

VOLUME LX | ISSUE V | SEPT-OCT 2023

SERENITY MESSENGER

FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS CONCERNED
ABOUT ANOTHER'S USE OF DRUGS, ALCOHOL,
OR RELATED BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE FAMILIES ANONYMOUS FELLOWSHIP

SERENITY MESSENGER

Newsletter of the Families Anonymous Fellowship



EDITOR'S NOTE

One of my biggest challenges in life as a daughter of an alcoholic is my inclination to be (perceived as) good. While my parent had no impulse control, never considered how his actions might harm those around, and consistently prioritized his addiction, I decided to be nothing like him. I tried instead, as a child of an addict, to never be 'difficult.' Perhaps I thought I could offset the destruction around me by behaving my best. But on the inside, I walked on eggshells, was anxious never to ruffle feathers and, above all else, tried to maintain peace in the midst of chaos.

Over the years, this learned proclivity became second nature. I could see the good in even those who harmed and abused me. I forgave others to be the bigger person. I overextended myself, whether it was a family dinner or intense seasons of caregiving for others. There were times when my generosity was needed. But over time, the stress of centering everyone else at the cost of myself led to a breakdown of my mental and physical health. I had put in years of work but did not receive the understanding and sensitivity I expected. Wouldn't those around me see all that I've sacrificed?



My father passed on without ever having admitted to his addiction. In the last years of his life, when he lived with dementia, I would be surprised by spurts of resentment I felt at his years of addiction. But I was left to deal with my feelings without any hope of discussing them with him. I still find it hard to recover from my need for approval. I struggle if perceived poorly or misunderstood.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

(CONT'D)

Thanks to the program I am trying today to live authentically, to not make pleasing others the motive of my actions. Learning that no one can ever have the approval of everyone. I can sense the unfamiliar discomfort I feel each time I draw a boundary and restrain from explaining myself or becoming overly apologetic about it. I try to stay in this new discomfort necessary for my growth for a while. I breathe deeply and try to let go of trying to control others.

**IN FELLOWSHIP,
ELIZABETH S.**



THINKING OF SUBMITTING AN ARTICLE OR ANNOUNCEMENT TO THE SERENITY MESSENGER?

For our upcoming issue, the deadline
to submit announcements is
November 23rd.

We gladly accept submissions of
original articles, letters, poetry, or
artwork at any time!

Email us at
newsletter@familiesanonymous.org.
We'd love to hear from you!

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Serenity Messenger

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THE JOURNEY TO ACCEPTANCE

Rosemary T. Reflects on What Acceptance Means to Her After Joining the Fellowship

I came to Families Anonymous in the summer of 2020 after realizing that my husband's drinking was more of a problem than I wanted to realize. I'd been in denial for a long time. I had actually gone to Families Anonymous 14 years prior, after being married for only 6 months, but I wasn't ready to "accept" the disease of alcoholism in my life at that time.

My husband's drinking spiraled out of control in the spring of 2020. I could no longer stay in denial; my kids were out of control, and my life had become unmanageable. My husband had entered an outpatient rehab that he logged into remotely, and I was hopeful things would work out with the family I so desperately wanted. Unfortunately, as I took off my rose-colored glasses, I discovered many things that I could not stay in denial about. My husband had lied about our finances and hadn't paid taxes for several years. This was all happening while we were in marriage counseling and while he was supposedly in rehab working a good program.

We always talk about the 3 A's of recovery (awareness, acceptance and action). Of these, acceptance has been the most challenging for me. I was aware that my husband had a drinking problem, and I could accept this to an extent, in that I was able to take action to move out and file for divorce. But to truly accept this as my family's storyline has been extremely difficult.

For me, acceptance has been a journey. I find myself at different stages and degrees of acceptance at different times, knowing that when I start spiraling into overthinking, I'm trying to fix and control outcomes.

