

OUR NEWCOMERS WELCOME PACKET FOR
ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS OR
DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES



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Frequently Asked Questions

What is WSO? WSO is the World Service Organization of Adult Children of Alcoholics. It acts as the central agency of the program, gathering and disseminating meeting information; creating and distributing literature for use in the Family Groups and provides information to the general public.

What is ACA (ACoA)? Adult Children of Alcoholics is a recovery program for adults whose lives were affected as a result of being raised in an alcoholic or other dysfunctional family. It is based on the success of Alcoholics Anonymous and employs its version of the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.

Do my parents need to be alcoholics? No! If you can identify with The Problem or have several of the characteristics of the “Laundry List” ACA will benefit you.

What is the cost? ACA is self-help, self-supporting program and according to our Seventh Tradition we finance our own way. If you are financially able we ask for a small contribution at each meeting.

What is a Higher Power? ACA is a spiritual program, based on no particular religion or set of beliefs but rather an understanding of a power greater than ourselves that can aid us on our path to recovery. This Higher Power is as diverse as the individuals of the group.

Where is a meeting? For a list of all the known ACA meetings please go to the Meetings Page. Then you can verify the meeting of your choice by calling the local phone number. Just as individuals recover and grow meetings are born and die as the need arises or declines. WSO tries to keep the meeting information current but cannot guarantee that every meeting listed is active. See the next section for other options if there are no ACA meetings listed in your local area.

How do I find a meeting when there is none in my area? Unfortunately, there are many areas around the world without any ACA meetings. If you cannot find a meeting listed for your area, check out the Telephone or Internet meeting; they are listed under the County “Telephone” and “Internet” respectively. Another option would be to start a new meeting in your area.” See the next section.

How do I start a meeting? If you have checked the ‘Meetings Page’ and were unable to locate a meeting nearby you may wish to start an ACA meeting in your town. It’s easy. Start by ordering a ‘New Meeting Pack’, which is available on the Literature Order Form. This will give you all the basic materials for establishing and running an ACA meeting. The ACA Fellowship Text also includes information on starting a new meeting. Information from the New Meeting Packet sufficient to start a new meeting is also available for download from the ACA Literature Page.

Why doesn’t ACA link to other websites? We do not provide links to other websites because of our Sixth Tradition, which states that we do not endorse any outside enterprise. Since we have no control as to where other sites may lead and what they may endorse, we cannot violate this Tradition. We do grant other webs permission to link to our site. Please link only to www.adultchildren.org.

Adult Children of Alcoholics®/Dysfunctional Families World Service Organization, Inc.
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This trifold is provided to aid the ACA newcomer in exploring the tools of discovery/recovery available in our program. It is absolutely essential that we recognize that there are many tools at our disposal and that each individual must carefully decide which and how each tool may apply and be used for our own unique plan of recovery.

ACA is a Twelve-Step Program of discovery/recovery, and our purpose is threefold: 1) to shelter and support newcomers in confronting denial; 2) to comfort those mourning their early loss of security, trust and love; and 3) to teach the skills of “reparenting ourselves with gentleness, humor, love and respect.”

The title “The Tool Bag” is indicative of many tenets of our program. As with any craftsperson, the choice of tools available and the proper selection and use of each tool can greatly enhance the work we produce. Our recovery is very similar to creating and producing a fine work of art, a tome – even a relationship. Each craftsman has tools that they learn to use, and with use, become skillful and accomplished, with dedication – a master.

Not everyone will use the same tools; not everyone will attempt the same work. We each set our own goals, dream our own dreams, and find our own niche in the scheme of things.

These are merely the tools available, and are not intended to be a complete list. Choose your tools with care, develop your own unique skills, and pursue these things that will help you to become free from the crippling pain of the past and become accomplished in the life that exists today.

1. The Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, The Problem and Solution

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are the rich heritage of our Twelve-Step Program. There are many books that examine the exact nature of these steps.

Working these Steps and Traditions means developing an understanding of how these Steps apply to us in our daily lives. Working these Steps and Traditions requires reading, writing, sharing, and living our understanding of these Steps and Traditions. We do so with the tools that follow in the light of our identification with “The Problem” and our understanding of “The Solution”.

2. The Meetings

The meetings are where we share our experience, strength, and hope. We share our identification with The Problem and learn that we are not alone. We learn that there are others like us, and there is hope. There is recovery. There is a light at the end of the tunnel.

3. Reading and Writing

In order to further our own program of discovery/recovery, we educate ourselves. We do this by exploring The Problem, The Solution, The ACA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, and by reading literature, books and other publications that pertain to our program.

We write to further explore our understanding of our program. Through writing we document our process and clarify questions for ourselves. This process requires a level of discipline and dedication. This dedication to the self – ourselves – leads to the freedom, understanding, and compassion needed to nurture our inner child.

4. The Telephone

We listen and share in our meetings and often find people like ourselves who we strongly relate to. By continuing to share outside the meetings, we further our process of discovery/recovery. We receive the support necessary to carry on our growth and also to support others in their process.

Often we are far more compassionate and honest with others than with ourselves. In the process of sharing with others we learn to practice the same

level of gentleness and respect with ourselves. We act as mirrors for one another and provide an avenue to escape the isolation of our childhood.

5. Sponsorship

Some of us choose to have sponsors. Sponsorship is a way to avoid the isolation we experienced as children. We seek others a little further along the path to provide us with guidance and possible answers to our questions.

In sponsoring or being a sponsee, we develop relationships based on the Steps and Traditions. We can often share things on a one-to-one basis that may be too terrifying to share in a meeting. We learn about intimacy, trust, risk, success, and failure.

A sponsor is not perfect – we are all in this program to overcome the effects of our childhood. But, just like sharing in meetings or with other friends, we stretch ourselves a little further, and risk a little more. We do this with someone who shows a level of recovery that we would like to develop.

Later, as our program progresses, we extend this same level of sharing to another. It is here in extending beyond ourselves that we develop a breadth of friendships. We learn about limited and casual friendships, and establish a support network of many types, levels and intensities of relationships.

6. Service

In service we try to give back to the program some of what we have received. By helping in the meetings as an officer, or as a set-up or clean up person, or by volunteering at the Intergroup or board level, we make this program available to others who follow us. Our recovery depends on an ongoing program of discovery and the PRACTICE of our recovery. Service provides us with the opportunity to practice this recovery in an atmosphere of support.

THE TWELVE STEPS OF ACA

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS OF ACA

- TRADITION ONE: Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends on ACA unity.**
- TRADITION TWO: For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.**
- TRADITION THREE: The only requirement for membership in ACA is a desire to recover from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family.**
- TRADITION FOUR: Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or ACA as a whole. We cooperate with all other Twelve Step programs.**
- TRADITION FIVE: Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the adult child who still suffers.**
- TRADITION SIX: An ACA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the ACA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.**
- TRADITION SEVEN: Every ACA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.**
- TRADITION EIGHT: Adult Children of Alcoholics should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.**
- TRADITION NINE: ACA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.**
- TRADITION TEN: Adult Children of Alcoholics has no opinion on outside issues; hence the ACA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.**
- TRADITION ELEVEN: Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, films, and other public media.**
- TRADITION TWELVE: Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.**

The Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions are reprinted and adapted with permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

The Tool Bag



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Welcome to ACA. We are very glad that you are here. As newcomers beginning this journey to a spiritual awakening, we may feel all sorts of feelings: relieved, sad, elated, even confused. Soon after arriving, some of us may become comfortable enough to engage in reading ACA literature, find a fellow traveler and take the suggested steps of recovery.

