S-ANON®
International
Family Groups

ANONYMITY IN S-ANON

WHY ANONYMITY IS IMPORTANT

A Safe Place: Anonymity creates a safe environment to share at meetings and helps preserve the fellowship. We do not reveal to anyone, even to partners, spouses, relatives, friends, or other members not present, whom we see and what we hear at a meeting. Anonymity means that whatever we share will be respected and held in confidence, giving us comfort that members will not repeat any personal information to others.

When we first come to S-Anon, we are often lonely and frustrated. We may have felt the shame of thinking we were responsible for the sexaholic behavior of a family member or friend. We may have learned to live with secrets. Or if we shared our situation with someone outside of the program, we may have met with judgment or a lack of understanding. A safe place to share with others who have similar experiences and can understand our circumstances helps us to learn to let go of shame and guilt. We learn to trust others and the Higher Power of our own understanding. We find that the problems we once kept secret lose their power and grip on us when brought into the light. We find that we are not alone.

We Are All Equal: Anonymity also contributes to our personal growth by reminding us that we are all equal in the fellowship, in keeping with the spirit of Tradition Three. This holds true regardless of how long we have been working the program, what our status may be outside S-Anon, or any service roles we have held or are currently holding in the fellowship. We leave our other identities outside the meeting, such as professions, religions, philosophies, or attendance in another Twelve Step fellowship. In accordance with Tradition Twelve, "Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles above personalities."

We learn to listen to others with respect and avoid crosstalk so we can share without fear of judgment. We keep the focus on ourselves and avoid talking about other S-Anon members, about those in other Twelve Step programs, or about others outside our recovery meetings. This helps build a safe environment for healing so we can become willing to be honest about our thoughts and what is in our hearts. We can listen with an open mind to the experience, strength, and hope shared in the message, rather than focusing on the messenger. Practicing the spiritual principle of humility through anonymity allows us to grow in the knowledge that we are loved and accepted just as we are instead of our pre-recovery behavior of seeking validation because we are focusing on what others think of us.

Secrets vs. Anonymity: Secrets and anonymity may seem similar. The difference is that secrets can keep us sick, while anonymity can provide a space for healing. Anonymity is also addressed in Tradition Eleven: "We need guard with special care the anonymity of all S-Anon and SA members." The intention is to keep us anonymous as individuals, not to keep the S-Anon program a secret. When speaking in a meeting or with another member, we usually do not refer to the sexaholic or another S-Anon member by name. Anonymity means avoiding gossip and being respectful of other people's right to privacy. Sexaholism can have a stigma, and when the sexaholism of another is shared, it can have serious financial and/or legal consequences, ruin relationships, and injure others. We allow others, including the sexaholic, to share their own stories so we do not break their anonymity. Each S-Anon member can determine for themselves whether and how much to share about their personal S-Anon story with family and friends.

We adhere to the spiritual practice of anonymity to create a safe space for healing for ourselves and other group members. However, for the program to grow, the S-Anon program itself cannot remain anonymous. We practice carrying the message of recovery to make our program available to others.

Members should take care when discussing details of illegal activity or abuse of any kind as some S-Anon members may be required by law or moral obligation to report instances of abuse, neglect, or self-harm. Groups strive to provide as safe an environment as possible in which members can focus on themselves, and, while anonymity is central to that purpose, it is not intended to shield abusive or illegal behavior. S-Anon's position on reporting abuse is available in the S-Anon/S-Ateen Service Manual, "Part 1. How S-Anon and S-Ateen Groups Work," "Anonymity."

HONORING PRIVACY IN AN ELECTRONIC WORLD

Honoring the privacy of others when using electronic communication and social media is closely tied to the critically important concept of anonymity. We live in an increasingly digital world with rapidly changing technology for collaboration and connection with others. Electronic communication and social media can be important tools for recovery and sharing the S-Anon message per Tradition Eleven's "attraction rather than promotion," provided we take a deliberate, careful approach to what we share and to whom we connect in the online world.

A helpful approach to digital or online anonymity is considering how to translate in-person practices to electronic interactions. We probably would not use our last name on a name tag in an in-person meeting or share where we work. Similarly, members may want to consider whether they are comfortable with sharing last names and other identifying information when creating an electronic identity. For example, the S-Anon/S-Ateen Service Manual encourages members to use generic email addresses and email signatures to maintain anonymity by not using last name, address, job title, company, etc.

Electronic Devices: Members are reminded to consider the anonymity of others in the program when leaving a voicemail, texting, or emailing by first asking if it's okay to mention S-Anon or to leave a detailed recovery message. Letting others access a personal cell phone, computer, or other electronic device such as a tablet as well as using a shared computer may inadvertently lead to broken anonymity or disregard for expectations of privacy.