Initially, I accepted powerlessness over my husband's drinking because I knew I couldn't control him. But I struggled to accept how this family disease was impacting me and our two sons. Then, through the



"I realized I had to walk away, not because I didn't love my husband, but because I had to love myself more—and because it was the only option for me and my boys to live in a serene, peaceful environment."

wisdom of FA, I realized that the only way I could change the trajectory of this family disease for my boys was if I left my husband and showed my boys that you don't have to accept unacceptable behavior and that nothing changes if nothing changes.

I realized I had to walk away, not because I didn't love my husband (or at least the version of him that I'd married; I've been grieving that loss for years), but because I had to love myself more—and because it was the only option for me and my boys to live in a serene, peaceful environment. I realize everyone's circumstances are different, and everyone has to make their own choices with help from their Higher Power.



"Rather than this causing us to be stuck with things as they are, acceptance is the foundation for growth and change."



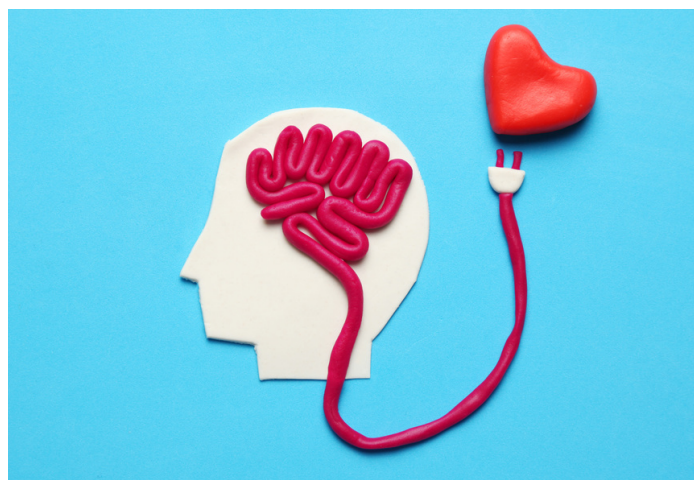
Acceptance is a person's assent to the reality of a situation, recognizing a process or condition (often a negative or uncomfortable situation) without attempting to change it or protest it. The key to acceptance is acknowledging the "unvarnished facts" about ourselves—the good and the not so good—without judging ourselves. Rather than this causing us to be stuck with things as they are, acceptance is the foundation for growth and change.

Acceptance isn't giving up and letting life just "happen" to us. Rather, it means accepting the things in life that are unchangeable (such as our past: there was nothing I could do about the fact I wasn't ready for recovery 17 years ago when I attended my first FA meeting) so we can focus our efforts and energy on the things that can be changed today.

As people in recovery, we carry guilt and shame with regard to addiction in our families. Learning how to accept life on life's terms allows us to let go of these feelings so we can move forward and make better decisions for ourselves.

I used to confuse acceptance with giving up on the alcoholic in my life. But with the help of the fellowship and an amazing sponsor, I now realize that giving up is a more passive and defeated response, while acceptance is more active and engaging. Acceptance is about acknowledging whatever problem you are facing and taking charge of what is within your control, even if it's just your reactions. If I'm struggling with acceptance, I usually need to revisit Step One and remind myself that I'm powerless.

To me, acceptance is where my head and my heart start to align and agree with each other. Often, my head knows first what to do, but my heart can't accept it. Reconciling my head and my heart is part of my ongoing work in the program. I'll get there with the help of my Higher Power and my FA family, one day at a time.



"To me, acceptance is where my head and my heart start to align and agree with each other. Often, my head knows first what to do, but my heart can't accept it."

ROSEMARY T.
SHALLOTTE, NC

WSB ANNOUNCEMENT

NEW Video Vignettes Project – We Need Your Help!



The FA World Service Board is considering the development of a series of two- to three-minute video “Vignettes,” each featuring a parent or couple who has a family member suffering from substance use disorder, speaking honestly and intimately about one aspect of their recovery journey (powerlessness, codependency, enabling, setting boundaries, etc.). Their identities will be anonymized.