When the Newcomer's Glow Dims

In our experience, newcomers exhibit an initial glow. The glow from the so-called "pink cloud" of being in ACA will start to fade and we may feel disillusioned. Don't be disheartened. Many of us thought that the Steps were a magic set of words that, once spoken, would lift the spell of dysfunction. There's more to ACA recovery than chanting the steps or recounting our stories – a lot more.

Keep the Focus

The dimming of the newcomer's glow signals the opening of the opportunity to do the healing "work" of getting behind the words, beyond our habits, to the deeper recesses of our subconscious where the conflicts, memories and feeling from our traumatic childhoods have been walled off by the critical survival parents or false selves* who have waited for us to be well enough to process them.

On the Greatness Inside of You

By this point of our recovery process, we may have learned all the ACA terms of recovery, we may have attended a great many meetings, we may have worked the steps a multitude of times, and served in many levels of service. Some may even think we are "the one". In our experience, you are the only "one".

Discerning the Distractions and Disguises

As we reach this level of our recovery, the distractions are many and the disguises are especially clever: the boring job, the new/old romantic interest, the lack of funds, etc. We may also perceive that meetings are for complaining and blaming, that closure is a fantasy, and there's no recovery there. They run from the ordinary to the quite extraordinary.

The critical survival parents or false selves have a great many of these tricks up their numerous sleeves, and will

*We believe that each of us is born with a True Self that is forced into hiding by dysfunctional parenting. A false self [critical survival parent] emerges that protects the hidden True Self from harm, but at a heavy price. BRB p. xv.

stop at nothing to prevent the painful truth from coming out. After all, this has been their one and only chore – to keep the pain-stricken inner children shuttered from any potential threat to their cocooned state. It usually takes a while for the goodness we have found in ACA to turn to trust.

The Healing Work Beckons

Ultimately, the healing "work" beckoned all of us to go deeper. Being aware of our stories, how we distorted them or how we took on the dysfunctional characteristics isn't the solution – it's awareness without consciousness – the oftentimes sad and predictable starting point of the actual recovery process. We have found the healing "work" looms further back than we can initially fathom.

By now, our defenses have probably become alerted, our invisible protective shield is at maximum power. After all, our critical survival parent or false self has been taking careful notes at the meetings too! Still the program's promise of a spiritual awakening cannot be deferred. It is our destiny. The healing "work" has to get done.

Keep Coming Back

"Keep coming back" takes on a whole new meaning when almost every fiber of our being wants to shut down and run as far and fast as possible. This is the pivotal stage when recovery *may* happen if we are persistent and consistent. Attending to our spiritual fitness allows us to weather the discomfort. To turn back now would mean to miss the most precious opportunity of our lives.

If we can anticipate the loss of the newcomer's glow, if we can keep our focus on our spiritual goal and away from the distractions, and if we can learn our spiritual lessons despite the many smokescreens, our effort will be rewarded a thousand fold. This healing "work" pays off handsomely in immeasurable, indescribable ways.

Spiritual Goal of the Healing "Work"

Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

Healing Work Defined

Processing and integrating our underlying conflicts, memories, and feelings is the core of the healing "work" that allows us to become whole (not dissociated), present (not living in the past/future), and spiritually awakened (not spiritually deadened and numb).

Preparation for the Healing "Work"

We may need to prepare for our integration process. Preparation may require recovery from external (exogenous) addictions to substances. We will also need to recover from any unhealthy dependencies on mentally, behaviorally, or emotionally produced internal (endogenous) addictions.

Seek Physical and Emotional Balance

As the result of this initial deconditioning, we can then seek to recover our original physical and emotional balance (sobriety), and our original goodness – our awakened spiritual consciousness.

Understanding Dependence and Addiction

To understand the healing "work," we may want to consider that adult children are as unhealthfully dependent on their survival defense mechanisms (critical survival parents or false selves) as alcoholics are on alcohol or as addicts are on substances. To understand what the healing "work" involves, it may be helpful to have a definition of unhealthy dependency and addiction.

Unhealthy Dependence and Addiction Defined

One definition of mental, behavioral, emotional or physical unhealthy dependencies or addictions may be that we have:

- obsessive and/or compulsive (dys-eased or dys-ordered) relationships with
- mindsets, behaviors, feelings or mood/mind altering substances that
- ultimately creates unmanageability in order to
- block traumatic or painful conflicts, memories and feelings that
- our critical survival parents or false selves don't believe or trust that
- we can resolve, remember or feel (recover).

Safe Processing

Our priority is to safely access, process and integrate the conflicts, memories and feelings that fuel our dependencies or addictions. Unlike substances that must be completely abstained from to achieve physical recovery, our survival defense mechanisms (false selves or critical survival parents) have to be disengaged safely for integration to occur. Having a ACA fellow traveller

will encourage us to stay the course; this cannot be overemphasized.

For the disengagement process to be safe, it is essential the healing “work” be done gently, humorously, lovingly and respectfully (that is, from a True Self or an inner loving parent space), and that we reparent the critical survival parents or false selves, our key defenders/protectors, and inner children, in a nurturing and integrative manner.

When we clear this challenging hurdle with a secure and nurturing grounding (True Self or inner loving parent), we are able to better utilize the Twelve Steps and reparenting tools to further build our physical, mental and spiritual capacity to resolve the conflicts, recollect the exact memories, and express the specific associated feelings that our dependencies or addictions blocked off.

We may want to consider picking a long-haul slogan to remind ourselves of this milestones’ significance when we reach this phase of our spiritual development; and let’s please remember to be gentle, humorous, loving and respectful with our critical survival parent or false self, too. After all, they are our oldest friends, our trusted defenders and our devoted protectors, and they deserve no less.

Suggested slogans, some funny, for the long-haul:

- ACA is a way of life that works if you work it. BRB p. 51
- One small step for man, and we still have to do the healing “work”. :-)
- Safely Access, Process and Integrate
- Attend many meetings, read voraciously, share all we want – we still have to do the healing “work”. :-)
- Moving forward by going inward
- We still have to do the healing “work”, sweetheart! :-)
- Stay on Course
- Seriously?! We still have to do the healing “work”. :-)
- Persistent Consistent Active
- Look! Up in the sky, it’s a bird, it’s a plane, no, we still have to do the healing “work”. :-)
- Recollect, Feel, Resolve
- If it’s not one thing, we still have to do the healing “work”. :-)
- Nurturing and Integrative Process For All
- Did we mention, we still have to do the healing “work”? :-)

- Abstinence and Disengagement
- What part of *we still have to do the healing “work”* do we not understand? :-)
- Talk Trust Feel
- Yoda says, “The healing ‘work’ we still have to do.” :-)

Sharing the Gift of Recovery

As we progress on our spiritual quest, we are empowered by our experiences to maintain and elevate our spiritual consciousness, foremost with our selves, then in our interactions with our fellow traveler, with other ACAs and especially with newcomers.

