
LITTLE BOOK 3

REPARENTING

THAT

LASTS

KATHLEEN S. 12-STEP RECOVERY
BRUCE D. EDITOR

*THE LITTLE BOOKS FOR ADULT CHILDREN IN 12-STEP
RECOVERY ORIGINATE IN THE ACA/DF FELLOWSHIP
HAPPY, JOYOUS & FREE PHONE MEETING CA1312.*

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12STEPMADECLAR@GMAIL.COM

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DEDICATION

Poem for Hannah, Maggy and Bob

*They were waiting on the westwind by the side of the river . . .
several tousle-haired kids and a smiling gold dog . . .
panting and stretching while the sky moved by . . .
. . . clouds like small sailboats on a very great pond
I remember what Sandy said about his poor mother: that it wasn't God would pay all
the bills!
it was all up to her . . .
while the sky moved along toward the glaring gold sunset I wondered if all adults just
never had time
I decided right then that I would get older - and I wouldn't ever grow up
with a world on my shoulders
and a sky full of boats all sunk in the night sky . . . Westwind brought the taste of wood-
burning smoke as the golden dog stretched and Sandy got up
to go help out with dinner
I was ready to throw a rock after him
and his mother who really does run the world and God had nothing to do with it . . .!
Mosquitoes and fish beginning to jump while the westwind is sweet with the smell of
our dinner . . .
cooking in timelessness
where yellow dogs and tousle-haired kids have nothing to do with it . . .
watching the cloud boats sail away on the dreams of my childhood.*

- Raven, With Gentleness, Humor, & Love (HCI 1989)

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PREFACE

“Missing Pieces” Added Here

The compilers of *Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families*, ACA/DF’s Big Red Book¹ wanted to put together a comprehensive textbook for Adult Children—an ambitious task! The BRB introduces the *concept* of “being an adult child.” Those of us who identify with having some (or all) of the adult child traits described often had no idea how growing up in dysfunctional (alcoholic) families *routinely* “infects” us with distorted, self-limiting expectations that track us through life, long past childhood. For the millions of us who were blind, confused and lost, isolated in “adult child” patterns we could not escape or change, the hope of recovery is a lifeline. We reach out, eager and grateful. Thank you for your service!

The *hope* of recovery—the hope of becoming whole, functional, caring, kind authentic individuals, capable of choice and commitment, trustworthy and poised—is based in the “track record” of Alcoholics Anonymous. AA is the 12-Step program fellowship of peers that has successfully restored alcoholics to lasting sobriety and sanity since 1935. 12-Step recovery is a voluntary, self-commitment individuals make to support one another, using in *a structured process* (the twelve steps) to *solve a common problem* they admit they can’t solve or eliminate on their own.

Is ACA/DF’s BRB a good model for 12-Step program recovery from the effects of growing up in a dysfunctional environment? “*What Step are you on, when, for example, you are using active imagination to reparent your Inner Child?*” While some criticisms of ACA/DF’s BRB can be shrugged off with the wry, “Keep coming back!” smile 12-Steppers extend to program “newcomers,” others are not easily dismissed.

These “Little Books” *add back* core ACA/ACoA 12-Step program materials developed in ACA/ACoA’s Intergroups that were missed or left out of ACA/DF’s Big Red Book, along with links to updated resources in print and online. “Take what you find useful!” is the watchword here.

Endnotes: _____

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*Our authentic self is a hard-wired, self-acknowledging, enthusiastic person. **We all start here.***

INTRODUCTION

“A newcomer at these meetings asked me, ‘When am I going to get happy in this here program?’ I told him, ‘Nothing to it! Just stop doing whatever’s making you unhappy. That’ll do the trick!’”

Clay S., “oldtimer,” Eureka, California, USA 1980

Happy, joyous and free is what an Inner Child wants, instinctively, from birth. We want, we desperately really need, a living daily experience that we come to trust because it works, because it makes a difference we understand and choose. Individuals who grew up in dysfunctional families (and communities) don’t have this experience. Addicted, preoccupied or emotionally distressed parents don’t model contentment and joy to their children, even when they are careful to feed them and make sure their child is warm and physically safe. Families trying to cope with chaotic, stressful conditions day to day become infected with anxiety, doubt, uncertainty and fear. This is as contagious as any disease. This is the world we live in today.

Because human beings *have to fit into their family*, children who grow up in dysfunctional families *internalize* the family’s point of view, unconditionally. Additionally, instead of developing *functional skills* for self-expression, problem-solving and communicating that every child is born eager to learn, they must struggle to break through their caregiver’s preoccupied “bubble.” Children of dysfunctional family systems adapt to accepting a *rationing* of care and attention, instead of an *abundance* of it, freely given and joyfully shared. They adopt mal-adapted coping behaviors from their caregivers or else they reject these and improvise—make their best *guess!* This is hard work. But born helplessly dependent, we must do it. We can’t survive without care!.

Here’s the Recovery “Bottom Line”

Remember this: We, every single one of us, have non-negotiable needs that are “hard-wired.” This authentic self (including our Inner Child[ren]) is who we are and who we recover. Human beings don’t start out questioning or doubting these, their instinctive drives, when they are born. Healthy human families (and societies) are made up of people who remain in touch with these needs, who integrate them, as the “facts of life” and *natural bonds* between people. Bonds of mutual understand-

ing, bonds of empathy, bonds of care, of responsibility, of recognition, bonds of tenderness, respect and admiration. Our *authentic self* is a hard-wired, self-acknowledging, enthusiastic person. We all start *here*.

“Recovery” is the experience of living our authenticity.

Re-read this paragraph often! Re-read it if you feel lost or bullied or hopeless. Read it twice and then open any recovery book you have at hand and read two pages. This is a way to let your Higher Power direct your attention to what can help to reconnect you to this *experience*.

(Optional) Put a ✓ and date when you re-read this paragraph and find it helpful.

Re-Parent to Recover

Because we are so readily *infected* with whatever stresses and misinformation our caregivers are caught up in, it is our *common problem* that we are “still suffering” from the carry-overs of our past unchallenged misinformation. Fortunately, this isn’t a hopeless legacy that must mark us through life.

We can undertake a *process of self-responsible “reparenting,”* at our own pace, to *become our own loving parent*. 12-Step programs are a *structured approach* designed to identify dysfunctional patterned behaviors *and* thinking, and then, through making use of the Steps, replacing these patterns with behaviors and ideas that reconnect our present-day “self” with our authentic Inner Child self. 12-Step program recovery, starting with



Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) in 1935. AA has a proven track-record of replacing self-destructive and self-limiting compulsions with new, satisfying approaches to life’s challenges and routines.