The objective of the project is to **raise awareness about Families Anonymous and diminish the stigma and shame associated with addiction**, while reaching as many audiences as possible, for example:

- Families who are struggling but have never heard about FA
- FA members who are seeking more support and tools to use between meetings
- Family and friends of FA members who want to understand and support their loved ones

The World Service Board (WSB) will post the vignettes on the FA website and its Facebook, Instagram and YouTube pages as well as pursue avenues to distribute the video digitally to other platforms.

The WSB is developing a pilot vignette of a father professing, with startling candor, his financial enabling and how he began to let go. The title is, “Don’t Do It Alone.”

WE INVITE YOU TO JOIN OUR OUTREACH EFFORT

We are asking for your expertise in all phases of video production. Some of the immediate needs are advice on:

- **Black-and-white rotoscoping, especially AI rotoscoping**
- **Cleaning up audio recorded in Zoom**
- **Preparing clips for social media**
- **Distribution strategies to reach our audiences**

If you have this expertise, or you know someone who does, please reach out to us at pi@familiesanonymous.org.



SUPPORT THE PROJECT FINANCIALLY

If you do not have this expertise but would like to support this effort with a donation (any amount would be greatly appreciated), please:

- **Click here to donate** and
- **Email treasurer@familiesanonymous.org** to notify us you'd like the donation earmarked for the "Vignettes Project"

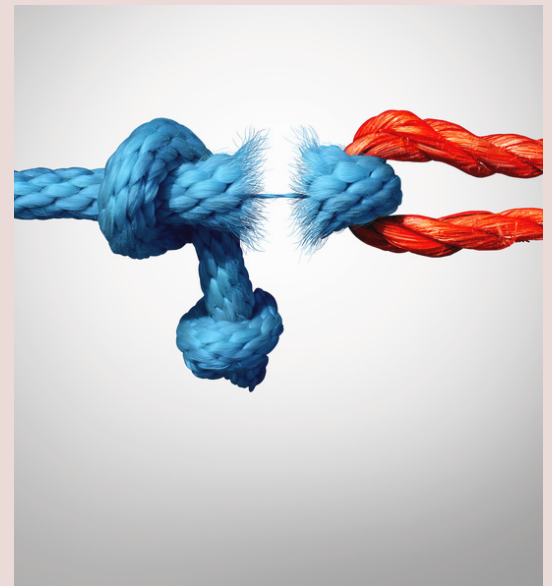
Thanks for your consideration to give back to the program that has meant so much to all of us.

LEARNING TO BE A ‘HANDS OFF’ PARENT

A Mother Shares How She Learned to Detach from Her Child's Choices

When I read the first page of The Twelve Step Workbook, I remembered my introduction to FA many years ago. My son's outpatient counselor had suggested I attend a Families Anonymous support group in my area after I had broken down sobbing in her office. Our son was being admitted to his first inpatient visit for a substance abuse disorder, and I was terrified of our future. The years to follow would include many inpatient and outpatient visits for our son, sober-living facilities, struggles to find good psychiatrists and therapists, and fighting the fear that addiction brings to any family.

As time went on, our son began suffering from mental health disorders, bringing on new uncertainties and anxieties. My FA group has provided a safe place for me to share my hopes, fears, despair, setbacks and successes. It's where I learned about working the 12 Steps. FA is not just a support group, but an introduction to a complete change in lifestyle and attitude that has helped me adjust to a new reality.



“FA is not just a support group, but an introduction to a complete change in lifestyle and attitude that has helped me adjust to a new reality.”

The first page of The Twelve Step Workbook reads: “Here you will discover ways to take your focus off your addicted loved ones and turn it back onto yourself. You will learn how to face reality with greater comfort and find some serenity and peace in the midst of your life's chaos.”

Our son did experience how I was changing my reactions to his behavior. He could stop lying to me, without fear of me yelling or expressing my disappointment, especially when he started using again.