No gift is greater than the one we have gratefully and freely received and gladly give away to newcomers who are embarking on this spiritual journey. Sharing the gift of recovery brings us great joy and satisfaction.

The newcomer just walking into ACA usually doesn’t think that recovery is possible, doesn’t believe that the traumatic and painful conflicts, memories and feelings are really behind their unmanageable lives and, if they are behind the newcomer’s unmanageable life, the newcomer doesn’t trust that they are really processable.

Our consistent attendance and humble service in meetings, our honest sharing the experience, strength and hope of our recovery process helps us to keep what we have by giving it away. We reassure them that their spiritual awakening is possible and is indeed a miracle that can be realized if we do the healing “work.”

Doing the healing “work” one day at a time, we have seen the temporary glow of our early days become the permanent radiance of our awakened spirits as we take spiritual flight from our protective cocoons and transform into the unique beings our Higher Power intended us to be. We sincerely thank you for your presence and we invite you to keep coming back. It works if you work it.



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To the Beginner In All of Us



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**“THE LAUNDRY LIST”
(14 TRAITS OF AN ADULT CHILD)**

THE SOLUTION

THE ACA PROMISES

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to “love” people we can “pity” and “rescue.”
10. We have “stuffed” our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

The solution is to become your own loving parent. As ACA becomes a safe place for you, you will find freedom to express all the hurts and fears you have kept inside and to free yourself from the shame and blame that are carryovers from the past. You will become an adult who is imprisoned no longer by childhood reactions. You will recover the child within you, learning to accept and love yourself. The healing begins when we risk moving out of isolation. Feelings and buried memories will return. By gradually releasing the burden of unexpressed grief, we slowly move out of the past. We learn to repair ourselves with gentleness, humor, love, and respect. This process allows us to see our biological parents as the instruments of our existence. Our actual parent is a Higher Power whom some of us choose to call God. Although we had alcoholic or dysfunctional parents, our Higher Power gave us the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

This is the action and work that heals us: we use the Steps; we use the meetings; we use the telephone. We share our experience, strength and hope with each other. We learn to restructure our sick thinking one day at a time. When we release our parents from responsibility for our actions today, we become free to make healthful decisions as actors, not reactors. We progress from hurting, to healing, to helping. We awaken to a sense of wholeness we never knew was possible. By attending these meetings on a regular basis, you will come to see parental alcoholism or family dysfunction for what it is: a disease that infected you as a child and continues to affect you as an adult. You will learn to keep the focus on yourself in the here and now. You will take responsibility for your own life and supply your own parenting. You will not do this alone.

Look around you and you will see others who know how you feel. We love and encourage you no matter what. We ask you accept us just as we accept you.

This is a spiritual program based on action coming from love. We are sure that as the love grows inside you, you will see beautiful changes in all your relationships, especially with God, yourself, and your parents.

1. We will discover our real identities by loving and accepting ourselves.
2. Our self-esteem will increase as we give ourselves approval on a daily basis.
3. Fear of authority figures and the need to “people-please” will leave us.
4. Our ability to share intimacy will grow inside us.
5. As we face our abandonment issues, we will be attracted by strengths and become more tolerant of weaknesses.
6. We will enjoy feeling stable, peaceful, and financially secure.
7. We will learn how to play and have fun in our lives.
8. We will choose to love people who can love and be responsible for themselves.
9. Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.
10. Fears of failure and success will leave us, as we intuitively make healthier choices.
11. With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors.
12. Gradually, with our Higher Power’s help, we will learn to expect the best and get it.

Affirmations

- ♥ It is okay to know who I am.
- ♥ It is okay to trust myself.
- ♥ It is okay to say I am an adult child.
- ♥ It is okay to know another way to live.
- ♥ It is okay to say no without feeling guilty.
- ♥ It is okay to give myself a break.
- ♥ It is okay to cry when I watch a movie or hear a song.
- ♥ My feelings are okay even if I am still learning how to distinguish them.
- ♥ It is okay to not take care of others when I think.
- ♥ It is okay to feel angry.
- ♥ It is okay to have fun and celebrate.
- ♥ It is okay to make mistakes and learn.
- ♥ It is okay to not know everything.
- ♥ It is okay to say "I don't know."
- ♥ It is okay to ask someone to show me how to do things.
- ♥ It is okay to dream and have hope.
- ♥ It is okay to think about things differently than my family.
- ♥ It is okay to explore and say, "I like this or I like that."
- ♥ It is okay to detach with love.
- ♥ It is okay to seek my own Higher Power.
- ♥ It is okay to reparent myself with thoughtfulness.
- ♥ It is okay to say I love myself.
- ♥ It is okay to work an ACA program.

The Twelve Steps

1. *We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.*
2. *Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.*
3. *Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.*
4. *Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*
5. *Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.*
6. *Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.*
7. *Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.*
8. *Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.*
9. *Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.*
10. *Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.*
11. *Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.*
12. *Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*

The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted from the original Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous

ACA **E**ssentials

"THE LAUNDRY LIST" THE SOLUTION THE ACA PROMISES AFFIRMATIONS THE TWELVE STEPS

God,

Grant me the serenity to accept the people
I cannot change,
the courage to change the one I can,
and the wisdom to know that one is me.

—ACA Serenity Prayer taken from the ACA Newcomer's booklet



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At the end of 1976 or the beginning of 1977, four or five young people who had recently “graduated” from Alateen joined Al-Anon, the adult version of their program. In Alateen they had explored the impact that alcoholic and co-alcoholic parents and living in an alcoholic household had on their lives. Upon entering Al-Anon, they were suddenly faced with the concept of learning to live serenely in a dysfunctional setting. We can only guess at the inner turmoil *this* presented to these young adults, not to mention their being afraid to displease the parent figures around them in Al-Anon.

Alateen must have taught them well how to get their own needs met. They formed their own Al-Anon meeting which they named “Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics”. Meeting at the Smithers building in Manhattan, this group used the Al-Anon greeting and closing, but “winged” the rest of the meeting.

At the same time there was an older member of Al-Anon and AA who had turned his sharing focus to the impact his “ancient history” in an alcoholic home of origin had on his adult life. Tony A. was about fifty years old then. Cindy, a member of the “Hope for Adult Children” group, heard Tony and asked him to be a guest speaker at her group.

Tony A. went and shared his experience, strength, and hope on the characteristics he found he had in his adult life due to growing up in an alcoholic home. The new Alateen graduates were in their early twenties, while Tony was a half century old. Yet, the differences in their ages dissolved with the shared background, experiences and feelings. There were tears and laughter, and a sense of belonging and understanding that transcended their years. They identified with Tony and he stayed with the group. After six or seven months, instead of the increasing membership they had expected, the fledgling meeting had dwindled to three or four people. The meeting was about to fold.

