

GENERAL SESSION TOPIC – ALATEEN

Al-Anon Family Groups Australia was happy to receive the invitation from the International Coordination Committee to contribute to the general session topics for the 2018 International Al-Anon General Services Meeting (IAGSM). The invitation included the following:

“Rather than mimicking the frequently repeated themes such as how to attract more Sponsors or how to get more teens to attend meetings, this is an opportunity for a new conversation to emerge. The new conversation should be focused on strategies for creating a supportive culture where Alateen can thrive.”

Initially I composed a letter to the General Service Board members, Australian Service Delegates and Area Alateen Coordinators explaining the task and asking them for feedback. At the 2018 Australian Service Conference in May there were opportunities to speak to participants, a number of whom were Alateen Sponsors.

The first question to ask was what makes an Alateen meeting successful?

The Alateen story is more successful in Areas where there is more **cooperation between Al-Anon and AA**. When Al-Anon and AA have good cooperation there are opportunities to get young people to Alateen. Alateens love camps (weekend get-togethers in tents or cabins at a country location) and rallies. Often these are the only times that Alateens attend meetings. In South Australia camps are extremely popular with Alateens who join other family members attending Al-Anon and AA. In the early years of Al-Anon, meetings were often held at the same time and venue as AA meetings.

The Al-Anon group responsible for the Alateen group (called a Parent group in Australia) is so important for a healthy Alateen group. Members of the Al-Anon group take responsibility for the Alateens ensuring a positive environment. My own home group became willing to be the parent group for a new Alateen meeting. The Sponsors were members of the group, so when needed they were able to attend the Alateen meeting. The group also made a decision to pay the rent for the Alateen group until they were able to become self-supporting. The benefit for parents of the Alateens bringing their children to meetings was that they were able to attend to their own recovery at the same time.

Alateen Ready. One Area’s strategy to encourage Alateen was to have the room and the sponsors available every week, so that when Alateens arrived the meeting could go ahead. Of course this takes a decision by the parent group to support this situation financially.

Keep the meetings open. Don’t give up too soon. Just as when an Al-Anon group opens, it may take time for numbers to increase. Al-Anon members need to be willing to attend each week for at least 3 months while making sure that public information for the group is done in the local community and at AA/Al-Anon meetings in the Area.

Young people from families affected by alcoholism need **attention and support**. The family disease of alcoholism robs children of their self-esteem, in the same way it does for Al-Anon members. Good Alateen meetings happen when teens are welcomed and given comfort. Positive attention and support encourages teens to take on a service role in the group and feel good about themselves

Sponsors who are working their Al-Anon program help Alateens to keep the focus on themselves. Young Sponsors (closer to the age of the Alateens) are of course ideal. Alateen needs to be fun, so Sponsors who are fun-loving, patient and good listeners are popular with Alateen members.

The role of the Sponsor is to make suggestions, not tell the teens what to do, while ensuring that acceptable behaviour from all members is expected..

Links of Service/Communication between Sponsors, the Alateen Co-ordinator , District, and Area Committees need to be kept open so that Sponsors feel supported. If a problem arises the most positive option (having the the opportunity to speak with another member) is always available to the Alateens.

The number of teens attending often fluctuates but hopefully longer term members will share with new members how they have used the Alateen program and tools, and help them identify..

After school meetings in a school room which is familiar and comfortable , anonymous and safe, have been successful if there are more than two Alateens present at a school.

Successful ideas to use in a meeting:

- Start on time
- Choose a topic to focus on
- Prepare activities, readings, etc. before the meeting starts
- Ensure only one member shares at a time. A 'talking stick' is an idea. Only the Alateen holding the stick is allowed to speak. If you are not holding the stick you need to listen.
- Providing a range of different activities (e.g., readings, 4th step inventory, writing/drawing tasks). Alateens cannot concentrate for long periods of time.
- Starting and finishing with a set routine (e.g., read opening, read pre-amble, read Steps and finish with the closing and the serenity prayer)

In one group, the sponsors have been extremely encouraged by the open, and sometimes deep sharing by the youngsters in the trusting, respectful environment that is developing. Using-

- Topics that have ranged from bullying at school, anger, anxiety and worry, to detachment.
- Good Week/Bad Week/Good Week is the most popular activity to open up communication followed by readings on a topic
- A choice of games, including a slogan memory card game, celebrity heads slogan game, tossing game with questions to answer, paper nice (where positive

comments are written anonymously on each person's paper), an A-Z verbal gratitude list and crayon drawings.

