

**ADULT
CHILDREN
ANONYMOUS**

A C A

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FOR NEWCOMERS IN ACA

Adult Children Anonymous

Welcome to our fellowship. Relax and make yourself at home. We understand your fears and apprehensions about coming here. All of us were once new to ACA. We know what it is like to feel like a square peg in a round hole. To never feel like we belong. To live with our backs to the wall. To have to be hyper-vigilant and never to know the relative safety and comfort that a home should have. We are certain, however, that in a short while you will, like many of us, feel you have finally found a home where people speak your language and be among people who have experienced the pain and confusion of growing up in a dysfunctional home environment. You are no longer alone.

In the meetings you are likely to hear stories from member's personal experiences (both past and present) that you will immediately identify with. You will also hear how they have coped and how they are learning to overcome past experiences and present difficulties. How they are learning to live happier and healthier lives. While it may at first seem somewhat negative, morose or self-pitying do not be too quick to judge us. Keep an open mind. We believe that the only way to heal the past and to stop recreating the chaos of our childhood is to finally allow ourselves to acknowledge the truth. To feel the feelings and work through them. Denial and repression helped us survive until now. Now we need to begin to live.

We suggest that you attend at least six meetings before you decide whether or not ACA is the place for you. While in these meetings you will likely hear some terms, phrases and concepts with which you are not familiar. No doubt a few questions will come to mind. We hope that the following pages will help to demystify our fellowship for you.

Thank you for coming. We hope that you find what you are looking for and that you will join us on our path of recovery and hope.

The origins of ACA in the National Capital Region date from January 1986. Wayne C. who had been travelling out West attended several ACA meetings in the Vancouver area. He brought the Vancouver material to Ottawa and asked Serenity Renewal for Families for space to hold the first meetings. From the original closed group of ten members it blossomed six months later to between eighty and one hundred. It was now an open group and found by word of mouth. After one year the Queensway Carleton Hospital group was formed and by October 1992 there were 11 English and 2 French groups in the National Capital Region. Presently, unfortunately, there is only 1 group in the NCR which maintains a web site at <http://acainnerpeace.ncf.ca/> (also easily found by searching for "ACA Ottawa").

Q. IS ACA A PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION OR A LOBBY GROUP?

- A. It is neither. ACA is a support group or self-help fellowship with one purpose: To carry our message of hope to other ACA's who are still suffering. There is however a U.S.national organization (with which we are not affiliated) known as NACOA (National Association for Children of Alcoholics). They are professionals and lobbyists.

Q. HOW DO I BECOME AN ACA MEMBER?

- A. By attending one or more meetings and saying "I qualify" (if you feel you do) meaning you identify with any or all of the characteristics of an adult child as discussed in the meetings. You do not have to give us your name, address, phone number or anything else. However, individual groups may keep a membership list for their own purposes such as calling business meetings and notifying members of upcoming events or changes in times or locations of meetings. Remember that ACA is an anonymous program and we do not use our full names when we speak (or write) publicly about ACA.

Q. DOES IT COST ANYTHING TO JOIN?

- A. Membership in ACA is absolutely free. There are no dues or fees. We are self-supporting through our own voluntary contributions which covers our website cost, rent, photocopying costs and other expenses in running a meeting. Revenues over and above costs for individual group(s) may be donated to an Intergroup, if present, to cover costs incurred by them as well as helping to finance ACA rallies, conventions and other special events.

Q. AM I REQUIRED TO PARTICIPATE IN ACA?

- A. No. You do not need to speak or offer your services to ACA in any way. Anything you say at a meeting, anything you undertake to do for your group or for ACA as a whole is entirely voluntary. We will always respect your right to say "No" if there is anything you do not want to do. However, it is with love and respect that we hope you will participate in ACA either by sharing your feelings at a meeting, chairing a meeting or in any other capacity. We are all needed here. We have found that participation is helpful for our own growth and we are grateful for whatever you may contribute to this fellowship. Remember, even just your attendance is appreciated. The most important person in ACA sits in your chair. Without you there, there would be no meeting.

Q. WHAT DO THEY MEAN BY SAYING 'MY NAME IS ... AND I QUALIFY'?

- A. The third tradition of ACA states :
"The only requirement for membership is a compulsive (dysfunctional) family background and a desire to become well emotionally". If this sounds like you, you belong too.

**WHAT ARE THE "TWELVE STEPS"? IS IT NECESSARY TO DO THEM?
IS ACA A RELIGION?**

- Q.
- A. No. ACA is not a religion. The Twelve Steps are a program for personal recovery from addiction and compulsive behaviour, when all attempts at control or cessation by virtue or willpower have failed. Originally part of the Alcoholics Anonymous program, we (and many other programs) have adopted the 12-Steps with minor changes, as they have proven effective in treating alcoholism and other addictions for over eighty years.

If you have read the 12-Steps or heard them read out at a meeting you will have heard such words as God, Higher Power, Moral Inventory, Making Amends and Prayer. Sometimes, with a person's previous experience of religion one can be put off quite quickly by these terms. Furthermore, others may be quite offended at the thought of relying on God, when it was "He" who let them down as children. Still others, burdened with shame and guilt from having been told all their lives overtly or covertly that they are "the cause" of their parents drinking or acting out behaviours, might head first into the steps and use them as a big stick to beat themselves with. Neither of these extreme attitudes will be healthy for you and it is better to let the Steps be for awhile until you have a better understanding of ACA issues and of your childhood experiences. Listen to what others in the program have to say about the Steps and if necessary get some professional help and/or spiritual counselling.

Remember that the Steps are a tool for spiritual growth, not to increase your level of shame. It has been our experience that recovery is a spiritual journey in search of the beautiful unique and loveable beings that each of us was created to be. Ultimately we feel that all recovery is, indeed, spiritual.

Q. **IS IT NECESSARY FOR ME TO DO THE TWELVE STEPS?**

- A. In a word, no. That is entirely your choice. They are simply a suggested program of recovery. They may also be interpreted to suit your own individual needs depending upon what stage of recovery you are at. There are several books available that have been approved by ACA which can serve as guides for working the Twelve Steps in your life. There are also meetings in ACA which deal specifically with the Twelve Steps.

Q. **IS THERE "SPONSORSHIP" IN ACA?**

- A. Those who have been in other Twelve Step programs, such a AA and AI-Anon will be familiar with the concept of "Sponsorship". This is where a long-standing member in the program works with a newcomer as a guide and mentor. In ACA, while we are not necessarily opposed to the idea, we are not entirely in favour of it either. We feel that with our individual histories we are pre-disposed to "care-taking" others rather than taking care of ourselves. For many of us this has had dire consequences. There is a fine line between effective sponsorship and co-dependency. Therefore, we have opted for the concept of "co-sponsorship".

Co-sponsorship means that we encourage the exchange of names and phone numbers between members, whether newcomers or old timers, and "share" our experiences, strength and hope with one another as caring brothers and sisters who are all on the road to recovery. There is no seniority here. We take it "One Day At A Time". We all have something to share regardless of the length of time in the program, which might benefit another. We are all in need of love and support because after all, life will never be easy.