Something rather powerful in Tony motivated him to invite members of Alcoholics Anonymous to join the little group. Some of them, after all, had alcoholic parents of their own, didn't they?

Seventeen members of AA showed up that next week. At the following meeting there were 50 people. At the next there were over 100 AAs. The somewhat radical

Al-Anon meeting was on its way with a lot of help from some very good friends.

The group then established, some of the members formed another meeting at St. Jean Baptiste Church. Tony A. chaired that second meeting called “Generations”. He also attended the “Hope for Adult Children” meetings during this period.

“Generations” was not affiliated with any organization. For about six months they operated with no format. Members of that group vehemently encouraged Tony to do something – to formalize, to legitimize – anything to establish the group.

So Tony sat down at work the following morning and in two hours jotted down 13 characteristics of the fellowship. He said of the experience, “It was as if Someone Else was writing the list through me”.

Tony worked near Chris, who had offered to type up the list so he ran it over to her. She typed up the 13 characteristics. Then Tony realized he'd forgotten to add that little piece about fear, reflecting, *No, they'd never “admit” fear. Excitement. Yeah, Better. They'd accept excitement....*

Tony wrote the characteristics. He also wrote the solution. Chris edited the solution (things like “God” became he/ she/it in the transformation).

When Tony read the characteristics at the next meeting, one of the members – Barry – said, “Hey, that's my laundry list!” That list of characteristics has since been called “The Laundry List”.

This was the official beginning of ACA (ACoA). No one quite remembers the date of this most auspicious occasion, but who'd have expected these humble beginnings to become a worldwide movement to stop child abuse from the inside?

“When we began, “Tony said, “there was a wonderful feeling of mutual love, empathy, and understanding”.

They did try working with the AA Steps at the “Generation” meeting, but most of the early members felt these steps did not apply to them.

About that time a lady visiting from Houston asked for a copy of the Laundry List. She took it to Texas to begin a meeting there. A gentleman by the name of Jack E. was moving to California. And then there was the lady from Switzerland....

At the “Generations” meeting one evening in late 1979 or early 1980, two ladies approached Tony at the end of the meeting. They were from the General Services of Al-Anon and invited the “Generations” group to join Al-Anon. The only real stipulation was that the meeting had to discontinue using “The Laundry List”. The Generations group unanimously agreed that they would not give up their “Laundry List”. This was the beginning of the movement away from Al-Anon.

In 1979 there was an article published in *Newsweek* about Claudia Black, Dr. Stephanie Brown, and Sharon Wegscheider (now Wegscheider-Cruse). It was the very first nationwide announcement that the family dynamics in an alcoholic household could and did cause life-long patterns of dysfunctional behavior. That article was, in essence, the second piece of ACA literature. With the tremendous acceptance of the family systems concept in mental health through the daytime talk show hosts, the literature from outside the program blossomed. For a beginning program with a crusader overtone, there was general enthusiasm from the fellowship to accept the use of outside literature.

At this time AA people were looking at Tony like he was a little crazy. It seems he was advocating a departure from the AA Steps. In 1978 or 1979 he wrote some Steps with the help of Don D. that he felt were more fitting for the victims of abuse. These Steps encouraged taking the inventory of the parents and indulging oneself in self-pity for being a victim (now referred to as “grief work”). Tony couldn't see the logic in the idea of being “restored to sanity” since restoration means to be given back something we once had, and coming from sick homes, we didn't have any sanity to begin with.

Keeping in mind that Tony was a concurrent member of AA – which may explain the one hundred friends who saved and established the “Hope for Adult Children” meeting – he felt the Twelve Traditions of AA were limiting for this particular program. He never saw the use of AA's Traditions for Adult Children.

Similarly he didn't feel the concept of anonymity is as important in ACA as it is in AA. "Anonymity is needed so we don't talk about other members and their stories," he said. "I feel that personal anonymity can be broken on any level – press, radio, etc. After all, anonymity can be a sick family secret rather than healthy".

Tony began to feel he was being put into the position of an authority figure, something he never wanted to be, saying "I was terrified of authority figures and becoming one. An authority figure to me can be a perpetrator". He also feared the impact of all the attention on his own recovery. So he turned over the meeting and stayed away from the program. When he returned for a visit, there was a hush over the room when he entered. It was a heady ego-rush, but he was as concerned about his own recovery as well as the program's having individuals "greater than" others. It just didn't feel right. So in 1981 he became a drop-out and attended Al-Anon in the interim.

As he left New York in 1981, some of the women in the "Hope for Children" ACA group formally asked Al-Anon to adopt the format the literature of ACA/ACoA. This is why there are ACoA meetings in Al-Anon today not affiliated with the ACA World Service.

When Tony A. moved to Florida he was asked to start a Tuesday night ACoA meeting at Bethesda-by-the-Sea. He had started a few meetings before that in the area, but that's the meeting that survived. Then another meeting sprang up in Delray, another in Sarasota, then one down in the Keys, followed by Orlando....

In 1985 Tony got a call from an ACA member, Marty S., out in California. Apparently someone else was publicly taking credit for the Laundry List. Marty encouraged Tony to come out of anonymity to establish the legitimate "founder" of the ACA program. Tony himself never claimed to be *the* founder of ACA, instead accepting the title of Co-Founder, giving credit to the four or five members of the original "Hope for Adult Children" meeting. But he *is* the person who penned the original characteristics that define our fellowship.

A former stockbroker in New York, Tony A. was counseling indigents at the same time he was continuing to be a stockbroker in Florida. In 1988 he went to work for the Palm Beach Institute and began to write *The Laundry List*, a book that was published in 1991 outside the ACA program.

I never expected ACoA to become a worldwide program when it began. We were working on trying to keep a little meeting going back then. The first time I got a glimpse that ACoA had national or international possibilities was when Barry said to copyright the Laundry List. He did foresee this. But I had no idea. I felt the Laundry List should be anonymous at that time and never copyrighted it.

The concept of "Adult Child" came from the Alateens who began the "Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics" meeting. The original members of our fellowship, who were over 18 years old were adults, but as children they had grown up in alcoholic homes. "Adult Child" also means that when confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood.

There are three parts of me, the Higher Power, me, and Little Tony. I have to love Little Tony, my Child within, if I'm ever going to unite with God. Little Tony is my connection to God. I learned this from a Hawaiian Kahuna teaching. Several months afterwards, I heard about the "Inner Child" work beginning in the therapeutic community.

I don't feel qualified to talk to organizations. When we started the "Generations" meeting, it was an anti-organization. I do hope ACA continues having an open literature policy. My wish for the fellowship is to use the original Laundry List and the new ACoA Steps written in 1990 in my book for the victims we are.

This program is about learning to love myself and then others unconditionally. We are not God-connected if we don't. Trust has to become a process and love is a process. When I can trust and love me, I can trust and love others.