This Little Book’s goal is to put *you*—the authentic person who may have been frustrated, trying to sort out a life overflowing with mixed messages and dead ends—in *charge* of your recovery, starting from now on, with the reliable resources and support to take on this undertaking. We don’t mean to gloss over the many forms dysfunction takes (and tries to reassert control!) The power of recovery we share, as individuals and as a fellowship, is rooted in honesty and in our growing trust that *truth does set us free* as we discover it. As surely as we are alive, a Higher Power unconditionally links us into *a life-fabric* that already exists, even if we’ve been conditioned to be fearful of it as a source of punishment or “dirty tricks.” Those are among the false messages and lies we learn to face and then pry off to let the healing in.

Our Inner Child *is born with instinctive guidance* and many tools for achieving success and happiness in life. Our breathing is, for example, in itself, a simple life-connection we have and probably take for granted. We can learn to use this connection, with every breath we take, as a tool for healing and empowerment. Recovery is, in very large part, *re-owning* what we already have that’s gotten *covered*, buried under misdirection; not a huge new task or undertaking. No matter what our past, an environment that welcomes us in fellowship, security and renewed contentment is ours to claim.

In this Little Book, we’ll try to trim this process down to what is simple enough to “just get on with it,” sticking with what is essential *right now*, while leaving open options you may want to, or have to, explore as time goes by.

That’s easier than it probably sounds. Chapters One and Two focus on *what we recover* in Adult Child recovery and how the Steps integrate with the many reparenting and self-exploring tools for empowerment. These Little Books do what they can to work with Adult Children of Alcoholics “official” books and workbooks. The ACA/DF materials focus on self-love, which is vital for Inner Child recovery, but they are light on self-responsibility tools—doing the “fearless and thorough” self-inventory Step Four specifies in AA and most of the other 12-Step programs—perhaps based on the assumption that most members of ACA/DF will have already covered these aspects of recovery in other programs or in therapy. These Little Books integrate reparenting within the framework of AA’s self-acceptance and the amend that comes from actively replacing dysfunctional traits with life-affirming behaviors and outlooks.

How Many 12-Step Programs—One or Many?

Fear is a strong motivator. Even in 12-Step programs, even with “time,” some members fear change and may come across as quite rigid, demanding that every bit of meeting structure remain unchanged and every bit of prescribed material is read. “*Keep it Simple!*” for this group, means, “*Stay on topic! If your share doesn’t involve* (fill in the name of anonymous group you’re at), *then take it to another program* (or therapy.)” This definition of *single purpose*¹(for the fellowship) equals “just *one issue* can be dealt with here.” “*Go to as many different programs as you have issues.*” *Unwillingness,*

in the form of *prohibitions or necessary rituals*, is self-protective, and we need to respect these forms of self-care as aspects of the *boundaries* we (and other people) have.

Another approach—which I take—is to work *one program* of recovery, the Steps, on however many *issues* you have. This idea of “*keep it simple*,” is the last third of Step Twelve, “. . . *and practice these principles in all my affairs*.” This stance is, “*I’m one person, however many issues I have! ‘Singleness of purpose’ is the aim of becoming a **unified person** through working the Steps*.” This stance requires trust and confidence in the recovery *process*, which only comes of experiencing empowerment as a result of doing it. Fearlessness is a kind of grace in this.

Both groups are “right.” At different times in one’s recovery, each approach may get the needed results—clear up confusion, put the focus where it belongs². None of us is a stranger to fear! ACA program materials and some meetings do have a good bit of “fluff” – sidetracks, “go slow” fear-based distractions. Grieving takes time. Give yourself compassion and time. ACA 12-Step recovery isn’t a race; we will come back to whatever’s *making our lives unmanageable*.

Can We Trust 12-Step Recovery?

“*Take what you find useful and leave the rest*” applies! Speaking only from my experience, as a reasonably intelligent, academically grounded student of this and other aspects of what is called “new thought,” I write³, not as a “guru-authority” who is handing down holy writ (which I don’t think is a good way to approach authority-issues anywhere), but, as a fellow traveler. Due to my childhood circumstances—born into my family fourteen years after my only sibling—I was a kind of “bridge” member of two generations. My interest in the post-WWI practical applications of “new thought” humanistic psychology, in the diverse fields of public relations, advertising, and industrial psychology as well as modern religions and self-help, grew out of my desire to comprehend the dynamics of the world I entered two months and two weeks before the start of WWII. Both of my parents and my brother died by 1971. None of them were diagnosed with alcoholism. Although they drank or used prescription drugs, denial was a primary symptom shared within my family. If there were a PhD program—which there hasn’t been—for the up-dates I’ve written to AA Co-founder Bill W(Wilson)’s *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952), I would have put them there.

What’s led me to spend forty-plus years of my life developing and refining the 12-Step program materials hinges on these facts: First, *the method works*⁴—*12-Step recovery has demonstrably worked for me* as well as for hundreds of individuals of different ages, ethnicities and economic status I’ve interacted with in a variety of settings—professionally, in junior high schools, Indian Reservations, and upper middle-class communities, and my personal life--health, finances and all of my relationships. Secondly, I think that 12-Step recovery fellowships are an important new development for how communities can come to function cooperatively and supportively without depriving anyone of individual freedom and autonomy. As a way of life, the meetings *are self-supporting, free, member-facilitated and equalitarian* structures, held together out of voluntary commitment and good will. A core feature of *leadership*—which is most importantly for individual empowerment— *the merit of what is shared*

is heard and respected independently of who is saying it. The materials and structure are simple but clear and flexible.

If the *social history* of the past hundred years teaches us anything, it shows how exciting ideas and social *movements* are quickly “packaged,” turned into products if they can be, promoted by media as “trends” and then, neutralized and replaced by the next “big new thing.” In a market society, *personal* empowerment is rarely the aim of *a corporation*, even when it conceived and founded with idealistic intentions. *Protecting property* is, by law, the *purpose* of incorporating. Managing *the corporation’s property* is the first priority of every Board. This is a “built in” brake, an intrusive “bottle-neck” against the open stance of gratitude and trust within a *fellowship based on sharing, trust and self-responsibility*⁵! ACA’s focus on “dysfunctional authority” puts a spotlight on this problem.