Remember that the time and energy you invest in personal contacts between meetings will be returned to you in full measure. There is none among us who could not do with a little love for a little or no charge.

Q. WHAT IS CO-DEPENDENCY?

A. You can talk to a dozen experts, read a dozen books and get a dozen interpretations. Many accept it as a disease in as much as it has an onset, is progressive, predictable and in time potentially fatal, although other causes of death are generally cited. It is assumed that all ACA's are co-dependents, but we each act out this illness in a different way.

Basically, there are two general concepts:

1. As children growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home environment, we learned to hide or dissociate our feelings, our true selves (also known as the "Inner Child") and we adopted a survival role in order to cope with the stresses. The experts in the field of alcoholism have identified four main roles which although not always mutually exclusive, seem apparent in all children from dysfunctional homes. The four roles are: The Hero, The Scapegoat, The Mascot and The Lost Child. Most of us discover that we identify with one or more of these roles, and are in the process of trying to separate our true selves from our childhood roles.
2. In relationships many ACA's find that as a result of traumatic bonding with our sick parents, we are now drawn to relationships with alcoholics or addicts of one sort or another. We become addicted to these dysfunctional people to the point that our own lives revolve around the addict, to our own detriment. We have difficulty in "letting go" because we convinced ourselves that we are "in love" and that we need this other person in order to feel fulfilled.

In short, co-dependents are "people pleasers". We have lived our lives focused on the significant others in our lives rather than living from our own beingness, adapting to the wants and needs of others rather than from our own agenda. In ACA we give up this "other centredness" and begin (perhaps for the first time) to be "self centred". Not in the narrow, egotistical or narcissistic sense, but in a healthy way that builds self-esteem and self-confidence. We learn to love ourselves. This is sometimes referred to as "re-parenting or self-parenting". We are reprogramming our inner child, giving up the "old tapes", the beliefs and the projections of our parents. We grieve our losses and become the ones we are, rather than what someone else tried to make us.

Q. WHAT IS MEANT BY "RECOVERY"? HOW DO I KNOW IF I AM DOING IT RIGHT? WILL I EVER GET OVER ALL OF THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF MY CHILDHOOD? HOW LONG BEFORE I START TO GET WELL?

A. Recovery is a process. Perhaps, more aptly, we should call it "discovery" because we begin to discover who we really are, what really happened to us (validation) and what we can do about it.

Most of us feel that once you have come to ACA and have identified with the symptoms or issues we have in common the process has begun. Having begun, your life will begin to change, though it may not always be immediately apparent. Be forewarned, that it is not always a pleasant road. But as they say, "no pain, no gain". While each case is different, the experts generally feel that on average, it may take three to five years before things begin to level out for you. But the rewards are worth the effort.

Be patient with yourself and share with us what you are going through. Trust us. We will not tell you that you are wrong or that you are crazy. We accept you as you are. Remember, we have been there too! And whatever you are experiencing right now, remember that "this too, shall pass". Will it all be better? Probably not. However, we do make progress in our own way, at our own pace and should not compare ourselves to others. Recovery is a personal matter. It is you becoming the beautiful, loveable you that you were meant to be.

NEWCOMER'S PACKET
ADULT CHILDREN ANONYMOUS
LETTER TO THE NEWCOMER

Many new people are coming to A.C.A. meetings every day who are distressed and in some stage of unresolved grief. Although some of these people have had years in other "12 Step Programs", many newcomers are bewildered when they are told that the 12 Steps are the solution to "The Problem".

We are all operating in some stage of "Denial", which is how we got trapped in the first place!

Yet, we know that the steps work. Many of us are recovering Alcoholics, Overeaters, Workaholics, Gamblers or Sexaholics and have had personal experience with or have seen first-hand, the miracles resulting from working the 12 Steps. Still, we knew what it was we had to give up or abstain from, after we had come out of the "Denial", and that we could not do it alone.

One young lady attending her first A.C.A. meeting, expressed it this way. (Passionately-nearly in tears.) "When I heard "The Problem", I knew that finally I had found others like myself and that this was home, at last. But I'm confused. I know that in AA you give up alcohol, in OA you abstain from food, but in A.C.A., just what do you give up for recovery?"

Many of us felt that we had already given up so much in our lives that we had nothing more to give. We needed explanations to what had happened to us as children. We needed our reality validated that there really was a problem, that it was not just our imagination! We needed to go through the identification process that AA and Al-Anons and OA go through and to come out of our dreamlike state, dropping layers of denial at whatever gradient was comfortable for us, by sharing "what happened" and "what's happening right now" in a safe and loving family environment. So that we can begin to see that we are re-creating what happened to us as children, in the present, and begin to break the trap circuits. Not by giving up something, but through the process of self discovery, realizing that we don't have to keep doing it. Thus, becoming our own parent, and giving ourselves permission to be right where we are, owing ourselves both the "good" and the "bad", and making our own choices.

Many of us had to "act out" our stages of grief and "feel our feelings", that we had never allowed ourselves to express in our own families. Some of us had to put some order to the many years of "seeking". Searching for answers, in books, psychotherapy sessions, past experiences and conversations with friends or professionals whom we somehow knew did not understand and could not help. Now realizing that it was all valuable, and a part of our growth experience that brought us to this new beginning, we get to keep all we learned.

We needed to enter into a process of self discovery. We needed to learn what "Denial" is and how it operates in our lives, and how the process of sharing peels denial off one layer at a time, raising our consciousness, and giving us vision and choices we never thought possible.

Just reading the educational material now available, blew change and brought us closer to home. Some of us had such "control" of our emotions that it took biofeedback sessions just to get through our suits of armor and prove to us that we really had "stuffed feelings", that we could begin to experience them and gradually come unstuck from our various stages of grief.

Many of us discovered that we could not love ourselves or let others touch us or love us. We needed to know why...and to discover that this was connected to loss...loss of self-esteem, and that we could get it back, or in some cases begin to really experience it for the first time. Some were not ready to hear about "Love" or "God", having felt abandoned by "God".

Once the "whys" and the "missing pieces" of our life mosaic gradually began to fill in, we began to see and admit our part, take responsibility for it, and finally make peace with our parents and our past.

FOR BEGINNERS

It is indeed confusing to walk into an Adult Children Anonymous meeting for the first time. Congratulations on your bravery. In these rooms you are welcome to share the confusion and pain that has haunted you.

Do you qualify for membership? Many beginners feel that they are not entitled to be in the rooms. There may have been no alcoholism in your family, but if you identify with the laundry list, you probably belong. Adult children of compulsive gamblers, over-eaters, sexaholics, and generally dysfunctional families have found help and acceptance in these rooms. If you identify with us, you are welcome to consider yourself one of us. You may hear words that are new to you: lost child, hero, scapegoat, mascot, codependent, the child within. Read the literature or simply listen and you will understand. You may also hear about spiritual recovery and the 12 steps. This is not a religious movement, but many of have found that a belief in a power greater than ourselves has been helpful. It is not necessary to have religious beliefs, or even to believe in God to participate in this program.

