

Task Force: Identify, Gather and Present Practices that Demonstrate a Healthy, Thriving Group

The Task Force was asked to define a healthy, thriving group, then gather material on the practices and present the material in a format for groups to use to be healthy and thriving. “Thriving” may be characterized by success, or prosperity, or flourishing. In a healthy group, members join local groups which have a welcoming atmosphere, where the AI-Anon/Alateen program is shared and where members participate in service. The AI-Anon and Alateen members usually consider one group as their “home group.” By regular attendance, friendships are established, and growth is acknowledged. In a home group, members and newcomers find a place where they feel accepted, no matter what. There may be time before the meeting where all members and newcomers are greeted as the room is being set up; refreshments and beverages may be available; and time after the meeting for more conversation and sharing on a one-to-one basis. Tradition Five ensures the group will be safe, friendly, welcoming, and non-judgmental. As always, our Higher Power is present in all meetings.

Members of a healthy, thriving group:

- Show up early and/or stay late.
- Commit to weekly attendance.
- Encourage all members, including newcomers and long-timers, to return.
- Encourage the use of Sponsors.
- Demonstrate willingness to be available to newcomers.
- Avoid outside issues.

A healthy group:

- Has a meeting protocol.
- Has a structured weekly group format.
- Uses the Preamble, Opening, and Closing from “AI-Anon Alateen Groups at Work” section of the 2014-2017 AI-Anon/Alateen Service Manual (P-24).
- Remembers that “AI-Anon is spoken here.”
- Maintains the anonymity of group members at all times.
- Enthusiastically encourages service work and is self-supporting through members’ voluntary contributions in order to cover rent, purchase of literature, support of trusted servants, and AI-Anon’s service arms.
- Rotates service positions regularly.

A thriving group:

- Has regular business meetings at times chosen by the group.
- Practices Tradition Four; “Each group should be autonomous, except in matters affecting another group or AI-Anon or A.A. as a whole.”
- Has literature available for a variety of group members.
- Is mindful of the use of acronyms, especially when talking with newcomers. For example, One Day at a Time, instead of ODAT.
- Uses the wealth of Conference Approved Literature (CAL) and available service materials.

Member Participation in a healthy group:

- Share their experience, strength, and hope about recovering from the effects of loving and living with alcoholics.
- Keep their sharings focused on their recovery in the meeting, and may share details with their Sponsors or others on a one-on-one basis.
- Support Alateen members transitioning into AI-Anon groups.
- Listen actively and attentively during member sharings without other distractions.

Group Problem-solving in a healthy group:

- Use the group conscience process to make group decisions.
- Conduct group inventories at regular intervals.
- Use available Conference Approved Literature, such as “Using AI-Anon Principles to Resolve Conflict” kit (P-70).
- Review the “Three Obstacles to Success in AI-Anon.”
- Practice principles above personalities.

The Task Force proposed the following questions to the Conference for discussion: What do you see in your Areas that demonstrates thriving, healthy groups? Is there information you would like to see added? *The floor was opened for discussion and the following comments were made:*

- There is no chanting at meetings.
- Diversity in a mix of ages and why they came to AI-Anon showing up in our surveys. How can we statistically validate that groups are growing? My dream would be to find ways to identify which groups are diverse and growing and what they are doing to make themselves successful.
- The dominance of long-time members is intimidating. They have difficulty in letting go. Yet, without longtimers there is no experience; without mid-term, no stability; without newcomers, no future.
- The most diverse meetings seem to be the most aware of being inclusive, are careful not to talk about outside issues, talk in inclusive terms, and attend multiple meetings for sharing of ideas.
- Practice attraction rather than promotion. We are always happy, asking the newcomer’s name, and clapping. Group members go to other functions. There is no gossip or criticism.
- When I give, I receive. God gave me a van, and I pack it when I go to Assembly. I invite newcomers to go with us. Some members can’t afford to go to Assembly. I tell them, get in my car, stay in my room. We always have the biggest representation at Assembly. Share the room, share the money.
- I do service because someone suggested it. I often ask someone, would you be greeter for me next week or next month? It gives them a reason to be there.
- We had just two or three members who kept showing up. We had a special meeting to decide whether to close or continue to struggle. We decided to share on a Step, Tradition, and Concept weekly and the meeting grew. It is now up to 60 members weekly.
- The Budget presentation talked about changing perspective. I will use this topic and add financial information and invite groups to share the qualities that make it strong. This deepens trust and gives a feeling of safety. Groups are declining in some places because the population is declining. We have a meeting on communication twice a year.

- To be thriving, a group has to be visible. We realize it takes courage to come to a church door, so we cut out footprints and wrote AFG on them, and put them from the door down hall to the meeting door where it says “welcome.” We welcome them and have a temporary Sponsor for them.
- One healthy group has gone through the work to clarify boundaries using spiritual principles on outside issues. They wrote a carefully worded introductory statement that is read in a respectful and inclusive manner.
- Dominance vs. long-time experience. I was encouraged to get a long-time member to sponsor me. She told me that when she doesn’t do something, she gets stale. Encourage members to work the Steps with a Sponsor and encourage longtimer members to not get stale but continue to sponsor and share at meetings.
- Greeters are important. Al-Anon members who are also members of Alcoholics Anonymous can be greeters. I wouldn’t have stayed if someone was not at the door to welcome me.
- Finding a home group was a fateful event. I went to the meeting place, but the doors were locked because no one had a key. So we went down the road to a café and had a meeting. Another time, we had a meeting in someone’s van since we had the materials. We have a thriving beginners group that meets for a half-hour before the regular meeting. Newcomers usually learn what Al-Anon is and what it is about there and stay and become part of the group. They can still attend the beginners meeting too.
- We read the Three Legacies along with the Steps, Traditions, and Concepts weekly. Why do we do that? Because it works. Get personal in meetings to let people know that just because we’ve been there for a while, not all is great but this is how I work through it.
- Meetings involved with service were the answer for me. Now I see complacency in meetings. There is no exchange of new ideas. I want to take this discussion back home. I think the meeting will be great.
- If you don’t think your home group is the best, something is wrong. The constant is the meeting and the core group of members who adhere to Al-Anon principles. We do the things on the presentation worksheet so there is recovery in that meeting. It is made strong and thriving no matter the number with some sort of activity after the meeting—coffee, dinner etc. The fellowship we experience is so great that members show up from other meetings too.
- I don’t feel like my Area is thriving. Many members are just satisfied with feeling better. I try to share what it is like to be challenged and to grow and expand. My District includes many counties and a small number of groups. Nearly half are clustered in my town. A lot of counties are so rural they do not have a group in them.

Suggestions of information to add:

- Healthy and thriving can be mutually exclusive. One can be thriving, but is it healthy? Characteristics of members: They study the Steps with a Sponsor and choose a home group. Groups encourage working a program.
- Information about sponsorship, group service positions, resolving group problems, etc. is in “Groups at Work” (P-24). Questions could be included in the Group Inventory Guideline (G-8a/b). The G-8a/b is a resource to guide them.
- There is currently a Task Force working on a presentation for the 2016 on meeting types. Other resources are in the 2012 WSC Summary and a Thought Force presentation on the “Importance of a Home Group” (2014 WSC Summary, pages 60-63) as well as a presentation on “Welcoming and Retaining New Members” at this year’s Conference.