When you work the program, you will find your behavior changing in a positive way. These changes, in turn, help to create an atmosphere conducive to your addicted loved one's recovery as well as your own self-growth. Our son did experience how I was changing my reactions to his behavior. He could stop lying to me, without fear of me yelling or expressing my disappointment, especially when he started using again. Above all, he knew I loved him, despite my unhappiness with his choices. I was stepping back and allowing him to live with the consequences of his actions. I learned to do things with him and not for him.

LEARNING TO BE A 'HANDS OFF' PARENT

(CONT'D)

When he was diagnosed with his mental health disorders, I would learn to help him if I knew he could not do it himself. When he took his mental health seriously, he was able to maintain sobriety and to work again.

Over these years, I have learned to stop comparing my son with anyone else or his progress with anyone else's progress. One of my favorite FA slogans is "Progress, not perfection." I am grateful every day for that empathetic counselor who led me to FA.

CHERYL K
PARK RIDGE, GROUP #173



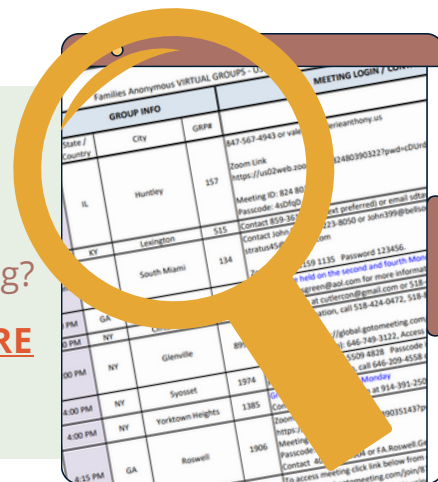
"I was stepping back and allowing him to live with the consequences of his actions. I learned to do things with him and not for him."

Looking for a Meeting?!

New to Families Anonymous and looking to join a meeting?

Interested in checking out either a new Virtual or In Person meeting?

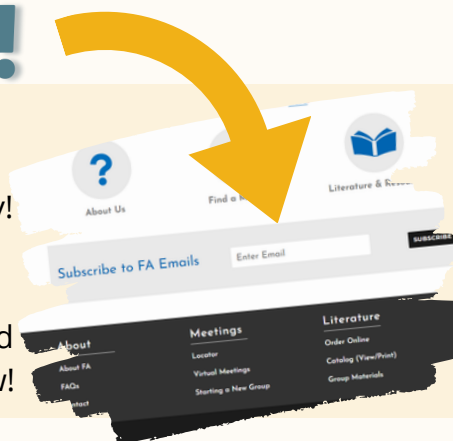
Find all our Meetings Directories on our website, by clicking [HERE](#) or under the "Meetings" > "Find a Meeting" tab.



SIGN UP TODAY!

If you don't want to miss an issue of the SERENITY MESSENGER and other FA announcements, subscribe to FA Emails today!

Visit familiesanonymous.org, scroll to the bottom of the homepage, fill in your email and hit Subscribe. It only takes a minute - do it now!



MY TRUTH ABOUT FEAR

A Parent Lets Go of their Fear of Losing Control

My personal experiences with my son have given me a new perspective and insight into his life with addiction. This new awareness of his reality occurred once I fully grieved the loss of the child of my dreams. This led to my honest acceptance, which then led me back to the life I had left behind when my son's addiction began. A life of peace and serenity. A life of joy, love and purpose.

It is good to be back. I have learned that the fear I had for him was not the fear he had. He had no fear. I experienced great emotional pain when I learned he was living on the streets, under a bridge. He felt no pain, emotional or physical. I cried when I learned he was in jail. He did not shed one tear.

I felt overwhelming sadness when I saw how the addiction was destroying his opportunities for a career, a loving wife, children, and discovering his purpose. He experienced no such sadness over these things. This is my son's life, not mine. I no longer pass judgment, as I have no right to judge him. I will allow him the dignity to experience his life in his way. Perhaps this is too radical of a concept for other parents to accept, but it is an understanding that keeps my codependency in check. It is what keeps me sane and focused on my own recovery.