More than one beginner has complained, "But I don't know what I'm supposed to do? What are the rules? How does it work?" Strange as it sounds, there are no rules or explanations, except to keep coming to the meetings. Here are a few hints to keep in mind:

1. **ATTEND SIX MEETINGS BEFORE YOU DECIDE IF A.C.A. IS FOR YOU.** This is the traditional wisdom. Why not 5 or 7? A good question. Six has become the magic number. What you hear may make you sad, uncomfortable, or angry. You may feel out of sorts the next day. This is a result of bringing up painful memories from the past. Try to examine your feelings.
2. **TRY DIFFERENT MEETINGS.** At the present time there is only one meeting in the Ottawa-Carleton area. We try to make every meeting a safe place, but you may feel more comfortable some nights more than others. Sample and select. Take what you want and leave the rest.
3. **SPEAK UP AT THE MEETINGS.** It might be difficult for you to speak. It has been for others as well. We will embrace you. Share with us. Once you speak, others may identify and perhaps grow from your sharing. More importantly, you will. This stuff works.
4. **DON'T TAKE REJECTION TOO PERSONALLY.** It hurts when a friendly overture is rebuffed, especially as we all feel particularly vulnerable in these rooms. It has happened to everyone. Remember that each of us is here because of conflicts and problems. Some friction and disappointment is inevitable. Try to talk things out.
5. **TRY TO KEEP THE FOCUS ON YOURSELF AND YOUR FEELINGS.** While it is painful and difficult to do so, we are in these rooms for ourselves to feel our feelings. Lecturing, advice giving, criticism, feed back, commentary on others, "fixing" are detrimental to other's recovery as well as our own. Focus on your past, your feelings, your problems, your patterns. This is not selfish, it is healthy.

6. **DON'T FOLLOW LEADERS.** Be wary of anyone who acts as an authority or sponsor. We A.C.A.s are each responsible for our own recovery, which comes through the development of our inner voice. The program is unique to each of us: we must learn to trust ourselves. We have no officials and our chairpeople are only trusted servants. There is no "approved" literature-we can all write it. Anyone can start a meeting. We have no spokesperson, representatives, or experts. Each one of us is expert in our own pain, in our own needs, in our own recovery.
7. **FELLOWSHIP.** If there is someone you identify with, you might tell them after the meeting. The groups sometimes have fellowship at a restaurant afterwards. Invite yourself, or ask another A.C.A. to join you. Isolation is part of this disease, and you can break it.
8. **SHARING OUTSIDE THE MEETING.** Pick up a telephone number list. While going through this exciting, painful process, it is enormously helpful to have other A.C.A.s to call in times of stress and need. Ask for people's phone numbers. (Some may say no). It is hard to lift up that phone and admit your pain, but we have all been there.
9. **BE CAREFUL OF RELATIONSHIPS.** Over the years, many adult children have had difficult experiences in "relationships" with other members of the A.C.A. fellowship - also known as Thirteenth Stepping.

These unhappy experiences have often resulted in one, or even both, of the individuals involved leaving the group.

We recommend that you talk to your G.S.R. (or to some other "safe" person) about any problems you may encounter with relationships with other A.C.A.'ers.

Reach out for help!

LASTLY, REMEMBER THAT THIS IS A PROGRAM OF SPIRITUAL RECOVERY. WE PRACTICE ANONYMITY AND TRY TO HAVE NO GOSSIP OR CRITICISM AMONG US. IF ANY OF THIS IS HELPFUL, TERRIFIC. EVERYONE RECOVERS AT THEIR OWN PACE. JUST KEEP COMING BACK, IT WORKS.

WHY THE CONFUSION

Feeling uncertain, disoriented, agitated, unprotected, and just plain stumped can be very good for your recovery. Children of dysfunctional families often feel this way, especially when we are making progress with our greatest difficulties.

In the process of spiritual recovery, the most painful experiences are often those which entail the shock of recognition, as the protective masks we once wore are stripped from us. We experience afresh the panic, the suppressed rage, and the sense of helplessness which compelled us as children to adapt our character to the disturbed nature of our home environment. These feelings themselves can inspire fear, they threaten our sometimes precarious equilibrium and the childhood taboos that we often still carry. Most frightening of all, they can make us feel stuck in our past.

By entering this program, we have begun to step into uncharted inner territory. Together we are moving towards self-awareness, respect, honesty, love and responsibility for ourselves. The general experience in recovery is that, after a while, we do become more comfortable in our emergence as emotional, occasionally somewhat difficult individuals. As we begin to orient ourselves to this new state, we can find considerable satisfaction in our increasing integrity. Still we may frequently find our emotional landscape in glorious disarray. This is quite normal (for us). Contact with others who are experiencing recovery can offer crucial help at these times. Certainly this takes courage. Sometimes we are apt to feel that we have nothing to share but our hurt and shame, and it is tempting to slide back into the closet or the eating, or the working, or the bottle, or whatever dark place we came from. But please do pick up the telephone or come to a meeting and spread the fertilizer around. It often seems as if the deeper our immediate difficulty, the more Adult Children we can connect with.

We each bear a past which we have been able neither to assimilate nor to escape. The roots of our anger, fear, and heartache run deep into the earliest layers of our soul's experience. As we begin to make the mental, spiritual, and emotional connections that enable us to survive today, and as our perceptions open up more to reality, we find ourselves changing in ways that were almost unthinkable before. The distorted self-image which we formed in the dysfunctional environment - perhaps the greatest "authority figure" we will ever have to face - begins to be challenged daily. Owning up to this past and these distortions, to the damage that we have undergone, seems fundamentally to be a process of grieving and letting go. It is painful to admit how far the situation of our life has been outside our control, outside of what seems fair or right. As a residue of our upbringing, we sometimes get "moralistic" with ourselves and experience our powerlessness, pain, and uncertainty as punishment. Perhaps this attitude is one last attempt to preserve the old hope that if we can just be obedient enough, we will be taken care of. We may also feel that our every move ought now to be an obvious step forward, with no steps back required. These are self-blaming attitudes which we can let go of. Our true self will always do the invaluable service of stubbornly refusing conformity with any ingrained notions of what we "should" need or "should" feel. Deeply effective recovery is rarely experienced as a smooth, graceful, assured process. It involves the recognition of some very sickening circumstances; contending with their effects on us cannot always be both truthful and outwardly pleasing. The feelings and attitudes most rigidly prohibited to us as children are the most disorienting ones to learn to know today, but this is exactly what liberates us.

Confusion, isolation, and self-doubt are the natural result when we are so continually forced to withhold our strongest feelings that we begin to disown them. Now, in the process of coming back to life, we must come face to face with the horrors we are leaving behind us. It is a necessary step towards regaining our own identities. But this re-union with a "long-lost self" is more momentous than meeting a long-lost relative (especially given the kind of relatives most of us seem to have). Your recovery in this program may not be measurable or controllable, but surely it is already under way. And you are not alone.