I think we have to become as little children. Feelings are the spiritual path of an adventure to know God. Our goal is God.

Tony A.
October 5, 1992



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Early History of ACA

**an October 5, 1992
interview with**

Tony A.

for inclusion in *The Handbook*



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“The concept of Adult Child came from the Alateens who began the Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics meeting. The original members of our fellowship, who were over eighteen years old, were adults; but as children they grew up in alcoholic homes.

Adult Child also means that when confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood.”

ACA History – an interview with Tony A., 1992

Adult Children of Alcoholics uses the words of fellowship co-founder Tony A. as a foundation to define the Adult Child personality. An Adult Child is someone who responds to adult situations with self-doubt, self-blame, or a sense of being wrong or inferior, all learned from stages of childhood. Without help, we unknowingly operate with ineffective thoughts and judgments as adults. The regression can be subtle, but it is there, sabotaging our decisions and relationships.

The following questions can help you decide if alcoholism or other family dysfunction existed in your family. If your parents did not drink, your grandparents may have drank and passed on the disease of family dysfunction to your parents. If alcohol or drugs were not a problem, your home may have been chaotic, unsafe, and lacking nurture like many alcoholic homes.

These 25 questions offer an insight into some ways children are affected by growing up with a problem drinker even years after leaving the home. The questions also apply to adults growing up in homes where food, sex, workaholism, or ultra-religious abuse occurred. Many foster children – who are now adults – also relate to these questions.

- 1. Do you recall anyone drinking or taking drugs or being involved in some other behavior that you now believe could be dysfunctional?**
- 2. Did you avoid bringing friends to your home because of drinking or some other dysfunctional behavior in the home?**
- 3. Did one of your parents make excuses for the other parent’s drinking or other behaviors?**
- 4. Did your parents focus on each other so much that they seemed to ignore you?**
- 5. Did your parents or relatives argue constantly?**
- 6. Were you drawn into arguments or disagreements and asked to choose sides with one relative against another?**
- 7. Did you try to protect your brothers or sisters against drinking or other behavior in the family?**
- 8. As an adult, do you feel immature? Do you feel like you are a child inside?**
- 9. As an adult, do you believe you are treated like a child when you interact with your parents? Are you continuing to live out a childhood role with the parents?**
- 10. Do you believe that it is your responsibility to take care of your parents’ feelings or worries? Do other relatives look to you to solve their problems?**
- 11. Do you fear authority figures and angry people?**
- 12. Do you constantly seek approval or praise but have difficulty accepting a compliment when one comes your way?**
- 13. Do you see most forms of criticism as a personal attack?**
- 14. Do you over-commit yourself and then feel angry when others do not appreciate what you do?**
- 15. Do you think you are responsible for the way another person feels or behaves?**
- 16. Do you have difficulty identifying feelings?**
- 17. Do you focus outside yourself for love or security?**
- 18. Do you involve yourself in the problems of others? Do you feel more alive when there is a crisis?**
- 19. Do you equate sex with intimacy?**
- 20. Do you confuse love and pity?**
- 21. Have you found yourself in a relationship with a compulsive or dangerous person and wonder how you got there?**
- 22. Do you judge yourself without mercy and guess at what is normal?**
- 23. Do you behave one way in public and another way at home?**
- 24. Do you think your parents had a problem with drinking or taking drugs?**
- 25. Do you think you were affected by the drinking or other dysfunctional behavior of your parents or family?**

(Questions from the ACA Fellowship Text, pp. 18-20)

If you answered “yes” to three or more of these questions, you may be suffering from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or other dysfunctional family. We welcome you to attend an ACA meeting in your area to learn more.

Adult Children of Alcoholics is an anonymous Twelve Step and Twelve Tradition fellowship. Our meetings offer a safe environment for adult children to share their common experiences. By attending meetings regularly and by sharing about our lives, we gradually change our thinking and behavior. By working the ACA program, we find another way to live.

You can find a worldwide list of ACA meetings, including telephone and online meetings at:

www.adultchildren.org

THE LAUNDRY LIST

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims, and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to “love” people we can “pity” and “rescue.”
10. We have “stuffed” our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (Denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

Tony A., 1978



In addition to alcoholic and addicted families, there are at least five other family types that can produce Adult Children:

- **Homes with mental illness in the parent(s).**
- **Homes with hypochondriac parent(s).**
- **Homes with ritualistic beliefs, harsh punishment, and extreme secretiveness, often with ultra-religious, militaristic, or sadistic overtones. Some of these homes expose children to battery and other forms of criminal abuse.**
- **Homes with covert or actual sexual abuse, including incest and inappropriate touching or dress by the parent(s).**
- **Perfectionistic, shaming homes in which expectations are often too high and praise is typically tied to an accomplishment rather than given freely.**

25 Questions: Am I an Adult Child?



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In ACA, the relationship between a sponsor and sponsee represents a spiritual connection between two people helping each other find life beyond the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional family. Adult children cannot recover alone or in isolation. Together, we learn to offer and accept healthy support. We learn what it means to be a friend.

“FELLOW TRAVELERS”

The unique model of sponsorship practiced in ACA places the sponsor and sponsee on equal footing, seeking answers and solutions together. Through sponsorship, adult children find empathy. This is the mutual understanding that puts action into our identification with another adult child.

As “fellow travelers” in recovery, we need not fear sponsorship as a reenactment of the domination, neglect, or control we experienced as children. For many of us, ACA sponsorship will be our first chance to establish a relationship based on equality and mutual respect. This may be an unfamiliar concept since we come from families in which healthy relationships with respect and trust were not practiced.

Asking someone to become our sponsor is a key step in our recovery. To find an ACA sponsor, we go to ACA meetings and events and listen to members sharing. We look for someone who has worked the Twelve Steps of ACA, attends meetings regularly, and understands ACA principles. We may also look for someone who has achieved an observable level of serenity and emotional sobriety. Typically, we look for a sponsor of the same sex to avoid romantic confusion.

We may ask for a potential sponsor’s telephone number and then call to talk about ACA. If we find we are comfortable talking with that person, we ask if they are available for sponsorship. We also discuss expectations of a sponsor/sponsee relationship. We

TYPES OF ACA SPONSORSHIP

Traditional: An experienced ACA member guides a sponsee through the Twelve Steps and helps them understand the ACA recovery process.

Co-Sponsor: Two ACA members with similar program time and experience support each other’s continued recovery.

Temporary: ACA members in a treatment or institutional facility may use a short-term sponsor until a more permanent sponsor in an ACA home group may be found.

Long Distance: ACA members who are geographically isolated may use online or telephone meetings for support. Where circumstances prevent face-to-face contact with a sponsor, long-distance sponsorship can still be meaningful and effective.

might go through this process with two or three people. Eventually we ask one of them to be our sponsor.

In some areas, ACA sponsors are not readily available. In this situation, we may have to seek out a sponsor through a long-distance method or by visiting other towns where ACA is more active.