THE USER'S PARENT GROUP #1806

REPUBLISHED FROM THE TWELVE STEP RAG, JANUARY-FEBRUARY 2014



"This is my son's life, not mine. I no longer pass judgment, as I have no right to judge him. I will allow him the dignity to experience his life in his way."

ONCE IN A LIFETIME! TODAY ONLY!

We see ads with headlines shouting these phrases all the time. They're designed to ignite a sense of urgency; to encourage us to rush out to buy some piece of merchandise or to attend a special social event because the offer for sale supposedly won't be repeated in the future.

Our FA program teaches us that every day is a once-in-a-lifetime, today-only event, because today is all we have. Be sure to take advantage of this incredible offer.

It will never happen again. Today only.

BOB S.



ACT NOW!

EDUCATION COMMITTEE ANNOUNCEMENT



Back by Popular Demand!

HOLIDAYS
CAN WEIGH
HEAVY
ON OUR HEARTS.



REMEMBER,
**YOU ARE NOT
ALONE.**

Feeling overwhelmed? Dreading the next family gathering?
You are not alone. **Families Anonymous can help.**

FREE Online "Help with Holidays" Workshop **Saturday, November 4, 2023 1 - 2pm ET**

Holidays can be tough, but we have options. There are things we can do to help us navigate a time of year that often brings added stress to family recovery.

Join us to hear from **Jeff & Jeanne S**, members of **Group #1906 in Roswell, GA**. Seasoned veterans of family recovery, they will share their family gathering **experiences**, offer **ideas** for dealing with our **emotions** and leave you with **encouragement** for your own journey through the holidays. Jeff & Jeanne are a great resource - don't miss the event!



[Click Here
to Join the Event](#)

Join us on Zoom
Meeting ID: 291 935 4542
Passcode: 4mPTGf

Phone dial in options:

+1 305 224 1968 US

+1 646 931 3860 US

Meeting ID: 291 935 4542

Phone Passcode: 649935

Questions? Email: FA.Roswell.Georgia@gmail.com

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THE KIND OF KIND WORDS WE NEED

Bob M. Shares Suggestions for Some Encouraging Words for Friends and Family

While I was searching every day for a cure to my son's addiction, it turned out that there were people who had already figured things out; they knew exactly what I should do. They'd say things like, "If my son did that, we would sit down and have a long heart-to-heart talk." or, "If my son pulled that, he would be grounded until he figured it out." When I heard such comments, I would think, I may not be a genius or even a good father, but if curing my son's addiction was as simple as a kick in the butt or a heart-to-heart talk, don't you think I would have done that by now? And as for being grounded, my son has spent more time grounded than the Boeing 737 Max. But I didn't say any of that out loud because as much as their comments made me feel small, because even though I had tried all those things already and I knew that none of them worked, I believed that deep down inside, those people wanted to help me; they just didn't know how. And then there were the people who said nothing, even though they knew. Did they not care? Or were they just afraid to say the wrong thing? I think those people wanted to be supportive, too.



"As someone whose loved one struggles with addiction, I wanted the support of family and friends. I needed the support of family and friends."

As someone whose loved one struggles with addiction, I wanted the support of family and friends. I needed the support of family and friends. So, why was it so hard for people? All they had to do was remember these 10 simple rules:

1. I don't want to talk about it unless I want to talk about it.
2. I don't want you to tell me that you know how I feel, but I want you to understand how I feel.
3. I don't want you to tell me that you have all the answers, but I desperately want answers. I desperately need answers.
4. I want you to listen, but I don't want you to pry.
5. I want you to tell me there's hope, even if you don't believe it, but I need you to be honest with me.
6. I want you to remind me that there are still good things in my life, without minimizing the struggles that I'm going through.
7. I need you to tell me that I'm strong, even though you can see that I'm at my wits' end.
8. I want you to support me but not absolve me.
9. I want you to remind me that I'm not alone, even if you have no clue what I'm going through.
10. I want you to give me a hug, even if it's only a virtual hug, because nothing says it's going to be all right like a good hug.