A.C.A. PREAMBLE

Adult Children Anonymous is a group formed for those suffering from the effects of addiction and compulsive behavior in our home environment during childhood.

The A.C.A. program is not a forum for continually wallowing in our unfortunate past, but rather one of awareness, acceptance and action. We become aware of the nature of our disturbed home environment and experience again the feelings of panic, suppressed anger and disorientation we felt as children. We learn to accept that our parents did the best they could. However, they managed to create in us many dysfunctional and compulsive characteristics which now interfere with our daily lives.

Through experiencing exactly those feelings and attitudes prohibited to us as children, we have learned to overcome the confusion, isolation and self doubt created automatically as part of survival techniques we used in our home environments.

This process is slow and usually extremely painful. Our recovery comes at a high price of personal effort, but for the newcomer we can assure you it's worth the struggle.

Recovery is not instantaneous. The period of growth and progress can bring minor setbacks, but once you begin to work the program, positive personality change is inevitable. By learning to express feelings and emotions long suppressed, we replace negativity with hope and a new sense of self worth.

THE PROBLEM

Many of us find that we have several characteristics in common as a result of being brought up in a dysfunctional household.

We came to feel isolated, uneasy with other people...especially authority figures. To protect ourselves, we became people pleasers, even though we lost our identities in the process. Personal criticism is perceived as a threat. We either become addicts ourselves or marry them or both. Failing that we find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We live life from the standpoint of victims. We have an over-developed sense of responsibility and prefer to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We somehow get guilt feelings if we stand up for ourselves rather than giving in to others. Thus, we become REACTORS rather than ACTORS, letting others take the initiative.

We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment... who will do almost anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet we keep choosing insecure relationships because they match our childhood relationship with dysfunctional parents. Thus, addiction can be seen as family disease and we can see ourselves as "Codependents". Those who take on the characteristics of the diseases without necessarily ever using chemicals or behavior to mood alter.

We learned to stuff our feelings down in childhood and keep them buried as adults through that conditioning. In consequence, we confuse love and pity and tend to love those we can rescue and...even more self defeating... we become addicted to excitement in all our affairs, preferring constant upsets to workable relationships.

THIS IS A DESCRIPTION, NOT AN INDICTMENT

THE SOLUTION

We are the survivors of addiction and abuse in the family of our childhood. We have found, however, that some of the tools and roles used to cope with the crisis of alcoholism now interferes with our present lives.

By attending A.C.A. meetings and sharing our experiences, we find we can admit our powerlessness over the disease of addiction, begin to heal old wounds, lose the sense of being inferior or worthless and help ourselves weed out attitudes that disrupt our present lives. We begin to gain a healthy perspective on our feelings and the feelings of others. Through a willingness to pursue in depth the root of childhood feelings and experiences, we are able to begin watching for present day self-destructive patterns, recognize these patterns and make better choices for ourselves.

We encourage sharing and trusting with cosponsors who can help us. We also find that trust, fellowship and service with our support group can aid our growth. Above all, practicing the principles of the Twelve Step Program on a daily basis helps us to change sick attitudes and characteristics that have plagued us for years and made our lives unmanageable.

KEEP COMING BACK

A.C.A. PERSONAL BILL OF RIGHTS

1. Life should have choices beyond mere survival.
2. You have a right to say no to anything when you feel you are not ready or it's unsafe.
3. Life should not be motivated by fear.
4. You have a right to all your feelings.
5. You are probably not guilty.
6. You have a right to make mistakes.
7. There is no need to smile when you cry.
8. You have a right to terminate conversations with people who make you feel put down and humiliated.
9. You can be healthier than those around you.
10. It is OK to be relaxed, playful and frivolous.
11. You have a right to change and grow.
12. It is important to set limits and be selfish.
13. You can be angry at someone you love.
14. You can take care of yourself, no matter what circumstances you are in.

AFFIRMATIONS

1. I feel comfortable and involved with people and authority figures.
2. I have a strong identity and give myself approval.
3. I accept and use personal criticism in a positive way.
4. I am becoming free from trying to fulfill my sick abandonment need.
5. As I face my own victim role, I am attracted by strengths and understand weaknesses in my love, friendship and career relationships.
6. I am getting well through loving and focusing on myself.
7. It feels great to stand up for myself.
8. I enjoy peaceful serenity.
9. I love people who love and take care of themselves.
10. I am free to feel and express my feelings even when they are painful.
11. I have a healthy sense of self esteem.
12. I am free from abandonment and fear in my relationships as I rely more and more on my higher power.
13. Through the A.C.A. group, I examine and release para-dysfunctional behaviors I learned growing up in a dysfunctional family.

**COMMON CHARACTERISTICS
OF
ADULT CHILDREN OF DYSFUNCTIONAL FAMILIES**
(According to Janet Geringer Woititz)

1. ADULT CHILDREN GUESS AT WHAT NORMAL IS.
There is no frame of reference for what it is like to be in a normal household. You also have no frame of reference for what is O.K. to say and feel. In a more typical situation, one does not have to walk on eggs all the time. Because you did, you became confused. Many things from the past contributed to your having to guess at what normal is.
2. ADULT CHILDREN HAVE DIFFICULTY IN FOLLOWING A PROJECT THROUGH FROM BEGINNING TO END.
In a functional family, the child has this behavior and attitude to model. The child observes the process and the child may even ask questions along the way. The learning may be more indirect than direct, but it is present. Since your experience was so vastly different, it should be no surprise that you have a problem with following a project through from beginning to end.
3. ADULT CHILDREN LIE WHEN IT WOULD BE JUST AS EASY TO TELL THE TRUTH.
Lying is basic to the family system affected by alcohol. It masquerades in part an overt denial of unpleasant realities, cover ups broken promises and inconsistencies. Lying as the norm in your house became part of what you knew and what could be useful to you. At times, it made life much more comfortable. If you lied about getting your work done, you could get away with being lazy for a while. It seemed to make life simpler for everybody.
4. ADULT CHILDREN JUDGE THEMSELVES WITHOUT MERCY.
Your judgment of others is not nearly as harsh as your judgment of yourself, although it is hard for you to see other people's behavior in terms of a continuum either. Black and white, good or bad, are typically the way you look at things. You know what it feels like to be bad, and how those feelings make you behave. And then if you are good there is always the risk that it won't last. So either way you set yourself up.
5. ADULT CHILDREN HAVE DIFFICULTY HAVING FUN.
6. ADULT CHILDREN TAKE THEMSELVES VERY SERIOUSLY.
These two characteristics are closely linked. You didn't hear your parents laughing and joking and fooling around. Life was a very serious, angry business. The tone in your house put a damper on your fun. Eventually, you just went along with everybody else. Having fun just was not fun. The spontaneous child within was quashed.
7. ADULT CHILDREN HAVE DIFFICULTY WITH INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS.
The feelings of being insecure or having difficulty in trusting, and of questions about whether or not you are going to get hurt are not exclusive to adult children. These are

problems most people have. It is simply a matter of degree, your being a child of an alcoholic caused the ordinary difficulties to become more severe.

