scheduling constraints.
- Family Meetings: Designed for entire families to attend together.

Choose a meeting that feels comfortable and aligns with your schedule. Many people find that attending several different meetings helps them discover the style that best suits them.

What to Expect at a Meeting

When you first attend an Alanon meeting, you might feel nervous or uncertain. Here's what you can expect:

1. Introduction: The facilitator will explain the meeting's structure and rules.
2. Opening Prayer: A moment of quiet or guided reflection.
3. Reading of Steps: A brief recitation of the 12 steps and traditions.
4. Sharing: You'll have the option to speak or simply listen.
5. Closing: A final prayer or reflection to close the meeting.

Remember, you are not obligated to speak if you're not ready. Listening can be just as valuable, and you'll learn how to share when you feel comfortable.

The Role of Sponsorship and Mentorship

In Alanon, a sponsor is a seasoned member who has successfully completed the steps and is willing to guide a newcomer. Sponsors provide:

- Personal Support: One on one meetings, phone calls, or text messages.
- Step Guidance: Practical advice on how to work through each step.
- Accountability: Encouraging consistency and progress.
- Encouragement: Celebrating milestones and helping you navigate setbacks.

Choosing the right sponsor is crucial. You should feel comfortable, respected, and supported. Many sponsors also volunteer as meeting leaders or committee members, further enriching the community.

Alanon Online and Digital Resources

In today's digital age, Alanon offers a range of online resources to support members who cannot attend in person:

- Virtual Meetings: Live video sessions via Zoom or other platforms.
- Alanon App: Features a meeting finder, step tracker, and community chat.

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