The AA program is, in my judgment, the best design—on paper, at least—for a truly empowering form of *fellowship-centered society*, one that combines individual free choice and commitment with mutual appreciation and support, at least potentially shorn of the bugaboos of nepotism and power politics⁶. In “the big picture” frame, that’s a goal. In this Little Book, however, we’re going to concentrate on how Adult Children can get *quick results* in changing whatever core “triggered reactions” that brought us to ACA. This is a “first things first.” Long range goals—be they personal or large-scale social—remain elusive fantasy until we’ve established a functional *present*, a realistic sense of being whole and adequate, *right now*. This is what is meant by “having a *daily program* of recovery.

Consider this proposition: With this recovery point-of-view, we are free—empowered—to detach ourselves from the entire fabric of disorder we’ve become enmeshed within. We can (and do) repent ourselves, pick and choose among the options at our disposal today, set our own short- mid-term- and long-range goals, and, with the support of this simple program and this large, growing fellowship, we can (and do) move at a pace we set for ourselves out along (what is called in AA) the *Road to Happy Destiny*.

Enjoy this workbook! Keep coming back! Welcome!

Endnotes:

¹ “Single purpose” come from Tradition Five: Every [fellowship name] group has but a single purpose, to carry the message to [fellowship members] that still suffer.

² Editor’s Comment: “I think this and the paragraph above is an excellent and extremely important paragraph. FANTASTIC!” BD

³ Kathleen S. has been a sober member of Alcoholics Anonymous since December 1975 and both a professional and a volunteer in the field of family alcoholism, treatment, prevention and intervention since 1972.

⁴. William James in his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) puts forth this concept, called pragmatism, and he reconciles this with the Biblical concept, “by their fruits will you know them.” The AA program uses this approach.

⁵ AA, the original 12-Step program, is not exempt from problems of corporate inflexibility that limit its ability to stay current with medical research due to its focus on “protecting” AA from systematic self-review of program texts, inability to engage in cooperation with academic allies and lack of structure aimed at periodic self-review.

⁶ As a publishing house, however, Alcoholics Anonymous World Service, Inc., is an entirely different kettle of fish, as is discussed in Little Book 5, “TAKE WHAT YOU CAN USE” HOW ADULT CHILD SERVICE RECOVERS



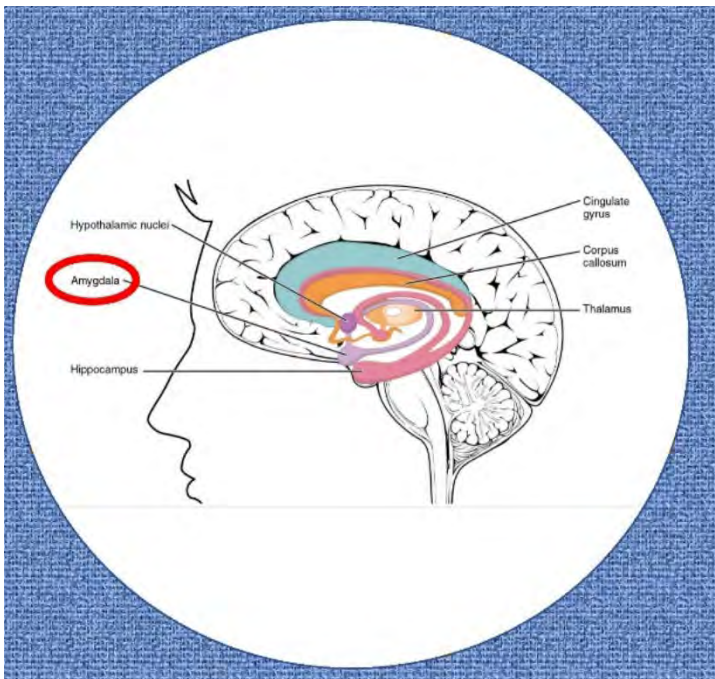
1. WHO IS OUR "AUTHENTIC SELF"?

Core Concept to Hold

Recovery, for an adult child of an alcoholic or dysfunctional family is as concrete and real a goal as sobriety is for an alcoholic. We aren't chasing a rainbow or making something up. What we're doing is retrieving something that's already present that's been blotted out or confused by the distorted conditioning we've experienced in our family of origin and dysfunctional society.

Is There Such a Thing as An Authentic Self?

Yes! Biologically speaking, there is a functional equilibrium-point—a *chi*—we can and do recognize (sense) within our physical body/brain that *communicates to our body's organs and nervous system*,



“I am OK!” when we are 1.) safely within network of caring relationships, 2.) adequately fed, 3.) physically comfortable, and 4.) can elicit respectful responses when we reach out. This is biologically reality; as individual members of a successful mammal species, *Homo sapiens*¹, we each have this, and this focal point of confident well-being can actually be found (more or less) as a location within our mid-brain. We each have a small feature there, *the amygdala*. The amygdala regulates chemical and neurological inputs that we know as *moods*: impulses, reactions, responses, happiness, love, fear, anger, peace.

Biologically, our authentic self (Inner Child) exists and has these basic instinctive drives to be met, no matter which language our parents speak, no matter what Higher Power/God-concept they tell us is true when we learn to speak. Our Inner Child-self has no opinions or prejudices, but our Inner Child

unfailingly knows when their core needs aren't being met, and feels frustrated, sad, hopeless, lost when they can't bridge this communication-gap.

As a species, we've been at about our current level of functioning for a minimum of 80-100,000 years, possibly a lot longer. We are, have been, *a successful species* because, most of this timeframe, we stayed integrated within the fabric of life and interacted directly with other life-forms who share this planet². From what little we can find from the small artifacts our ancestors left behind, we pretty universally made music, liked to dance and sing and bonded with each other through "story," ritual and shared oral skill-transfers (how to make flint tools, or start a fire, or where the paths to various kinds of seasonal habitat were marked by features in the landscape). From even this present period, most of us will concede this archaic "human lifestyle" had its upside!

We seek to rebuild a conscious bridge to the "authentic self" (or Inner Child) in 12-Step recovery programs—all 12-Step programs. This is a *biologically present human being*, a successful life form with a long history of living successfully in a great many cultures, climates and terrains. It's important to realize that "recovery" isn't just *an idea*; it is a *concrete process*, based in fact and in biology. We really do have "solid ground" to stand on.

Core Concept to Hold

In ACA/ACoA, discovering and rebuilding a functional, conscious connection with our authentic self-identity is called "reparenting our Inner Child." Our Inner Child's need to be seen, heard and accepted is what brings us to this program and when we come out of denial and admit this in Step One, we begin. The Higher Power we seek in Step Two is a healthy, loving, resourceful Parent/Mentor for our creative Inner Child and a source of power and guidance to our authentic self.

Where Does "God/Higher Power" Fit in This Picture?