8. ADULT CHILDREN OVER-REACT TO CHANGES OVER WHICH THEY HAVE NO CONTROL.

The young child of an alcoholic was not in control. The alcoholic's life was inflicted on him, as was his environment. In order to survive when growing up, he needed to turn that around. He needed to begin taking charge of his environment. This became important and remains so. The child of the alcoholic learns to trust himself more than anyone else when it is impossible to rely on someone else's judgment.

9. ADULT CHILDREN CONSTANTLY SEEK APPROVAL AND AFFIRMATION.

The message you got as a child was very confused. It was not unconditional love. The definitions were not clear and the messages were mixed. "Yes, no, I love you, go away." So you grew up with some confusion about yourself. The affirmations you did not get on a day-to-day basis as a child, you interpret as negative.

10. ADULT CHILDREN FEEL THAT THEY ARE DIFFERENT FROM OTHER PEOPLE.

Feeling different is something you have had with you since childhood and even if the circumstance does not warrant it, the feeling prevails. Other children have had the opportunity to be children. You did not. You were very much concerned with what was going on at home. You could never be completely comfortable playing with other children. You could not be fully there. Your concerns about your home problems clouded everything else in your life.

11. ADULT CHILDREN ARE EITHER SUPER RESPONSIBLE OR SUPER IRRESPONSIBLE.

Either you take it all on or you give it all up. There is no middle ground. You tried to please your parents, doing more and more, or you reached the point where you recognized it did not matter, so you did nothing.

12. ADULT CHILDREN ARE EXTREMELY LOYAL, EVEN IN THE FACE OF EVIDENCE THAT THE LOYALTY IS UNDESERVED.

The alcoholic home appears to be a very loyal place. Family members hang in long after reasons dictate that they should leave. The so-called "loyalty" is more the result of fear and insecurity than anything else, nevertheless, the behavior that is modeled is one where no one walks away just because the going gets rough. This sense enables the adult child to remain in involvement's that are better dissolved.

13. ADULT CHILDREN ARE IMPULSIVE.

They tend to lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences. This impulsivity leads to confusion, self-loathing, and loss of control over their environment. In addition, they spend an excessive amount of energy cleaning up the mess.

THE CHARACTERISTICS WE SEEM TO HAVE IN COMMON DUE TO HAVING BEEN BROUGHT UP IN A DYSFUNCTIONAL HOUSEHOLD

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identities in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, overeaters, etc. marry them - or both - or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our need for abandonment.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of helping and seeking 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 closely at ourselves.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves. Instead, we give in to others.
8. We become addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love with pity and tend to "love" people we can pity and rescue.
10. We have stuffed back our feelings from our traumatic childhood's and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings. It hurts so much--(denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem, sometimes compensated for by trying to appear superior.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment. We will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience the pain of abandonment. We are conditioned to these types of relationships.
13. Addiction is a family disease, and we became para-dysfunctional. We took on the characteristics of these diseases even though we did not use chemicals to mood alter.
14. Adult Children are reactors rather than actors.

THE A.C.A. PROGRAM AND HOW IT WORKS

REPORT OF THE IDENTITY, PURPOSE AND RELATIONSHIP COMMITTEE

We find a difference in identity and purpose distinguishes Adult Children Anonymous from other 12 Step Programs and underscores the need for our special focus.

The central problem for Adult Children is a mistaken belief formed in childhood, which affects every part of our lives. As children, we fought to survive the destructive effects of addiction and began an endless struggle to change a troubled dysfunctional family into a loving, supportive one. We reach adulthood believing we failed, unable to see that no one can stop the traumatic effects of family addiction.

Following naturally from this pervasive sense of failure are self-blame, shame and guilt. These self-accusations ultimately lead to self-hate. Accepting our basic powerlessness to control dysfunctional behavior, and its effect on the family, is the key that unlocks the inner child and lets re-parenting begin. When the "First Step" is applied to family dysfunction, a fundamental basis for self-hate no longer exists.

Two characteristics identify the A.C.A. Program. The program is for adults raised in dysfunctional homes, and although dysfunction may exist, the focus is on the self, specifically on reaching and freeing the inner child, hidden behind a protective shield of denial.

The purpose of A.C.A. is three-fold...to shelter and support "newcomers" in confronting "denial", to comfort those mourning their early loss of security, trust and love; and to teach the skills for re-parenting ourselves with gentleness, humor, love and respect.

Moving from isolation is the first step an Adult Child makes in recovering the self. Isolation is both a prison and a sanctuary. Adult Children, suspended between need and fear, unable to choose between fight or flight, agonize in the middle and resolve the tension by explosive bursts of rebellion or silently endure the despair. Isolation is our retreat from the pain of indecision. This retreat into denial blunts our awareness of the destructive reality of the family dysfunction and is the first stage of mourning and grief. It allows us to cope with the loss of love and to survive in the face of neglect and abuse.

The return of feelings is the second stage of mourning and indicates a healing has begun. Initial feelings of anger, guilt, rage and despair resolve into a final acceptance of loss. Genuine grieving for our childhood ends our morbid fascination with the past and lets us return to the present, free to live as adults.

Confronting years of pain and loss at first seems overwhelming. Jim Goodwin, in describing the post-traumatic stress of Vietnam Veterans, writes that some veterans "actually believe that if they once again allow themselves to feel, they may never stop crying or may completely lose control..."¹

¹ "The Etiology of Combat-Related Post Traumatic Stress Disorders," (page 16)
Goodwin, Jim, Psy D., DISABLED AMERICAN VETERANS, Pub., Cincinnati.

Sharing the burden of grief others feel gives us the courage and strength to face our own bereavement. The pain of mourning and grief is balanced by being able, once again, to fully love and care for someone and to freely experience joy in life.

The need to re-parent ourselves comes from our efforts to feel safe as children. The violent nature of the dysfunction's darkened our emotional alienation from our own internal direction kept us helplessly dependent on those we mistrusted and feared.

In an unstable, hostile, and often dangerous environment, we attempted to meet the impossible demands of living with the family dysfunction and our lives were soon out of control. To make sense of the confusion, and to end our feelings of fear, we denied inconsistencies in what we were taught. We held rigidly to a few certain beliefs, or we rebelled and distrusted all outside interference.

Freedom begins with being open to love. The dilemma of abandonment is a choice between painful intimacy or isolation, but the consequence is the same--we protect ourselves by rejecting the vulnerable inner child and are forced to live without warmth or love. Without love, intimacy and isolation are equally painful, empty and incomplete.

Love dissolves self-hate. We give ourselves the love we seek and embrace the lonely child inside. With a child's sensitivity we reach out to explore the world again and become aware of the need to love and trust others.