If we are asked to be a sponsor, we try to say “yes”. Sponsoring is one of the key actions that helps an ACA member maintain emotional sobriety while continuing to grow spiritually. By sponsoring others, we learn more about ourselves and the sequence of recovery. We learn that if we are working the Twelve Steps and attending ACA meetings regularly, we have something to offer another person. We can pass on the gift of recovery which was given to us.

BEING A SPONSOR

An ACA sponsor shares his or her spiritual program of recovery with a sponsee and provides guidance for the newcomer building his or her own foundation for recovery through the Twelve Steps of ACA.

A sponsor understands the effects of being raised in a dysfunctional family. A sponsor also understands the importance of resolving stored grief and reparenting one’s self through the ACA Steps. ACA sponsors are not therapists or counselors, but they can offer needed support to a sponsee revisiting abuse, trauma, and other overwhelming experiences of childhood.

An ACA sponsor:

- shares their own story, as well as their experience, strength, and hope in recovery,
- helps a sponsee understand emotional intoxication, the Laundry List traits of an Adult Child, and the effects of family alcoholism and dysfunction,
- encourages active Step work, meeting attendance, journaling, meditation, and seeking a Higher Power,
- encourages a sponsee to break old family rules which discouraged talking, trusting, feeling, and remembering,
- helps a sponsee identify, express, and understand feelings,
- leads by example in their own active recovery.

An ACA sponsor with an addiction must not be active in that addiction. We cannot sponsor others if we are drinking, drugging, or engaging in some other behavior that would qualify as a relapse.

It is also important to remember that an ACA sponsor:

- is not a parent, authority figure, or Higher Power to the person being sponsored,
- does not judge or invalidate the feelings or insights of the person being sponsored,
- does not do for a sponsee what they can do for themselves,
- does not give or lend money,
- does not become romantically or sexually involved with a sponsee

THE SEQUENCE OF ACA RECOVERY

Hitting bottom/Asking for and accepting help
Admitting powerlessness and unmanageability
Becoming open to spirituality and a spiritual solution
 Getting honest/inventorying our past
Telling our story openly and honestly with another
 Humbly seeking the removal of shortcomings
 Finding self-forgiveness
 Making amends to those harmed
Continuing inventory of daily thoughts and behavior
 Finding discernment
 Meditating and seeking spiritual direction
 Practicing love and self-love
Carrying the message of recovery to others

BEING A SPONSEE

A sponsor will expect a sponsee to actively participate in his or her own recovery. The sponsor will expect the person to be honest with themselves and others. Sponsees will need to make regular contact with their sponsor and will be expected to follow through on commitments. Sponsees with addictions must also be committed to abstinence. We cannot work an effective ACA program if we are dosing ourselves with alcohol, drugs, or other addictive behaviors.

A sponsor will watch for willingness from the person being sponsored and will pay attention to whether the sponsee completes Step work and attends meetings regularly. A sponsor will expect a sponsee to accept full responsibility for his or her program and behavior.

Making a decision to end a sponsor/sponsee relationship is not abandonment. However, when either party decides he or she needs to move on, that person needs to be honest and tactful about the decision.

The fellow traveler model of sponsorship calls both a sponsor and sponsee to practice the principles of the ACA steps in all their affairs. These principles include surrender, self-honesty, self-inventory, and willingness. This is the two-way street of ACA sponsorship.

AFFIRMATIONS AND COMMITMENTS

For Sponsees:

- I can ask for help without feeling like I am a burden.
- I can be equal in a relationship with another person.
- I have willingness to do whatever it takes to recover.
- I am capable of selecting a healthy sponsor.
- I will work a strong ACA program one step at a time.
- I will celebrate the milestones in my recovery.

For Sponsors:

- I have something to offer another person.
- I can help someone with what I have learned in recovery.
- I can help another ACA regardless of the type of abuse we experienced as children.
- I can share my experience instead of giving advice.
- I will avoid “fixing” or rescuing others.
- I will maintain healthy boundaries.

Information in this pamphlet comes primarily from Chapter 11 of the ACA Fellowship Text. For more information about ACA Sponsorship, please refer to that chapter.

ACA Sponsorship: Fellow Travelers



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Introduction

Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA) is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition program of men and women who grew up in alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional homes. The ACA program was founded on the belief that family dysfunction is a disease that infected us as children and affects us as adults. Our membership also includes adults from homes where alcohol or drugs were not present; however, abuse, neglect or unhealthy behavior was.

We meet to share our experience and recovery in an atmosphere of mutual respect. We discover how alcoholism and other family dysfunction affected us in the past and how it influences us in the present. We begin to see the unhealthy elements of our childhood. By practicing the Twelve Steps, focusing on the ACA Solution, and accepting a loving Higher Power of our own understanding, we find freedom.

Why We First Came to ACA

Our decisions and answers to life did not seem to work. Our lives had become unmanageable. We exhausted all the ways we thought we could become happy. We often lost our creativity, our flexibility, and our sense of humor. Continuing the same existence was no longer an option. Nevertheless, we found it almost impossible to abandon the thought of being able to fix ourselves. Exhausted, we held out hope that a new relationship, a new job, or a move would be the cure, but it never was. We made the decision to seek help.

Why We “Keep Coming Back”

At the end of an ACA meeting, the group members encourage one another to “keep coming back” to meetings. Why? We found people in the meetings who listened to us talk. They did not judge us. They did not try to fix us. They did not interrupt us when we spoke. They merely told us that if we came to meetings on a regular basis we would gradually begin to feel better. We did.

What We Do in ACA Meetings

- We share what is happening in our lives, and how we are dealing with these issues in our recovery program (i.e., we share our experience, strength, and hope).
- We build a personal support network.
- We practice our recovery and personal boundaries by giving service.

What We Do Not Do at Meetings

- We do not engage in crosstalk.
- We do not criticize.
- We do not comment on what others say.
- We do not offer advice.
- We do not distract others from the person speaking by word, whisper, gesture, noise, or movement.
- We do not violate the anonymity of others.
- We do not repeat what is said in meetings (in any context).

How We Work a Program of Recovery

Individuals recover at their own pace. We have learned by experience that those ACA members who make the greatest gains in the shortest amount of time are using the tools of recovery.

Tools of ACA Recovery

- We go to meetings, and call program people to discuss recovery issues.
- We read ACA literature and learn about the experiences of others while gaining clarity on our own experience.
- We define and enforce our boundaries.
- We work and use the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions.
- We identify the people, places and things that are healthy and useful to our lives today, and discard those that are not.
- We reconnect with our Inner Child or True Self.

- We work with a sponsor and build support networks.
- We attend meetings that focus on issues upon which we need to work
- We give service in ACA.

Listening to others and ourselves share at meetings helps us in our recovery. Sharing at meetings sometimes helps us to focus, define and clarify our problems. We express our feelings. Talking out loud helps us to resolve some problems. We talk about our action plans to change our lives, or how well our current plan is working. At times we report our progress or victories. We often use meetings as a reality check on our overall program, comparing our current life in the program to our adult life before coming to the ACA program.