12-Step Programs—all of them—leave how we conceive of a Higher Power up to us, as individuals, while, at the same time, all 12-Step programs tell us we have to have a concept of a power greater than ourselves in order to overcome our unmanageable problem (whatever it is). If this sounds like double-talk, it is! However, this does describe our situation, as individuals and as a species/life form at this place and time. What we think of as "a greater power" isn't as important as our willingness to open up to the possibility that there is *something we don't know, something we haven't found, a kind and caring HP* that we can open up and let it in³. We don't want to argue religion or debate anybody's rituals. We want an open mind. Our problems—including our various addictions and deviant behaviors, whatever these may be—are rooted, anchored, bio-chemically channeled within our mis-wired brain.

Tony A.'s Laundry List (The Problem) Is an Adult Child's Open Door

Practically nobody comes to a 12-Step program free of confusion and self-doubt, although few of us realize how much we've stuffed and buried, trying to live "around" the unmet needs and hurt accumulated over time. We don't think our minds are closed; we're defensive about our "coping mechanisms" if they're pointed out. Survival, hanging on and getting by, are motivations we've lived with so long we may be completely captured by them, prisoners of our own limited perspective—and justified by the situations where we find ourselves. However it happens, if we find ourselves at a 12-Step program meeting, *something is making our life unmanageable and we are searching for some help*. We may not be very clear at all about what "our problem" is, but "unmanageable" rings a bell! We are at Step One.

Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families (ACA/DF), the 12-Step program, has a pamphlet, a list of traits (Tony's Laundry List⁴), that catches the attention of our "authentic self" within. When we identify with some—or many—of these characteristics, it is our authentic self who is finally getting an opportunity to speak out about their daily experience, without having to deny their fears or mask their sense of isolation. Our Inner Child feels relief. *"Maybe, I belong?"*

What's Making My Life Unmanageable?

Here's a simple "first things first" exercise that can be a big help to us once we've decided Adult Child recovery may be for us. *Unmanageability* (the second part of Step One) is what brought us to look for help, right? We may not be very clear on *how* we've gotten stuck or just what's triggering us, but *we can make a start* by noting down, as best we can, *what keeps happening* (repeated patterns) that causes us *anguish, pain or puts us at risk of injury or loss of freedom*. Here's a version of Step One to use working this exercise:

STEP ONE: “We admit we were powerless over the effects of (family-of-origin dysfunction) (childhood abuse/neglect/trauma) (group prejudice) (sexual exploitation) (bullying) and our lives have become unmanageable.”

- ✓ What are you personally “powerless over”? Note down what brought you to ACA. Were you referred by a therapist or by someone in another fellowship? Was there a crisis or were you feeling “at a dead-end” in some area of your life? Do you feel angry or afraid?
- ✓ Set this part of Step One to one side, to come back to later, as you get more information and insight over time. **Reparenting Tip: We don’t have to try to do everything at once.** “Keep coming back!” is a slogan to remind us to be gentle and relaxed—and stick with it.
- ✓ Now we move on to the second part, “*and our lives have become unmanageable.*” Reading over Tony A.’s Laundry List or the Problem, in Appendix I “Handouts” in this book, *circle the characteristics you identify in yourself that “trigger” you to act in ways that make your life unmanageable.*
- ✓ Write down *what it is that you do*, when you are “triggered” that makes you lose out or feel helpless. These don’t have to be big, detailed descriptions. These include things we do *reactively*, without even realizing we are stepping into a pattern until we begin to feel the consequences, or they may be *defensive* patterns we use to *manipulate* others.

Example: “*I get uneasy, afraid of other people, (from the Problem) when I project they feel threatened by me in situations where we are supposed to be working together toward a shared objective. What I do: If I’m not treated as a peer, I get so defensive and distrustful I can’t stay. I don’t accept authority and won’t “do what I’m told.” I can’t tolerate a hierarchy and I don’t want to be in one, even as “a boss.” I want to be a creative, independent person who joins with others to achieve a shared goal in work activities.*

Here are some suggested areas to consider (but feel free to change or add to this list!)

1. Authority issues/figures (the “rules”): Am I afraid I’ll be a target if I speak up?

- Do I protect myself by “being on the winner’s side”?
 - Do I passively resist completing what I’m told to do?
 - Do I act out—Blow up, Leave, Cut off relationships?
-
-

2. Abandonment issues: Does someone have to “need” me so I can feel valuable?

- Do I “test” people, over and over, and still feel unsure?
 - Do I believe people usually cheat, use or turn on others?
 - Do I “put up with” hurtful behavior as “what to expect”?
-
-

3. Self-Attack issues: Does my “inner critic” tell me I’m not good enough, or *bad*?

- Do I give up when others want things I have or want?
 - Do I suspect those who are nice to me want something?
 - Do I believe it won’t matter (or be better) if I go away?
-
-

Identifying these, *our reactive patterned behaviors or thoughts which are the effects of dysfunction we’ve internalized*, in Step One, gives us a way we can track and measure our own progress in recovery with these as our personal focus, *one by one*. Lack of a trustworthy reliable structure—an organized method to take on goals and follow through to achieving them—is one of the big stumbling blocks adult children share, even if we’ve got a PhD, when it comes to getting what we’ve needed and wanted built into our personal lives! We *reparent* ourselves when we take the initiative to use the Steps, starting with this version of Step One, to organize our own recovery. Our Inner Child is grateful for this structured template we giving to ourselves. Self-doubt is gradually replaced by self-respect—one of the Promises comes true—as we experience the results of replacing internalized dysfunction with skills and hope.

Step Two: We Come to Believe Our Experience of Recovery

Our authentic-self/Inner Child was—still is!—an unsure little person who may be, at one moment, mad as hell, and at another, needing to be picked up, then, again, defiantly independent. These are the legacies of trauma and learning deficits we carry with us into recovery. We’ve been there—all those places—and we know, for ourselves, that this *method* works, because we personally have experienced our own empowerment and change. Reparenting is what our Inner Child needs, and in recovery we *learn to observe* how our Inner Child develops as we are able to “be there” for ourselves. We also learn to acknowledge and share our progress with each other.

We are a *fellowship* of supportive fellow travelers. We model what we discover, personally. As we share what we discover, clarity—a *sane perspective*--grows. We welcome newcomers but we don’t tell them what to do or when to do it! We come to trust our Inner Children—yours as well as ours—to *accept* support, as naturally as we accept our breathing. Our Inner Children are already members of this fellowship, finding their way back from being lost or distracted. We are safe! This *process* is, in effect, a *practical Higher Power* we can and do come to trust. *Recovery* is a *living experience* we have, not limited by a doctrine or a specific religious faith. We are free, each one of us, to understand this Power as we discover it and call it what we will. It is, however, *ours to keep*.