THE KIND OF KIND WORDS WE NEED

(CONT'D)

Simple, right? Not really, and I get it. Addiction is hard on relationships. In Step 8 we start trying to rebuild the relationships that addiction has damaged, and we begin by making a list of people we've harmed. So, to all the people who offered advice, however bad; to all the people who said nothing and pretended they didn't know; whether you wanted to have a heart-to-heart talk with me or criticize me, I want you to know, you're on my list. I want to thank you all for not giving up on me.

BOB M.
GROUP #853, PALOS PARKS



Saturday Phone Meeting Group #2076

Are you out of town or on vacation and need to connect with a meeting?
Do you need a one-hour meeting on the weekend?
All you need is your **phone!**

We cover the basic FA readings, enjoy lively discussions, and keep it short.

Join us Saturdays at 3 PM EST

Login Info: (605)313-5141 access code 164804#

Contact: SusanL@familiesanonymous.org





LITERATURE SPOTLIGHT



THE HELPING SERIES

They are here! The last two have now joined the first three to complete the series!

Is your reaction, “What the heck is she talking about?” (You might not be alone in this response.)

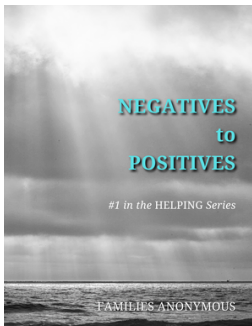
Or, do you perhaps recognize that I am referring to the completion of the popular *Helping Series*?



Yes, the Literature Committee is happy to announce that the 4th and 5th booklets in this series—*Hostility to Understanding* (#2003-4) and *Manipulation to Release With Love* (#2003-5)—are now available for you to read, study, contemplate, and add to your recovery library.

Helping, being one of FA’s basic readings, has, for nearly half a century, been a guiding light to FA newcomers and old-timers alike. About a decade ago, the Literature Committee took on a project of parsing out what the reading really means, and what it takes to truly change negatives to positives, fear to faith, contempt to respect, hostility to understanding, and manipulation or overprotectiveness to release with love.

Hence was born the five-part *Helping Series*, which has truly been a labor of love.



There is something for everyone in each of these small, wisdom-filled booklets. For myself, when I entered the FA rooms, I was mired in self-pity; I could not conceive that anyone could have it as bad as I did. How my old self would have benefited from reading *Negatives to Positives* (#2003-1) early on!

All of us, including my current self (who is, for the most part, no longer self-pitying, thanks to FA), need constant reminders ...

- to stay positive;
- to release with love and give up trying to manipulate or control;
- to nurture faith and have the courage to “let go of our willfulness in exchange for willingness”;
- to respect both the potential within others and the changes happening within ourselves; and
- to be understanding and ready to release any feelings of hostility.

These five *Helping Series* booklets, with their redesigned covers and meaningful new inscription, bring the Helping reading alive. Use them as topics for group discussions; as tools to help you “get over the humps” in your Step work; and as valuable reminders of the importance of the *Helping* concepts that are an integral factor in our recovery.

Helping reminds us that we are always changing—and that we can make these changes constructive ones, if we are willing. It also counsels us that if we want to really help our addicted loved ones, we must first be willing to be helped ourselves.

You may purchase each of the *Helping Series* booklets and the *Helping* bookmark individually:

- #2003 Helping – \$1.00
- #2003-1 Negatives to Positives – \$2.00
- #2003-2 Fear to Faith – \$3.00
- #2003-3 Contempt to Respect – \$3.00
- #2003-4 Hostility to Understanding – \$3.50 – NEW
- #2003-5 Manipulation to Release With Love – \$3.00 – NEW