The warm affection we have for each other heals our inner hurt. A.C.A.'s loving acceptance and gentle support lessen our feelings of fear. We share our beliefs and distrust without judgment or criticism. We realize the insanity of alcoholism, workaholism, etc., and become willing to replace the confusing beliefs of childhood with the clear, consistent direction of the 12 Steps and Traditions, and to accept the authority of the loving God they reflect.

A.C.A.'s relationship to other anonymous programs is shared dependence on the 12 Steps for a spiritual awakening. Each program's focus is different but the solution remains the same.

In childhood our identity is formed by the reflection we see in the eyes of the people around us. We fear losing that reflection...thinking the mirror makes us real and we disappear or have no self without it.

The distorted image of family dysfunction is not who we are. And we are not the unreal person trying to mask that distortion. In A.C.A. we do not stop abusing a substance, or losing ourselves in another. We stop believing we have no worth and start to see our true identity, reflected in the eyes of other Adult Children, as the strong survivors and valuable people we actually are.

CO-DEPENDENCY CAN BE:

My good feelings about who I am stem from being liked by you.

My good feelings about who I am stem from receiving approval by you.

Your struggles affect my serenity.

My mental attention focuses on solving your problems or relieving your pain.

My mental attention is focused on pleasing you.

My mental attention is focused on protecting you.

My mental attention is focused on manipulating you "to do it my way".

My self-esteem is bolstered by relieving your pain.

My own hobbies and interests are put aside. My time is spent sharing your interests and hobbies.

Your clothing and personal appearance is dictated by my desires as I feel you are a reflection of me.

Your behavior is dictated by my desires as I feel you are a reflection of me.

I am not aware of how I feel; I am aware of how you feel. I am not aware of what I want; I ask what you want. If I am not aware, I assume.

The dreams I have for my future are linked to you.

My fear of rejection determines what I say and do.

My fear of your anger determines what I say and do.

I use giving as a way of feeling safe in our relationship.

My social circle diminishes as I involve myself with you.

I put my values aside in order to connect with you.

I value your opinion and your way of doing things more than my own.

The quality of my life is in relation to the quality of yours.

THE TWELVE STEPS

We have adopted the 12-Step recovery program from Alcoholics Anonymous with minor changes. Their 12 Steps and Traditions have proven effective for over 50 years in dealing with alcohol and alcoholism, helping millions to overcome the crippling effects of the disease. We use them to help identify and change unwanted Adult Children characteristics. Here are the 12 Steps. . .

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of addiction that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to wholeness.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood 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 work in partnership with God to remove our ineffective behavior.
7. Humbly asked God to help us 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 whenever 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 understood 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 a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

. . . All journeys begin with the first step. It is with a compassionate understanding of your suffering that we urge you to begin a recovery process. Through the reliance on our spiritual program and using a God as you understand God, you, too, can begin to change, starting from this moment on.

THE TWELVE STEPS WORK

THE TWELVE TRADITIONS

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

AS ADULT CHILDREN

1. We have low self-esteem and feel inadequate. We fear discovery of the real us will cause rejection.
2. We fear rejection and disapproval and react by creating a character that is acceptable to others.
3. At times our identity seems to wander without conviction or direction, forced to feeling independent, alone or unique.
4. We have lost the ability to have "blind trust" in loved ones, peers, or authority figures.
5. We grieve for the family we never had.
6. We become compulsive and obsessive in our own behaviors.
7. In our desire to be needed, we gravitate to people we feel need us and lose those people when they outgrow their need for us. Our feelings of inadequacy are hidden in those positions of superiority. We sometimes meet others like ourselves and make ourselves victims of the survival roles we learned in our traumatic past.
8. We associate anger with violence and rejection and are afraid of expressing strong feelings and losing control of the situation by showing a weakness in our acceptable character.
9. We have learned how to live with stress in our childhood and are unknowingly trying to re-create the chaotic lifestyle we are familiar with.
10. We make excuses for other's weaknesses and have unreasonable expectations for ourselves and society at large.
11. Our role models showed us conditional love - we are afraid to trust because we don't trust ourselves. We don't know how.
12. We are afraid to reveal our secrets for fear of rejection or disapproval.
13. We are unable to let go, relax, and have fun.
14. We are afraid of intimacy and have difficulty forming close, intimate relationships.
15. We are unable to ask for what we want or what we need.
16. We withdraw and isolate when we experience the pain of friendship.
17. We are hypersensitive to the needs of others.

18. We have difficulty hearing positive and are critical of ourselves and others.
19. We build up barriers to protect ourselves from our own insecurities.
20. We become aware of feelings which seem to separate us from others and we find ourselves depressed. Depression is epidemic in families with Dysfunctional Syndrome.

To be an adult child who has come far enough out of denial to recognize the personal validity of "The Problem" is to earn recognition as one of the toughest, sanest, psychologically strongest people the world knows, with a capacity for personal responsibility that is unusual to say the least.

Sane, totally sane all our lives, whether or not we adopted insanity, suicide attempts, self-abusive drinking, eating or drugs use, compulsive working or obsessive relationships as our ways of handling our lives.

For the few who have survived the traumas of childhood, adolescence and adulthood, who have screened themselves, selected themselves throughout the other Twelve Step programs, therapies, consciousness expansions, insane asylums, jails and hospitals, all that is needed is a safe place where we can finally shed our defenses, our denials, and admit to ourselves and others how angry, hurt, maddened, wounded we have always felt. Admit it, experience it, and release it.

And finally we are safe. We have ourselves, we have each other; we are brother, sister, self, father, mother as we need them, need each other, until we are all self, able to claim our lives, our adulthood, our responsibility of ourselves, our lives and everything in them.

Anyone who can handle what comes up at six meetings without retreating into denial, "That is not My Problem", has begun an irreversible process of recovery; everything in that person's life becomes part of the recovery process, regardless of how chaotic it looks or feels. We act out at least once, our old dramas and defenses to see if they are as unnecessary as we hope they are. They are, and we typically do not slip back into denials of our other obsessions; we keep our other programs going, we are survivors.

There are many explanations ranging from religious to scientific, psychiatric, or a consciousness expansion which includes all of these. Any explanation seen, heard or thought of so far includes one central statement in complete agreement with all the others:

THE TWELVE STEPS WORK

THE SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the
SERENITY
to accept the things
I cannot change, the
COURAGE
to change the things
I can, and the
WISDOM
to know the difference.

REPEAT AFTER ME

I found the following poem to be the essence of what I hope REPEAT AFTER ME offers you.
May your journey offer the choices in your life you so deserve!

AUTOBIOGRAPHY IN FIVE SHORT CHAPTERS by Portia Nelson

I

I walk down the street.
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
 I fall in
 I am lost ... I am helpless
 It is not my fault.
 It takes forever to find a way out.

II

I walk down the same street.
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
 I pretend I don't see it.
 I fall in again.
 I can't believe I am in the same place.
 but, it is not my fault.
 It still takes a long time to get out.

III

I walk down the same street.
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
 I see it is there.
 I still fall in ... it's a habit.
 my eyes are open.
 I know where I am.
 It is my fault.
 I get out immediately.