Core Concept to Hold

We build a *working relationship* with our Loving Parent/Mentor in Step Three through *action*: We don’t have to wait. Use visualization, active imagination and play to engage our Inner Child. *Decide to join in exploring and opening up to being lovingly reparented.*

Below is a short form of Step Three. Hopefully, it will be helpful in establishing a friendly concept and relationship with a Higher Power that is not demanding or judgmental, but is protective and unconditionally loving.. We will revisit this topic, “turning our life and our will” over to the care of a Higher Power, in the Chapter about toxic forms of codependency

Take a One-Minute “Vacation”

Does the idea of a *biologically real* “authentic-self” seem surprising?

New ideas are often challenging, even when we want to welcome them! Any kind of change is stressful. Change requires attention, focus, re-considering, and choice. In recovery, we need to learn techniques that build our ability to “keep an open mind,” techniques we can practice to not feel overwhelmed by new ideas and concepts. You can change the scenery or location of your “vacations.” How about a ski trip? Horseback ride? Motorcycle?

Visualization is a Step Eleven (Prayer and Meditation) practice that’s a big help in for taking “space” when necessary. Taking “space,” even for just one minute, gives us permission to step away from what is going on, be at peace, and take a few deep breaths. This is a simple practice and a powerful learning technique that our Inner Child appreciates. It is also a proven tool for regaining balance in stressful, challenging situations. Here’s how to begin:

(Go to a private place or close the door to where you are.) Taking in a deep, relaxing breath, allow your eyes to close or focus on a far horizon, and imagine you are taking yourself to a safe, comfortable place where you are completely surrounded by delightful sights and sounds. This can be a golden beach where turquoise surf rolls up a channel, breaking one thousand feet out and curling, four feet or more in height, slow, steady breakers you can ride or body surf along. A sea gull laughs and angles through the sunlight and the air is fragrant with the scent of salt. You are graceful as you glide, the water sparkles; you are weightless, free and certain. You are loved and when you open up your eyes, an image, a memory or dream, looks back at you and reaches out their arms. This is a friendly place. As I remember to breathe deep, whatever care, whatever information or direction is most helpful to me finds a path and I am welcome, safe and free.

(Take a few moments to experience this “vacation,” in a quiet, private place. Breathe. Now let yourself come back into the present, refreshed and revitalized, at peace, knowing you can come and go from here. It is your private place and only what is for your highest good can enter.)

Draw or collage your “Inner Vacation” spot(s):



Endnotes:

¹ Evolutionarily speaking, we've been around, evolving from earlier primate relatives, for at least a million years. We are mammals, which means 1.) we don't lay eggs that hatch outside our bodies, but instead, we give live birth to our off-spring and feed them directly from the milk we make in our own (female) bodies, 2.) We have hair or fur instead of feathers or scales. 3.) We have "warm blood" (our body temperature is regulated from within our bodies.) There are other biological factors that distinguish us: We take care of our off-spring for an extended period of time because our children are born quite helpless and wouldn't survive unless we "parented" them, not just for a few weeks like some other mammals, but for a period of years (most anthropologist agree, a minimum of twelve.) Another big distinguishing trait we have is *that we talk*, we use an organized complex of sounds (and gestures) to communicate among ourselves. *Human beings are the storytellers among the life forms of the Earth.* Other creatures also communicate—ants and bees, dolphins, elephants, wolves, various species of birds and probably a lot more kinds of life-forms we haven't studied, or whose communication methods we may not recognize as such. But for our purposed here, let's stick to human beings. *We are, as far as we can tell, the only life form on this planet that uses written words, on paper, on telecommunication platforms, to record our speech.*

² We lived in little family groups of 20-50 individuals (depending on what local resources would sustain), met and traded with other similar groups periodically. We probably had a great deal of autonomy available to us within the scope of our environment, our personal health and skills, and, if we chose—for any reason—we could leave, as individuals or, more likely, as couples or small sub-sets of a group. This "hunter-gatherer/small holder" lifestyle didn't make much impact on the planet, wasn't particularly warlike and, it is estimated, only required a workweek of about 20 hours or so from individuals.

³ We include further discussion of limiting old ideas about "God" in the Chapter, *TOXIC CODEPENDENCY, The Biggest Gift: Freedom to See "God as We Understand God.."*

⁴ Before 1991, ACA/ACoA circulated a different version of these traits, the Problem and Solution.

When we give *a balance of our focus* to applying recovery tools to the “triggered” behaviors we still do, we see *measurable results* in our adult child recovery.

2. WHAT IS “RECOVERY?”

Adult children of dysfunctional families and individuals recovering from post-traumatic stress can and do achieve stability and poise using the existing program materials, while not bogging down in endless inventory and grief processing.

When we give *a balance of our focus* to applying recovery tools to the “triggered” behaviors we still do, we see *measurable results* in our adult child recovery. This is somewhat akin to the way sober alcoholics count up and celebrate their “days sober.” *Realistic self-validation* is a necessary component of recovery. Even if this is an unfamiliar approach, it’s not difficult to practice, once we begin to see, for ourselves, a more livable present. The simple truth is, “*We can believe ourselves when we can measure our progress.*” This is self-credibility, and it goes a long way to lifting us out of “approval seeking” or being easily diverted by other people’s fears or doubts! *Keep it Simple! Believe what you do!* These 12-Step principles will work, under all conditions, in every circumstance. It’s a promise!

What’s Inside the Open Door of Adult Child Recovery?

The Problem/Laundry List is ACA/DF’s “welcome” mat. If we *identify* ourselves—how we *act*, how we *feel*, what we *worry* about—with some of the traits listed in the Problem/Laundry List, we *qualify* as members of the 12-Step program Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families (ACA/DF.) Every 12-Step program reaches out to “those who still suffer” to *attract* those who *identify themselves as sharing a common problem*. The basis of membership¹ in all 12-Step programs is voluntary participation—fellowship and working the 12-Step program—in order to solve a serious (life-threatening) problem each member admits they have.

Core Concept to Hold

To have *measurable progress* in ACA/ACoA 12-Step recovery, we reparent our Inner Child by *identifying specific behaviors we do*, effects of trauma/family dysfunction, that make our lives unmanageable, and we replace these, one day at a time, with healthier options that we discover and choose for ourselves². We use Step Four to inventory our past experiences,

resentments, fears and the coping mechanisms we adopted/invented in order to discover self-defeating patterns and barriers we admit are limitations we want to change.