In the meetings we come to understand how our childhood experiences shape our attitudes, behavior, and choices today. We hear others talk about their experiences, and we recognize ourselves. We learn how we can change. We sense that within ourselves are people who are not who we were taught to be. Some people call these our “Inner Children”. We discover ourselves.

We read literature about ACA issues, often using the literature as life rafts. We hang on to what we have read when the seas get temporarily rough. Many of us write on a daily basis, finding that it helps us to put things into perspective for us. Some of us write to get in touch with our Inner Children. We write about our childhoods, daily thoughts, recurring struggles, and discoveries about life and ourselves. We write about new issues as they arise. We use ACA functions outside the meetings to learn spontaneity and how to have fun.

Gradually we begin to recognize the negative parenting messages from our childhoods that drive our lives. We learn how to replace them with healthy behaviors. This is a first step toward “reparenting”. As we gradually reparent our selves, our outlook on life changes. We begin to look at it

from an emotionally mature perspective. Ultimately we become happier, stronger, more capable people – more able to handle life. We learn to respect others and ourselves. The quality of our lives improves as we learn to define and communicate our boundaries, and insist that they be honored.

We have learned by experience that those ACA members who make the greatest gains in the shortest amount of time are those who use the “tools of recovery”. We have also found that each of us recovers at our own pace, and in our own time. We are individuals who come from varied experiences and backgrounds.

Membership

The only requirement for membership is a desire to recover from the affects of growing up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family.

Literature Policy

Many Twelve Step programs require that only literature published within the program be available at meetings. The ACA program, from the outset, has held that valuable information exists outside the program. We do suggest that any outside literature brought into the meetings be in keeping with the ACA Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions. Our program also suggests that such literature be kept separate from ACA Conference Approved literature. For more information on the ACA literature policy, refer to the brochure entitled “The ACA Literature Policy”.

Contributions are Voluntary

No dues or fees are required for membership. We are, however, fully self-supporting through our own contributions. We give our Seventh Tradition donations at the meetings as we can afford to, in acknowledgment of the benefits our program gives us.

At the meeting level our contributions are used to keep the doors open (pay the rent, buy the refreshments, make literature available). At the Regional level our contributions are used to keep the

lines of communications open between Intergroups and World Service, and at the World Service level so people can find meetings. Each member has a responsibility to keep ACA operational by ensuring their meeting supports their Intergroup, Region, and World Service organizations.

Affiliation

ACA is an independent Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition program. We are not affiliated with any other Twelve Step organization. We do, however, cooperate with other Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition programs. We are not allied with any sect, denomination, organization, institution, political, or law enforcement groups. We do not engage in any controversy, and we neither endorse nor oppose any causes.

A Personal Invitation

This is your personal invitation to come to ACA and to *keep coming back*. Your presence in meetings helps us in our recovery. We know that this program works for us. We have yet to see anyone fail who honestly works the program. This is our path to sanity, our program to serenity.

We invite you to participate. ACA works!

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The ACA Twelve Steps

- 1) We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
- 2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
- 3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.
- 4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
- 5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
- 6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
- 7) Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
- 8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
- 9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
- 10) Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
- 11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
- 12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Twelve Steps are reprinted and adapted from the original Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

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The ACA Twelve Traditions

- 1) Our common welfare should come first; personal recovery depends on ACA unity.
- 2) For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.
- 3) The only requirement for membership in ACA is a desire to recover from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family.
- 4) Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or ACA as a whole. We cooperate with all other Twelve-Step programs.
- 5) Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the adult child who still suffers.
- 6) An ACA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the ACA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
- 7) Every ACA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
- 8) Adult Children of Alcoholics should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
- 9) ACA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
- 10) Adult Children of Alcoholics has no opinion on outside issues; hence the ACA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
- 11) Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, films, and other public media.
- 12) Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our Traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.

The Twelve Traditions are reprinted and adapted from the original Twelve Traditions of Alcoholics Anonymous and are used with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

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The ACA Twelve Concepts

Concept I – The final responsibility and the ultimate authority for ACA World Services should always reside in the collective conscience of our whole fellowship.

Concept II – Authority for the active maintenance of our world services is hereby delegated to the actual voice, the effective conscience for our whole fellowship.

Concept III – As a means of creating and maintaining a clearly defined working relationship between the ACA meetings, the ACA WSO Board of Trustees, and its staff and committees, and thus ensuring their effective leadership, it is herein suggested that we endow each of these elements of service with the traditional Right of Decision.*

**The right of decision as defined herein refers to:*

- 1) the right and responsibility of each trusted servant to speak and vote his/her own conscience, in the absence of any contrary mandate, on any issue regardless of the level of service;*
- 2) the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, and the Commitment to Service will be followed by trusted servants in decision making;*
- 3) delegates to the Annual Business Conference are trusted servants and therefore equally guided by the 12 Steps, 12 Traditions, 12 Concepts, and the Commitment to Service;*
- 4) standard practice that decisions made by subcommittees are subject to the authority of the service body which creates its mission and defines its parameters.*

Concept IV – Throughout our structure, we maintain at all responsible levels a traditional Right of Participation.

Concept V – Throughout our structure, a Right of Petition prevails, thus assuring us that minority opinion will be heard and that petitions for the redress of grievances will be carefully considered.

Concept VI – On behalf of ACA as a whole, our Annual Business Conference has the principal responsibility for the maintenance of our world services, and it traditionally has the final decision respecting large matters of general policy and finance. But the Annual Business Conference also recognizes that the chief initiative and the active responsibility in most of these matters would be exercised primarily by the Trustee members of the World Service Organization when they act among themselves as the World Service Organization of Adult Children of Alcoholics.

Concept VII – The Annual Business Conference recognizes that the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws of the Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization are legal instruments: that the Trustees are thereby fully empowered to manage and conduct all of the world service affairs of Adult Children of Alcoholics.

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The ACA Twelve Concepts

It is further understood that our World Service Organization relies upon the force of tradition and the power of the ACA purse for its final effectiveness.

Concept VIII – The Trustees of the World Service Organization act in this primary capacity: with respect to the larger matters of over-all policy and finance, they are the principal planners and administrators. They and their primary committees directly manage these affairs.

Concept IX – Good service leaders, together with sound and appropriate methods of choosing them, are, at all levels, indispensable for our future functioning and safety. The primary world service leadership must necessarily be assumed by the Trustees of the Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization.

Concept X – Every service responsibility should be matched by an equal service authority – the scope of such authority to be always well defined whether by tradition, by resolution, by specific job description, or by the Operating Policy and Procedures Manual and bylaws.

Concept XI – While the Trustees hold final responsibility for ACA’s World Service administration, they should always have the assistance of the best possible standing committees, corporate trustees, executives, staffs, and consultants. Therefore the composition of these underlying committees and service boards, the personal qualifications of their members, the manner of their induction into service, the systems of their rotation, the way in which they are related to each other, the special rights and duties of our executives, staffs and consultants, together with a proper basis for the financial compensation of these special workers, will always be matters for serious care and concern.

