

Dear WSC Members,

At the request of Marcia M., Panel 58 Delegate from Area 4 California South, we are posting her email sent to the WSO and our response requesting information and guidance on how to register a "hybrid" Al-Anon group as parts of the country are beginning to open in light of easing restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many members are expressing concern as to how to conduct meetings in this "new normal" that we are now being presented. We ask that you carefully consider the information being provided and place it in the context of what is occurring where you live. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can be of any assistance and feel free to share this information through your links of service.

Marcia's email:

Dear Sue and Scott,

Our California South Area members are asking questions about "hybrid" Al-Anon meetings as some counties in our state are loosening their COVID-19 restrictions, and some facilities are reopening. I imagine you've received emails regarding hybrid meetings and that this is a topic that's already being discussed at WSO. Especially since you were able to pull together our WSC using innovative methods that we only dreamed about a year ago! (You did an awesome job by the way!)

Do you have any guidance to offer meetings that are trying to figure out how to have some members meet face-to-face and have a virtual component? Members are considering using a phone with a speaker, or a laptop using a virtual platform like Zoom. Pros, cons to think about?

And if an Al-Anon group is able to pull off a hybrid meeting, how will they note this for their registered meeting? As in, members could either join the face-to-face location, or join virtually - so the teleconferencing link would continue to be listed (as part of the group's location instructions), along with their physical address. The group's name and WSO identification number would remain the same.

The COVID-19 situation has given us more growth opportunities than we ever imagined. I've mostly seen members respond to the challenges by "reasoning things out" with their groups. Unfortunately there are some who respond to the perceived freedom in virtual meetings by taking liberties with format, literature, their sharing, etc., that they wouldn't think about doing in a face-to-face meeting. I am so grateful for the members who are trying to gently, lovingly remind others of our spiritual principles and legacies. I receive emails/text messages every day from members who are struggling with these challenges. I can't begin to imagine how overloaded WSO must be with questions and concerns!

I greatly appreciate your support and guidance as we navigate this uncharted territory together. Thank you for all your are doing for our wonderful worldwide fellowship!

With Gratitude and Hugs, 🍀🍀

Marcia

WSO response:

Dear Marcia,

Warm greetings from your world Service Office (WSO)! We have been receiving a number of emails and phone calls regarding how Al-Anon meetings will be moving forward as localities reopen and hope this information will be able to contribute to discussions in the California South Area.

As the clearinghouse for Al-Anon Family Groups, we are tasked with providing interpretation of policies approved by our World Service Conference, considered Al-Anon's largest representative group conscience. There are some situations, like what has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, that has required us to talk to each other and reason things out with one another on a level that was not expected.

There is nothing that precludes a hybrid Al-Anon meeting to take place on a situational basis, like in response to a pandemic. This means that a temporary platform is used because the face-to-face group cannot meet at the time and day the group is scheduled to meet. The Al-Anon group, in accordance with Concept One, has the authority to decide where and how it will meet. Once the registered Al-Anon groups are able to resume for everyone to meet face-to-face, we will ask that any temporary electronic meeting information that has been entered into the AFG Online Group Records application be removed. This will also remove the temporary electronic meeting information from display on al-anon.org. At that point, it will become the responsibility and decision of the local groups to determine how to deal with situational issues, like social distancing or limited amounts of people able to gather, and how the Al-Anon group will continue to function.

Members need to be reminded that there is no process or policy in place at this time to register or display an Al-Anon meeting that meets face-to-face and online. When registered meeting information is displayed, it is for anyone to be able to participate in that meeting. It is important not to cross geographic boundaries with members that are connected to a registered Al-Anon group. Each registered Al-Anon group is connected via its links of service to the Area in which the group meeting takes place. These types of meetings may be challenged with service responsibility not being clearly defined if members participate from outside the geographic area, which can lead to violation of Concept Ten. In other words, when the group is voting on matters presented by the District or Area for consideration, the Al-Anon members connected via a published electronic method but not connected directly to the Area cannot vote. How will the group be able to handle those situations? How will the group know if the member is a trusted servant already elected in a group in the geographic area where they live? Members participating in physical groups are connected directly to the physical geographic structure where they reside.

We can share that members are discussing continuing an electronic component to meetings which will now be limited to availability to members in the physical location or Area of the group. Accessing meetings electronically from home anywhere around the world is not the same as accessing meetings in the immediate community at large. Will there be internet access where the group meets with a signal strong enough to support the meeting in its duration? Have group members discussed concerns with video-based platforms and anonymity for themselves as well as those that may be joining? Is there a way to use a video platform and not engage video and just audio? Can the group financially support rent and payment for a platform? These are some of the many questions and principled conversations that members are asking themselves, as we are here at the WSO.

As with many things in Al-Anon, more will be revealed. As the clearinghouse we are grateful to be part of the discussion and are here to offer guidance in light of our current policies. I hope this is helpful to continue to bring the discussion forward at the Area and local level. These are great discussions to post on the various service communities within AFG Connects as we are all in this together - to make sure we are here to offer help and hope to families and friends of alcoholics.

With love in service,

Sue P

Associate Director - Group Services