All 12-Step programs have a **clearly defined problem** that is their focus of recovery: “*Here’s the issue we are working on, and here is how we are going to measure our progress,*” is the message³. 12-Step programs are *primary* treatment, used this way.

As Adult Children, What Is Our “Our Common Problem?”

An ACA/ACoA fellowship’s definition of “our common problem” isn’t pinned down the way it is in other 12-Step programs. *Some* of us are alcoholics or are addicts. Some of us are overeaters, workaholics, compulsive shoppers or casino gamblers. Some of us do none of those things, but, instead, have suffered trying to cope with these and other “problem behaviors,” either in childhood or in the present. We may be members of other fellowships or in therapy to address these issues, too, but ACA/ACoA’s focus is on the *effects that dysfunctional past experiences still exerts on us*. We inventory our family *history* of growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home⁴ environment, not to brood or blame, but to *discover triggers to our own dysfunctional behavior and thinking affecting us today*. It is *the now* we want to recover. As adults, we may or may not even be in touch with those who were our childhood caregivers. The *effects* of dysfunctional preparation we imprinted when we were vulnerable and dependent is what we are challenged to *uncover, re-evaluate and then change*, through what we call “reparenting” ourselves⁵.

In reparenting our Inner Child, we come to see our past in a different light. As a fellowship and program, ACA/DF recovery is an invitation to open up our past experience and hurt, because, as far as we can tell, recovery--the process of healing and reclaiming our essential, authentic “self” –works on every issue we are willing to disclose!⁶

If we’ve already worked the Exercise: “What’s Making My Life Unmanageable?” (in Chapter 1), we can keep our recovery work *manageable* by picking one (or two) of these *effects of dysfunction we’ve personally internalized* to inventory in Step Four, using either the Step Four Chapter in this book, or by reviewing the ACA Yellow Workbook to search for your triggers or coping traits.

It may turn out that Authority issues, Abandonment fears and Self-attack behaviors are blended and mixed up, but, instead of bogging down in sorting “which is which,” we can just keep the focus on *what we want to change or take a renewed approach to* in our personal recovery journey, instead. It will gradually become clear, one day at a time, on how we can go forward and make progress as we continue through the Steps.

Our Inner Child may be reluctant to actually complete Step Four, because doing so means coming out of isolation to go forward with Steps Five, Six and Seven. Take a One Minute Vacation and hug those Inner Children when anxiety and fear of consequences pushes forward! Fear has been our ally and we honor it!

Our Inner Child needs to know that *fear* is a motivation that's built into our biological core—to keep us safe! Part of the reparenting we do in ACA involves *validating* how our Inner Child's coping mechanisms and defenses have been how we've survived, so far! If these old dodges and routines had made us happy, healthy and successful, we would have kept them up, right? But in recovery, we are finding courage and gentle trust in these reparenting tools. When we are ready to go forward, we aren't alone, and we will not be hurt or shamed. We will be safe.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

STEP FOUR⁷

What Is True About Me?

4. *Make a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.*

In Step 4, we own our strong points and our failures. We admit what we hate and what we fear.

We think the Worthy Person God made and intends us to be wants to be honest. It feels good to let go of lies, justifications, defenses. Honesty isn't the same thing, however, as going to opposite extremes of self-attack or self-rejection. In Step 4, we want to put an end to extremes of denying any fault or seeing ourselves as worthless.

The dictionary tells us that "morals are a code of behaviors based upon value judgments as to the right and wrong ways to behave or to relate to others."

By this definition, morals are the same as limits and boundaries. They define what we feel is personally okay or not okay for us to do. Some moral codes include value judgments on feelings. Some do not.

Most religions offer moral values as part of their teachings. The Ten Commandments is a moral code. The Seven Deadly Sins speak to us about internal attitudes that spill over in the ways we feel and act toward other people. Some moral codes are detailed and concrete. Others stick more with underlying principles, as guides to personal choice.

If you find that your ideas about morals are mixed up with a church or a religion you reject, it's good to note that philosophies which are not religious also provide workable moral systems.

In Step 4, we inventory our morals to set limits that allow us to live guilt and shame free lives today. We start by writing a list of all the moral values we can think of, whether we agree with them or not. We then go over the list and decide what feels true.

Ask yourself where you stand or would like to stand on these issues:

ISOLATION/INTIMACY: *What is your ideal? Is marriage or partnership an important value for you? How about your needs for privacy? When do you prefer solitude, one-on-one relating or a group activity?*

CONTROL/STRUCTURE: *What of yourself do you want to offer to others and which others? Are you willing to ask for what you want?*

OBSESSION/SERENITY: *What are your personal standards for moderation? What are the healthy sources of joy and pleasure that you choose and celebrate in your life?*

It may take some time to tell the difference between our own true values and the standards others imposed upon us. It may well be true, too, that we find ourselves in agreement with some or many of the values we were taught.

We look at how we have coped and survived so far in life.

We look at how we have learned to deal with recurring threats. Has there been rejection, abandonment, violence, financial insecurity? Have we faced prejudice? We now go back over the past, seeking to view ourselves as the survivors we are. We note the ways we have reacted, including what the circumstances were that prompted us to lose our self-control. Remorse about wrongdoing is healthy, even when the pain is sharp. It is good to feel sorry for the things we have done wrong. It is okay to cry. We want to welcome whatever feelings surface. Nothing is gained by lying to ourselves or screening out reactions to the past. Self-acceptance means giving ourselves permission to feel whatever we feel.

Although we want to get in touch with any feelings or fantasies involving figures from the past, we are cautioned not to act on these until we have completed Steps 5 through 9, which are a necessary part of the healing process. If we are troubled, talking with a trusted person helps.

We will probably find, too, that we behaved or tried to behave in ways that we see now were actually healthy responses to the pressures that we faced. If our assertive responses were attacked or discredited, we may find that we have suppressed a storehouse of rage and frustration. A sense of injustice is the root of much resentment.

In this portion of the inventory, we chart who is the object of our anger, how we were hurt, what basic human needs were impacted, and how we feel about it. Here is an example:

A Resentment Inventory

Who?	Why?	Affects:	I Feel:
Myself:	I wrote bad checks to pay for food.	Identity, Survival.	Worthless, weak, not able to provide.
Stepparent:	Stole my share of family money.	Survival, Commitment.	Abandoned, ashamed.
Siblings:	Took family things for themselves; left nothing.	Identity, Gratification.	Rejected, used, hurt, emotionally battered.