Videoconferencing: Digital meetings present different challenges in protecting a member's anonymity. When using videoconferencing, many groups suggest that members use only a first name and last name initial to identify themselves. Meetings are vital to the S-Anon program because this is where we get to hear the experience, strength, and hope of others, and we found that sharing with others helps us grow. Being on camera can increase our connection to others and help us be "fully present" while in a meeting, while also ensuring no one else is present in the background. However, it can raise anonymity considerations such as identifying items that may be in the background while on screen. Anonymity means that our other identities and affiliations need to remain outside the meeting discussion. Consider whether your on-screen view includes diplomas, decorations, photos, or items that could specifically identify you or indicate any outside affiliation. Consider what actions you can take to place principles above personalities in your video view.

We need to respect the anonymity of members when meeting via phone or online platform by not allowing non-participants in the meeting to see, overhear, or disrupt the meeting. Joining a video meeting using headphones and protecting your screen, or using only an audio/phone connection, are some ways to participate in online meetings if your space isn't private. Through the group conscience process, many groups decide to add a privacy and anonymity reminder to their sharing guidelines when they adapt the Suggested Meeting Format.

Other considerations for digital meetings include how to share meeting information while also safeguarding member anonymity, preventing uninvited people from joining, and protecting meeting passwords.

Social Media: It is important to consider ways to protect anonymity when using social media, as many of these services are designed to connect you to other people who are using the same social media platform but with whom you have not specifically chosen to be connected. Therefore, taking extra precautions and being mindful of privacy settings is a good practice.

Social networking sites or blogs provide members with efficient means to distribute information about S-Anon recovery to a large audience. However, in accordance with Tradition Eleven, members who use public media, such as social networking or blogs, need to maintain their own personal anonymity and "guard with special care" the anonymity of all S-Anon and SA members. This also ensures that no one person is perceived as a representative of or spokesperson for S-Anon.

While it is not recommended that full names of S-Anon members be connected to content that exposes their membership in the program, there are other creative ways of sharing recovery without utilizing the S-Anon name. If you choose to share the miracle of recovery through web content or social media, keep in mind how easily personal anonymity can be compromised.

There are a large and growing number of websites and social media services, and their privacy options and settings are continually evolving. We encourage S-Anon members to periodically review their privacy settings to protect anonymity.

ANONYMITY IN S-ANON

WITHIN THE FELLOWSHIP

Within the S-Anon fellowship, each member is encouraged to maintain a level of personal anonymity during meetings in accordance with the Twelve Traditions and is free to choose their level of anonymity with other members outside meetings. When providing service to the fellowship, we may need to disclose our full name, address, etc., but we do not become spokespersons for S-Anon. Members of the Board of Trustees, representing the legal structure of S-Anon, are required to disclose such information on legal documents. When a local group opens a bank account, someone may need to provide identifying information to the bank.

OUTSIDE OF THE FELLOWSHIP

Outside the fellowship, the principle of anonymity assures us that only we, as individual S-Anon members, have the right to make our membership known to friends, associates, and others within our community. For example, we may wish to give our full names to interested doctors, therapists, or spiritual leaders who may meet with family members of sexaholics, but we would not provide the name of any other member without specific permission from that person. If we do reveal our S-Anon membership outside the fellowship, we clearly indicate that we do not represent S-Anon as a whole.

Tradition Eleven reminds us that "[W]e need always maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, and films" or any other form of public media, such as the Internet. In these circumstances, we guard against allowing our last names, faces, or other distinctive physically identifying characteristics to be revealed when we identify ourselves as S-Anon members. We do not take photographs or record video at conventions, workshops, or any other events to safeguard anonymity. This policy protects both the individual and the fellowship and provides reassurance to newcomers that their anonymity will be protected. It also reminds us that no one person speaks for S-Anon or can be portrayed as a spokesperson for the program. Photos of people used on the S-Anon website and in publications are those of actors or models taken from stock photos, so the anonymity of S-Anon members is not compromised. Using generic, non-identifiable group email addresses maintains the anonymity of members.

The intention of Tradition Eleven is to protect the anonymity of S-Anon members as individuals, not to keep the S-Anon program anonymous. It is vital that those who need what S-Anon offers can learn about us. Each of us has benefited from the accessibility of the S-Anon program—it is important that the program remains visible and that we each find our own way of doing Twelfth Step work while respecting the principle of anonymity.

As S-Anon's *Anonymity Reminder Table Tent Card* states:

To ensure the success of our S-Anon meetings:

Whom You See Here
What Is Said Here
When You Leave Here
Let It Stay Here.

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