IV

I walk down the same street.
 There is a deep hole in the sidewalk.
 I walk around it.

V

I walk down another street.

NEGATIVE TO POSITIVE USES OF ADULT CHILDREN ANONYMOUS ISSUES**A. SELF**

- cultivating self-understanding and self-acceptance
- giving self "treats"/strokes
- developing a "self" hour
- learning to be gentle with self
- developing self-examination and validation (e.g. journal writings)
- building behavior modification program
- changing "what ifs" to "so what if"
- learning to STOP - LOOK - LISTEN
- learning to think things through
- developing the "right to be wrong"
- taking small steps
- learning to use stress reduction techniques
- learning to require honesty from self
- reprogram thoughts to positive ones

B. SELF AND OTHERS

- learning to gather information and take action
- learning to gather a support system
- coming out and sharing personal experiences as a child of a dysfunctional family
- detach from sick family members

TWELVE RULES FOR RELATIONSHIPS

1. I WILL FACE MY EMPTINESS, YOU NEED NOT FILL ME UP.
2. I WILL TRUST, AND I WILL TELL YOU WHEN I DON'T.
3. I WILL BE THERE, YOU CAN COUNT ON ME.
4. I WILL TELL YOU IF I'M LEAVING.
5. I WILL LET YOU KNOW MY THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS, TO THE EXTENT THAT IS POSSIBLE.
6. I WILL BE VULNERABLE WITH YOU AS OFTEN AS I CAN.
7. I WILL DISAGREE, I WILL SAY WHEN I DO, AND I WILL SAY WHEN I DON'T.
8. I WILL COMMENT ON MY REALITY.
9. I WILL TAKE THE CONSEQUENCES FOR WHAT I SAY AND DO.
10. I WILL BE RECEPTIVE TO GIVING AND TAKING.
11. I PROMISE TO RESPECT YOUR STRUGGLES, AND HAVE COMPASSION FOR YOURS AS WELL AS FOR MY OWN.
12. I SHALL UNDERSTAND THAT MY NEEDS FOR INTIMACY MAY BE DIFFERENT FROM YOURS.

POSITIVE USES OF ADULT CHILDREN ANONYMOUS ISSUES

A. Personal Skills

1. Isolation
 - can bring self-reliance
 - can bring ability to be alone
 - can foster self-protection or insulation
 - can foster growth away from separation
2. Trust
 - when given is deep
3. Denial
 - of self can bring perceptive sensitivity
 - can cultivate a great sense of humor
 - can lead to a kind of optimism
4. Guilt
 - can bring a sensitivity to needs of others
5. Ability to Survive
 - a sense of having coped and "come out alive"
6. Lack of Rights
 - can bring an awareness of personal rights of self and others

B. Career-Oriented Skills

1. Responsibility
 - can foster a dependable/trustworthy employee/er
2. "All or Nothing"
 - can bring decisiveness
 - can foster independence
 - can foster goal-orientation
3. Control
 - can develop organizational skills
 - can foster a sense of being in charge of one's own life and making choices
4. Adaptability ("the Adapter")
 - can cultivate flexibility
5. Ability to Survive ("Survivors")
 - can develop realistic expectations/fewer disappointments
6. "Blinders"
 - can teach concentration/ability to stay on track
7. Hypervigilance and Unpredictability
 - can lead to ability to deal with "here and now"

A.C.A. SPONSORSHIP

Why have an A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor?

Those who have been in other Twelve Step programs, such as AA Al-Anon will be familiar with the concept of "Sponsorship". This is where a long-standing member in the program works with a newcomer as a guide and mentor. In A.C.A., while we are not necessarily opposed to the idea, we are not entirely in favor of it. We feel that with our individual histories we are pre-disposed to "care-taking" others rather than taking care of ourselves. For many of us this has had dire consequences. There is a fine line between effective sponsorship and codependency. Therefore, we have opted for the concept of "cosponsorship".

Cosponsorship means that we encourage the exchange of names and phone numbers between members, whether newcomers or old timers, and "share" our experiences, strength and hope with one another as caring brothers and sisters who are all on the road to recovery. There is no seniority here. We take it "One Day At A Time". We all have something to share regardless of the length of time in the program, which might benefit another. We are all in need of love and support because after all, life will never be easy.

Remember that the time and energy you invest in personal contacts between meetings will be returned to you in full measure. There is none among us who could not do with a little love for a little or no charge.

What can an A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor do for us?

An A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor can help us understand our A.C.A. characteristics, and can help us identify and work through our painful feelings. A Sponsor/Cosponsor can help us live a happier, healthier life by guiding us through the 12 Steps of A.C.A. to overcome the barriers of our denial. A Sponsor/Cosponsor can help us take responsibility for ourselves by helping us develop our spiritual growth.

How do we choose an A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor?

For us, choosing a Sponsor/Cosponsor involves a few steps: first, we go to several meetings and find someone we can identify with, who has the recovery we want. Then, we ask questions such as: What does the Sponsor/Cosponsor expect of us, and what is their availability (time, phone, location)? And last, we feel free to try a Sponsor/Cosponsor on a probationary basis.

Suggested Guidelines of an A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor

An A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor:

- regularly attends A.C.A. meetings, observes the 12 Traditions of A.C.A.,
- is willing to work the 12 Steps of A.C.A. with us,
- already has a Sponsor/Cosponsor, or is willing to Sponsor/Cosponsor with us,
- is willing to respect our anonymity, is willing to become familiar with other 12 Step programs,

- is willing to listen to our feelings, to be caring and supportive, to be reliable, trustworthy, and share their experience, strength and hope with us.

An A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor does not:

- tell us how to run our lives; criticize, judge, label or invalidate our feelings; lend or give money to us; cure us; become sexually involved with us; become our Higher Power.

FINALLY, an A.C.A. Sponsor/Cosponsor honestly tells us when they can or cannot help us.

12 STEPS OF A SPONSOR/CO-SPONSOR

1. I will not help you stay and wallow in limbo.
2. I will help you to grow, to become more productive, by your definition.
3. I will help you become more autonomous, more loving of yourself, more excited, less sensitive, more free to continue becoming the authority for your own living.
4. I cannot give you dreams or "fix you up", simply because I cannot.
5. I cannot give you growth, or grow for you. You must grow yourself, by facing reality, grim as it may be at times.
6. I cannot take away your loneliness or pain.
7. I cannot sense your world for you, evaluate your goals for you, or tell you what is best for you in your world, for you have your own world.
8. I cannot convince you of the crucial choice of choosing the scary uncertainty of growing over the safe misery of not growing.
9. I want to be with you and know you as a rich and growing friend; yet I cannot get close to you when you choose not to grow.
10. When I begin to care for you out of pity, then I begin to lose trust in you, then I am toxic, and bad, inhibiting for you, and you for me.
11. You must know - my helping is conditional; I will be with you, I will hang in there with you as long as I continue to get even the slightest hints that you are still trying to grow.
12. If you can accept all of this, then perhaps we can help each other to become what Higher Power meant us to be - mature adults - leaving childishness forever to the little children.