Now, we go over what we have written. In the incidents we've written about, what did we fear we'd lose or fail to get? We look for patterns created by our fears.

Have survival fears dominated our lives? Where are we appeasers, losing our integrity in compliance, flattery or by presenting a false front to those we feel had power over us? How much does fear color how we act in situations involving the "basics" of family, sex-relations, money, reputation?

How does fear of losing, or of not getting, what we want affect our personality? Shame, embarrassment and pride probably prompt us to minimize or gloss over these questions. Fears seem to have a life of their own. If we are inclined to sidestep this phase of the Inventory, we remind ourselves that buried fears usually take over our behavior in a crisis. We may be living lives largely defined by what we fear. It is by tapping "the courage to change the things we can . . ." and facing our fears that we begin to change our way of life.

We complete the Inventory in Step 4 by setting up a balance sheet of personal assets and liabilities.

This balance sheet is a sketch of what works and what needs work in our personalities. We sort through what we have written, first noting any characteristics we admire in ourselves. We look for courage, kindness, willingness to try, a spirit of adventure — any and all characteristics we see in ourselves as worthy and strong. We claim these assets. We don't leave out minor or "to be expected" positive qualities when we do this.

Going back over all we have written, we try to see what our character defects really are. Do we tend to lie to ourselves rather than admit an unattractive bit of truth, for example? Do we steal, react violently to others, cheat in relationships of trust? Do we stage a crisis to avoid facing basic responsibilities?

We seek to discover what the underlying weaknesses are within us, not as an exercise in self-attack, but to find a starting place from which to rebuild our character and our life.

In conclusion, we add doing the Inventory to our list of Assets. We also give ourselves credit for having survived and coped through the difficulties and trials of our own past. We thank our Higher Power for the courage and the willingness to have done this Inventory.

Questions to ponder:

Who do I hate?

What do I fear?

What are my best qualities?

Endnotes:

¹ Tradition Eleven: "Our public relations policy is based on *attraction, not promotion.*"

² If this approach to Step Four seems at odds with Tony A.'s ACA Step 4 (and other Steps as he recommends) it is important to remember that Tony A. as a long-time member of AA had *already* done the version of the Steps we are outlining in the Little Books. Long-term sober AAs who bring their insights into ACA recovery are building on their foundation work in the *original* 12-Steps with the focus on self-responsibility, changed behavior and amends. Our carry-over "traits" have impacted others and ourselves; we let go of guilt and self-blame, but we also change.

³ In Alcoholics Anonymous, *alcoholism* is the issue/problem and *not taking a drink*, is the daily solution. In Al Anon, the issue is *other people's substance-use/abuse*, and the solution is to practice *detachment* from trying to control other people's behavior or to shield them from the consequences of their choices.

⁴ Or the details of the traumatic experience we are recovering from due to war, poverty, prejudice, etc.

⁵ When, in therapy or in using visualization/active imagination tools to "revisit our Inner Child's experiences" in Step Four inventory, it's important to bear in mind that we aren't going to be three or ten years old again! Stuff that happened to us (or didn't happen) in the past, is past. Our goal in recovery is to admit what happened and reclaim our feelings—and reclaim how we coped, reacted or shut down.

⁶ At least, so far. 12-Step recovery has been successful in every situation where its principles have been applied! Family dysfunction "trauma" and "abuse" bring us into ACA. This broad approach is necessary in ACA/DF because our fellowship itself is very broad—world-wide, diverse, multi-national and multi-cultural. Our welcome mat is meant to welcome all and everyone who wants to face the lacks and errors that our various traditions have become "infected" with that have been passed along to us, their recovering adult children in the present.

⁷ Step Four in its entirety is excerpted from *Handy Guide to the Twelve Steps* (1997, 2019), Kathleen S./Bruce D., Used with permission.

Step Four Notes & Lists

Step Four Notes & Lists

Step Four Notes & Lists

3. “INVENTORY” WHERE YOU FIT IN

“Stick with the Winners” Equals “Sticking with Our Authentic Self.”

“Come to meetings!” we are told. At the meetings, it’s suggested we read the literature and come to meetings *regularly* and then, perhaps, get a sponsor. All 12-Step programs—whether for alcoholism, overeating, gambling or another issue (including adult children issues)—have this basic framework for participation.

“Keep it Simple!” has a *friendly* sound to it. 12-Step programs usually begin with a moment of silence followed by a simple affirmation or prayer, and then some basic readings, usually a preamble, the Steps, the Traditions and a “kick off” lead, to introduce a topic. A lot of what makes 12-Step programs *work* as problem-solving forums for a lot of different kinds of troubles is this *user-friendly* approach¹. “*It gets better,*” we are told, “*Keep coming back!*” Because we *identify* with the program’s issue and want relief, we are happy to join up. *How* and *when* “it gets better” is a matter of discussion—a lot of discussion!

Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families is a diverse fellowship! We belong if we say we do! If this poses a confusing challenge, it’s good to remind ourselves that participation in ACA meetings and fellowship, all by itself, relieves a core issue adult children share: **Isolation!** Our fellowship welcomes all who identify, and some of us are content—even happy—to just enjoy the warm, acceptance of being safe, included, understood. Not everyone in ACA/DF works the 12-Steps in an organized way. Some may work the Tony A. version of the Steps, some focus primarily on therapy. There are members of ACA who may leave out making amends (Step Nine) or letting go of character defects (Step Six) because they find their Inner Child isn’t guilty of anything beyond just having been a child (who got inadequate care). ACA’s “Big Red Book”² is 646 pages long, not counting the index. It is literally full of information. Many ACAs focus their recovery on readings from the BRB or other workbooks and materials, with or without on-going support of professional therapy or their church.

So, are some of these people *doing it wrong*?

No! They are all, as individuals, doing what is right and appropriate—*for them*, at this time! We cut through this confusion when we *accept responsibility* for charting our own path, our own recovery goals—short, medium and long-range. When we do this, we will begin to identify those whose goals are similar to our own, and we can become *fellow traveler* co-sponsors with them.

Repairing Tip: We can give ourselves permission to set short, medium and long-range goals for ourselves in building a life that’s enjoyable and satisfying, in touch with our feelings as we go, and in the care and guidance of our loving HP every step of the way!

Here's another reparenting tip: We are being a kindly loving parent to our Inner Child when we give them healthy tools and structure along with encouragement and permission to experiment, creatively, with how to use them!