- Ensuring Alateens have Chairing a Group Meeting (Guideline GX-1). How to Start an Alateen meeting in Australia (Guideline GX-19) is also useful.
- Alateens make their set of 'Rules' (or Code of Conduct) for their meetings.
- Ensuring parents and Alateens are aware of "What you say here, what you hear here, when you leave here, let it stay here."
- Alateen members have a room quite separate from the Al-Anon or AA meeting room so they feel safe in sharing.
- Skype meetings, with an Alateen group meeting in a different town, have been experimented with. Sponsors are present with the group of Alateens. If there is only one member at another venue there is no need for Sponsors to be present. I remain hopeful for all those Alateens who need this life-changing program, fellowship and recovery.

The second question to ask is 'what contributes to the demise of an Alateen meeting?'

The cycle of years means that members of Alateen today will no longer be members in five years' time. They leave school and they leave Alateen, new Alateen members are constantly needed to replace the ones who leave. Lack of new members when there are 1 or 2 members remaining in the group (especially if the 2 are siblings) means that the group may struggle. Significant age gap between members can often mean that younger members cannot fully understand what is happening.

When Sponsors are unwell, on holidays, resign, or leave for any reason there is instability in the group. Having 3 or 4 members registered as Sponsors who are familiar with the Alateens is desirable.

Time restraints mean that Alateen members divide their time between sport, music and various other interests after school and weekends.

Dominance of one member who does not allow ideas of the other members.

No plan at a meeting can mean that the discussion goes off the topic; members get distracted and lose the focus.

CONCLUSIONS:

- Cooperation between Al-Anon and Alcoholics Anonymous
- Supportive Parent/Al-Anon group responsible for Alateen
- Loving interchange between Sponsors and Alateens
- Structured and planned meetings with a variety of activities
- Always sharing the Alateen message of hope and encouragement



Alateens in the State of South Australia celebrated 60 years of Alateen Worldwide by spending the day with other teens and Al-Anon members. Here are some of their thoughts about Alateen

WHAT DOES ALATEEN MEAN TO YOU?

- Surprised that Alateen is real
- Nervous about starting something new
- Happy that I am not alone
- Excited to start something new and make new friends
- Scared that people wouldn't like me and would bully me
- Happy that I can share my feelings
- "a lot"

HOW HAS ALATEEN HELPED ME?

- Getting past my fears and sores and troubles, it helps me a lot
- It helped me get through tough times with my family
- It helps me to learn to be myself and not care what people think about me
- It helped me to share my feelings and get loose and feel proud of my family to accomplish this. It has made me feel proud of myself and my struggles

Here is an example of the Victorian Southern Area Public Information piece.

**When you don't know
where to turn...
because someone
drinks too much...**

Alateen can help.
(Alateen is part of Al-Anon Family Groups)
Learn more by attending a confidential meeting in your community.
www.al-anon.org.au 1300 252 666

The image shows a public information piece. On the left, a person is sitting on the floor with their back to the camera, hunched over with their arms wrapped around their knees. To the right of the person, there is a large white rectangular area containing text. The text is in a bold, dark blue font. At the bottom of this area, the text 'Alateen can help.' is in red, followed by '(Alateen is part of Al-Anon Family Groups)' in a smaller red font. Below that, it says 'Learn more by attending a confidential meeting in your community.' in red, and at the very bottom, the website 'www.al-anon.org.au' and the phone number '1300 252 666' are also in red.