ANONYMOUS

HELP YOURSELF BY FORGIVING YOUR PARENTS

Ninety percent of the population carries around resentment and pain from childhood, says Harvard-trained psychiatrist Harold Bloomfield.

His book, *Making Peace With Your Parents*, is designed to help people shrug off the burden that is often so heavy it stagnates career, love affairs and all other business of adulthood.

Too often adults---even those who are competent in other areas of their lives---revert to the powerless, victim role when dealing with their parents, Bloomfield said.

Many who know there are unresolved hostilities toward their parents believe they have them "handled" by shoving them under the rug or refusing to see a parent they can't forgive.

How much is your everyday happiness affected by unresolved conflicts with parents? Enormously, said Bloomfield. "If anything is at the core of psychiatry, it's the parent-child relationship. You are making peace not for them but for you."

If you are still hung up on conflicts with your parents, you will probably answer no to the following questions:

1. Do you feel free of the expectations and obligations of others?
2. Can you make a mistake without excessive self-criticism?
3. Do you work well with bosses, teachers, landlords and other authority figures?
4. Are you free from excessive striving and unrealistic expectations that make you a slave to your work?
5. Do you and your spouse or lover work through your arguments without blaming or holding on to your resentments?

The process of changing your perception of your parents is far from painless, Bloomfield said.

First, you must develop skills such as receptive listening and showing anger. And then you get busy on your "psychological house cleaning."

Start by listing your most deeply held resentments -- the spots where your psyche still aches from the broken promise or public put down.

This list is private, Bloomfield emphasized. "Under no circumstances should these lists be shown to your parents. What's the point of devastating your 86-year-old mother?"

Visualize your parent hearing you read your list and giving back the "love, support and respect you desire."

Write a letter (don't send it, of course) uncovering your hurt right down to the core -- get below the situation to how you feel about it.

Verbalize your pain. Go over your list of resentments with a close friend. The friend's role is to be a calm, still listening post, not to jump in to spare you pain.

Take a blank piece of paper, address it to your parents and divide it into two columns. On the left hand side write, "I forgive you." On the other side write, whatever comes into your mind next. "I forgive you...No, I don't,...really," is a common one.

After repeated attempts, the "I forgive you" will come out without little silent messages trailing behind it and you'll have nothing to write in the right-hand column.

At this point, you are better able to get on with living , Bloomfield said. You have dealt with the inner parent, the one who hampers your day-to-day freedom.

CANADIAN PRESS

CONCLUSION

It is not unlikely that weeks and probably months have passed since you first picked up REPEAT AFTER ME and began your process of reflection. Many readers will find it helpful to do some of the exercises a second or third time over the next year or two. Recovery is an ongoing process and takes time. Be patient with yourself. Be willing to recognize your strengths. Find support systems to validate your feelings and perceptions. Begin to risk more of yourself. Try new behaviors that will allow your needs to be met.

As mentioned in the introduction, we must acknowledge our past - our childhood - grieve the losses and take responsibility for how we live our lives today. Today, you and the child within you deserve...

- to play...
- to laugh...
- to relax...
- to be flexible...
- to develop the ability to lead
 - yet feel comfortable when it
 - is time to follow...
- to question...
- to talk honestly...
- to make decisions...
- to attend to your own needs...
- to understand where your power lies...
- to protect yourself...
- to know and accept your feelings and
 - to be able to express those
 - feelings...
- to no longer live your life in fear and
- to believe in your specialness...

RISKS

To laugh is to risk appearing the fool

To weep is to risk appearing sentimental

To reach out for another is to risk involvement

To expose feelings is to risk exposing your true self

To place your ideas, your dreams before a crowd is to risk their loss

To love is to risk not being loved in return

To live is to risk dying

To hope is to risk despair

To try is to risk failure

But risks must be taken, because the greatest hazard in life is to risk nothing

People who risk nothing do nothing, have nothing, and are nothing

They may avoid suffering and sorrow but they cannot learn, feel, change, grow, love, live

Chained by their certitude's they are slaves, they have forfeited their freedom

Only a person who risks is free

INGREDIENTS OF A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP

VULNERABILITY	To what degree am I willing to let down my barriers? To what degree am I willing to allow the other person to affect my feelings?
UNDERSTANDING	Do I understand the other person? Do I understand what he means by what he says or what he does?
EMPATHY	To what degree am I able to allow myself to feel what he feels or she feels?
COMPASSION	Do I have a genuine concern for the issues that cause the other person concern?
RESPECT	Do I treat the other person as if he or she is of value?
TRUST	To what degree and on what levels am I willing to let the other person gain access to the things about me that I don't want everybody to know?
ACCEPTANCE	Am I O.K. the way I am? Is my partner?
HONESTY	Is this relationship built on truth or are there games involved?
COMMUNICATION	Are we able to talk freely about issues that are important in the relationship? Do we know how to do it so we are understood and the relationship goes forward because of the sharing?
COMPATIBILITY	To what degree do we like and dislike the same things? To what degree does it matter if we differ in certain attitudes and beliefs?
PERSONAL INTEGRITY	To what degree am I able to maintain myself as well as offer to the other person?
CONSIDERATION	Am I mindful of the other person's needs as well as my own?

A.C.A. CLOSING PRAYER

I put my hand in yours
and together we can do
what we could never do alone.

No longer is there a sense of hopelessness,
No longer must we depend
upon our own unsteady willpower.

We are all together now,
reaching out our hands
for power and strength greater than ours,
and as we join hands,
we find love and understanding
beyond our wildest dreams.

Survival Roles of Adult Children

Scapegoat

Role: Problem Child

Outside Traits:

Hostile
Defiant
Rule-breaker
In trouble

Inside Traits:

Rejection
Hurt
Guilt
Jealousy
Anger

Mascot

Role: Family Clown

Outside Traits:

Immature
Fragile
Cute
Hyperactive
Distracting

Inside Traits:

Fear
Anxiety
Insecurity

Lost Child

Role: Forgotten Child

Outside Traits:

Shy, quiet
Fantasy life
Solitary
Mediocre
Attaches to things, not people

Inside Traits:

Rejection
Hurt
Anxiety

Chief Enabler

Role: Protector of Family
Closest emotionally to victim

Outside Traits:

Self-righteous
Super-responsible
Sarcastic
Passive
Physically Sick
Martyr

Inside Traits:

Anger
Hurt
Guilt
Low self-esteem

Family Hero

Role: Caretaker of Family

Outside Traits:

Good kid
High achiever
Follows rules
Seeks approval
Very responsible

Inside Traits:

Guilt
Hurt
Inadequacy

Victims

Role: Chemically
Dependent, Addict

Outside Traits:

Hostility
Manipulation
Aggression/self-pity
Blaming
Charming
Rigid values

Inside Traits:

Shame
Guilt
Fear
Pain
Hurt