Concept XII – In all its proceedings, Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization shall observe the spirit of the ACA Twelve Traditions, taking great care that the conference never becomes the seat of perilous wealth or power; that sufficient operating funds, plus an ample reserve, be its prudent financial principle; that none of the Conference members shall ever be placed in a position of unqualified authority over any of the others; that all important decisions be reached by discussion vote and whenever possible, by substantial unanimity; that no WSO action ever be personally punitive or an incitement to public controversy; that though the WSO may act for the service of Adult Children of Alcoholics, it shall never perform any acts of government; and that, like the fellowship of Adult Children of Alcoholics which it serves, the WSO itself will always remain democratic in thought and action.

The Twelve Concepts are reprinted and adapted from the original Twelve Concepts of Alcoholics Anonymous and are used with the permission of Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc.

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The ACA Twelve Concepts



The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List

- 1) We face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation and stop intimidating others with our power and position.
- 2) We realize the sanctuary we have built to protect the frightened and injured child within has become a prison and we become willing to risk moving out of isolation.
- 3) With our renewed sense of self-worth and self-esteem we realize it is no longer necessary to protect ourselves by intimidating others with contempt, ridicule and anger.
- 4) We accept and comfort the isolated and hurt inner child we have abandoned and disavowed and thereby end the need to act out our fears of enmeshment and abandonment with other people.
- 5) Because we are whole and complete we no longer try to control others through manipulation and force and bind them to us with fear in order to avoid feeling isolated and alone.
- 6) Through our in-depth inventory we discover our true identity as capable, worthwhile people. By asking to have our shortcomings removed we are freed from the burden of inferiority and grandiosity.
- 7) We support and encourage others in their efforts to be assertive.
- 8) We uncover, acknowledge and express our childhood fears and withdraw from emotional intoxication.
- 9) We have compassion for anyone who is trapped in the “drama triangle” and is desperately searching for a way out of insanity.
- 10) We accept we were traumatized in childhood and lost the ability to feel. Using the 12 Steps as a program of recovery we regain the ability to feel and remember and become whole human beings who are happy, joyous and free.
- 11) In accepting we were powerless as children to “save” our family we are able to release our self-hate and to stop punishing ourselves and others for not being enough.
- 12) By accepting and reuniting with the inner child we are no longer threatened by intimacy, by the fear of being engulfed or made invisible.
- 13) By acknowledging the reality of family dysfunction we no longer have to act as if nothing were wrong or keep denying that we are still unconsciously reacting to childhood harm and injury.
- 14) We stop denying and do something about our post-traumatic dependency on substances, people, places and things to distort and avoid reality.

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The Flip Side of The Laundry List

- 1) We move out of isolation and are not unrealistically afraid of other people, even authority figures.
- 2) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
- 3) We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.
- 4) We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.
- 5) We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.
- 6) We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.
- 7) We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.
- 8) We avoid emotional intoxication and choose workable relationships instead of constant upset.
- 9) We are able to distinguish love from pity, and do not think “rescuing” people we “pity” is an act of love.
- 10) We come out of denial about our traumatic childhoods and regain the ability to feel and express our emotions.
- 11) We stop judging and condemning ourselves and discover a sense of self-worth.
- 12) We grow in independence and are no longer terrified of abandonment. We have interdependent relationships with healthy people, not dependent relationships with people who are emotionally unavailable.
- 13) The characteristics of alcoholism and para-alcoholism we have internalized are identified, acknowledged, and removed.
- 14) We are actors, not reactors.



The Problem

(Adapted from The Laundry List)

Many of us found that we had several characteristics in common as a result of being brought up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional household. We had come to feel isolated and uneasy with other people, especially authority figures. To protect ourselves, we became people-pleasers, even though we lost our own identities in the process. All the same we would mistake any personal criticism as a threat. We either became alcoholics (or practiced other addictive behavior) ourselves, or married them, or both. Failing that, we found other compulsive personalities, such as a workaholic, to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We lived life from the standpoint of victims. Having an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, we preferred to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We got guilt feelings when we stood up for ourselves rather than giving in to others. Thus, we became reactors, rather than actors, letting others take the initiative. We were dependent personalities, terrified of abandonment, willing to do almost anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet we kept choosing insecure relationships because they matched our childhood relationship with alcoholic or dysfunctional parents.

These symptoms of the family disease of alcoholism or other dysfunction made us “co-victims,” those who take on the characteristics of the disease without necessarily ever taking a drink. We learned to keep our feelings down as children and kept them buried as adults. As a result of this conditioning, we confused love with pity, tending to love those we could rescue. Even more self-defeating, we became addicted to excitement in all our affairs, preferring constant upset to workable relationships. This is a description, not an indictment.



The Solution

The Solution is to become your own loving parent. As ACA becomes a safe place for you, you will find freedom to express all the hurts and fears you have kept inside and to free yourself from the shame and blame that are carryovers from the past. You will become an adult who is imprisoned no longer by childhood reactions. You will recover the child within you, learning to accept and love yourself.

The healing begins when we risk moving out of isolation. Feelings and buried memories will return. By gradually releasing the burden of unexpressed grief, we slowly move out of the past. We learn to reparent ourselves with gentleness, humor, love, and respect. This process allows us to see our biological parents as the instruments of our existence. Our actual parent is a Higher Power whom some of us choose to call God. Although we had alcoholic or dysfunctional parents, our Higher Power gave us the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

This is the action and work that heals us: we use the Steps; we use the meetings; we use the telephone. We share our experience, strength, and hope with each other. We learn to restructure our sick thinking one day at a time. When we release our parents from responsibility for our actions today, we become free to make healthful decisions as actors, not reactors. We progress from hurting, to healing, to helping. We awaken to a sense of wholeness we never knew was possible. By attending these meetings on a regular basis, you will come to see parental alcoholism or family dysfunction for what it is: a disease that infected you as a child and continues to affect you as an adult.

You will learn to keep the focus on yourself in the here and now. You will take responsibility for your own life and supply your own parenting. You will not do this alone. Look around you and you will see others who know how you feel. We will love and encourage you no matter what. We ask you to accept us just as we accept you. This is a spiritual program based on action coming from love. We are sure that as the love grows inside you, you will see beautiful changes in all your relationships, especially with God, yourself, and your parents.

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The ACA Promises

- 1) We will discover our real identities by loving and accepting ourselves.
- 2) Our self-esteem will increase as we give ourselves approval on a daily basis.
- 3) Fear of authority figures and the need to “people-please” will leave us.
- 4) Our ability to share intimacy will grow inside us.
- 5) As we face our abandonment issues, we will be attracted by strengths and become more tolerant of weaknesses.
- 6) We will enjoy feeling stable, peaceful, and financially secure.
- 7) We will learn how to play and have fun in our lives.
- 8) We will choose to love people who can love and be responsible for themselves.
- 9) Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.
- 10) Fears of failure and success will leave us, as we intuitively make healthier choices.
- 11) With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors.
- 12) Gradually, with our Higher Power’s help, we will learn to expect the best and get it.