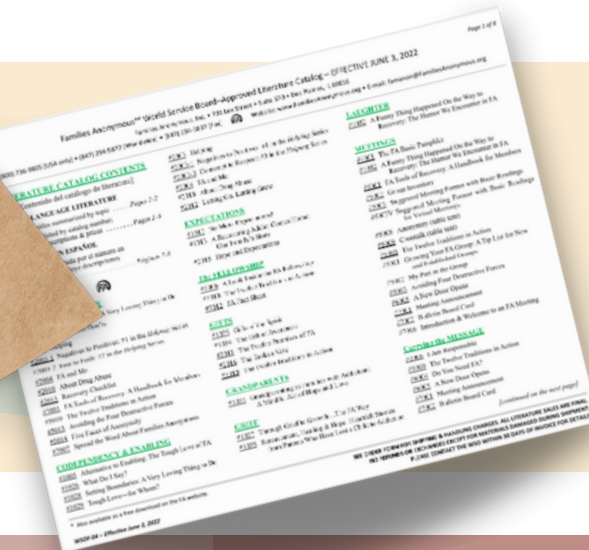
You may also purchase the **entire *Helping Collection*** (#2003 HC) for the discounted price of only \$13.25—and receive all five booklets plus the laminated *Helping* bookmark, in an attractive package, ideal for yourself or for gift giving.



May the *Helping Collection* provide you with the peace and serenity that the Literature Committee has absorbed from concentrating on the principles, steps, and profound reflections that fill these “little but mighty” booklets.

* SHOP NOW *

Interested in our full literature catalog? Download your own copy here, or check out our eStore online!



GIVING TUESDAY



Matching Gift Opportunity

Thinking of making a year-end donation to Families Anonymous?

Has the fellowship been helpful to you this year? Are you looking to

give back so others may also find resources and support?

CLICK HERE TO DONATE



FamiliesAnonymous.org/Donate

Like last year, a group of donors from within the fellowship will be joining together to offer a match of your contribution. Our 7th tradition restricts us from participating in most donation matching programs, but this is a unique situation falling within our traditions. Watch for more details to come, and as the year-end giving season approaches, please take advantage of this special opportunity where your important gift, an investment in Families Anonymous, may have **twice the impact**.



***Giving Tuesday** is coming up on **November 28th**.*

*If you will be joining this movement of generosity, please consider **Families Anonymous** when you do. We appreciate your support on this day and always.*

Thank You

Viewing a printed copy of the newsletter? Scan the QR Code to Donate.



Families Anonymous, Inc. is a tax-deductible 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization.

DONATIONS

COMMEMORATIVE DONATIONS

- In memory of Caleb, on behalf of Group 2038
- In memory of Sammi, on behalf of Group 494
- In memory of Parker S., on behalf of Marianne S.
- In memory of Parker S., on behalf of Judith T.
- In memory of Caleb (from Suffield, CT FA Group) on behalf of Debra A
- In memory of Brandon S., son of Ellen and Jeff, on behalf of Group 1416



GROUP DONATIONS: July & August 2023

Over \$500

- GR1974 NY, Syosset

\$101 to \$500

- GR0133 CT, Hartford
- GR0252 NJ, Summit
- GR0262 NY, Garden City
- GR0746 IN, Evansville
- GR1187 CT, Bloomfield
- GR1301 NY, Syracuse
- GR1451 TX, Dallas
- GR1522 IL, Chicago

\$101 to \$500

- GR1833 Canada, Winnipeg
- GR2056 FL, Bradenton
- GR2085 TX, Dallas
- GR3001 IL, Chicagoland

Up to \$100

- GR0162 IL, Des Plaines
- GR0171 IL, Arlington Heights
- GR0270 NY, Massapequa
- GR0288 OH, Pepper Pike
- GR0478 IL, Glenview
- GR1096 VA, Richmond
- GR1318 FL, Boca Raton
- GR1773 WI, Madison

As per the Seventh Tradition, each group should be self-supporting. Your donations also help support the activities of the World Service Office. For more information on how to donate, please [click here](#) or visit www.familiesanonymous.org and click **DONATE!**

Thank you for supporting the many activities of FA World Service.

Your contribution is tax-deductible.

DONATE