Exercise 1. Get on Good Terms with the 12-Steps

Here are some alternative approaches to the Steps. A good way to let the Steps become an integrated practice instead of a possibly intimidating *task* is to use them as problem-solving tools. This member who distilled them down to this *minimalist* first version said, "It is like playing scales on a musical instrument—just getting used to "wiggling your fingers" in them!" If an Inner Child is suspicious of "tasks" as a) boring, b) meaningless things to do to please (or placate) an authority, c) ways we've been trained to "stuff" out authentic self, give them time to see the results in themselves and in other people who "fiddle" with them. .

"No Kidding Around": Working the Steps in One-Half Hour

(Shared by Jim W., Humboldt ACA Intergroup)

1. What's the problem?
2. What can help?
3. Will I let it?
4. What do I know/ feel about it?
5. Tell somebody (phone or person).
6. What do I want instead?
7. Keep an open mind/heart.
8. . Who hurt me and who am I hurting?
9. Heal it, if possible.
10. How do I feel, right now?
11. Am I spiritually centered?
12. How is the program alive in me?

Here's a second example: This Adult Child has re-written the Steps to make them a better "fit" for their Inner Child/Authentic Self relationship. This is exactly what Tony A. did and equally as valid. We each share "our experience, strength and hope" in 12-Step recovery. None of us are gurus, saints or professionals in this activity! *Anonymity* doesn't make us "non-people;" it frees the truth we share to float among us all, enriching our entire fellowship, without the ego-burden of "having to defend" or "always being right."

Reparenting Tip: At a meeting (or any situation where several people are gathered to do something together), take a moment to detach and take a breath. Imagine everyone is between the ages of, say, three and ten, trying to join in and get what they bring accepted and heard. If someone is having trouble—feeling frustrated, getting mad—imagine a big friendly loving adult coming into the picture and giving them a hug or bringing the focus of the group around in a caring way. (This is a form of affirmation-prayer.)

Read through Charlie T.'s version of the Steps. Give yourself permission to hear what they share uncritically. Take what you find useful to experiment with, yourself. Shrug off what isn't "your cup of tea." Write up or modify your own personal version of the Steps. If it feels safe, share this version with your home group or trusted fellow travelers. Experience their feedback! Know that reaching out to others in a safe situation is a part of becoming integrated and whole. Put your arms around your Inner Child and reassure them, "*This is safe!*"

Disillusioned & Embittered About the "God Stuff"

Charlie T.'s 12-Steps of Recovery

1. I acknowledge that I was powerless over the effects of my dysfunctional upbringing, and my life had become unmanageable.
2. I believe that a Greater Power within myself restores me to sanity.
3. I now turn my will and my life over to the care of that Power as I understand It.
4. I make an honest and thorough inventory of my life. (In this inventory I include the things about myself with which I am content as well as those about which I am ashamed or dissatisfied. As I remain open to my Higher Good, the things in my life which need correction are made known to me. This Step is about self-awareness, not self-condemnation.)
5. Supported by Loving Spirit, I share my inventory openly and completely with another person. (In this Step I do not admit to God. God already knows and goes with me, as I share my inventory with the other person. As a person with low self-esteem, I may tend to deny my assets at least as much as my character defects. It's very important that I acknowledge and express my worth as I rediscover it.)
6. I am entirely willing to have my Higher Power remove all of my character defects. I boldly affirm that Universal Good removes my shortcomings.
7. (I do not humbly ask God for this as though I am unworthy. Instead I affirm that it is God's will for me to be perfect, whole and complete. Affirmative prayer is

simply an agreement to cooperate with Spirit in order to bring about my needed healing. It is done unto me as I believe.)

8. I make a list of all persons I have harmed and am willing to make amends to them all. (I include myself on this list when appropriate.)
9. I make direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would harm them or others.
10. I continue to take personal inventory, and when I am in error, I promptly correct it.
11. I seek through prayer and meditation to improve my conscious contact with my Higher Power. I pray only for Divine Guidance and affirm the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these Steps, I carry this message to others and practice these principles in all my affairs.

Endnotes:

¹ Psychologists now understand these opening exercises are a form of induction, an invitation to let down our defenses, to *join*. As mammals, we are hard-wired to *feel safe* in situations we are familiar with, that are not too complicated and where we have a clear idea of what to do (and what to *not* do.) Repetitious phrases—prayers, music, chants—are soothing to us, like lullabies, or being gently rocked. We *naturally* feel we can relax, and when we relax, we can learn something, try something, even something new. *Induction* is, however, also a much-used technique in advertising, in religious ceremonies, and in the construction formats of all kinds of performance events—concerts, plays and story. In the last century or so, since radio (and television, internet) became an avenue for reaching “a mass public,” the *science* of using these soothing, inviting techniques has been studied and refined (Industrial Psychology, Public Relations), not always with innocent, caring motives! Ads that start with, “*imagine* . . . are invitations (or commands) that you *visualize or feel* some particular image or sensation, so that *we’ll associate it with a product or a message* we are being “sold.” What’s being played upon is *our biological association of story or lullaby with soothing care*, a hard-wired response we have (as mammals) that can be manipulated and abused—and very often is used to “herd” people—by non-nurturing external interests such as commercial sales and others who want to reduce our consciousness temporarily so that we’ll “just go along.”

² *Adult Children of Alcoholics* (2006) ACA WSO www.adultchildren.org is the primary ACA/DF text, known as “the Big Red Book” (BRB) of ACA.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:



1 GRADUAL PROGRESS IS PROGRESS!

4. AUTHENTIC SELF, YOU ARE WELCOME!

Core Concept to Hold

Steps Five, Six and Seven are dynamic actions each of us must take of our own free will. These actions change us, from the inside out. When we take off our mask and disclose ourselves, our Inner Child is finally *in the present*, no longer hiding, on the run or putting on a show. This is a triumph of self-courage and Step Six asks us to pause, reflect and reaffirm (if we are able to do so) our willingness to be free of the many lies and self-deceptions we have built around ourselves to keep our fear concealed and our resentments hidden, even from ourselves. Step Seven asks us, then, finally to let these masks and dodges be removed, not knowing what the outcome of this surrender will be—a very powerful leap of faith only we can make.



A New Approach for Us?

Step Five is a risky business for those of us who have practiced, “Don’t talk! Don’t trust! Don’t feel!” as our safest bet for getting by in this world. We lost something, if we learned these rules—our relationship with our authentic self (our Inner Child!) AA has a warning about this, written in 1938, before anybody knew about our lost, defensive Inner Child in need of rescue:

The AA “Big Book” ¹states, chillingly, “. . . Those who do not recover are people who cannot or will not completely give themselves to this simple program, usually men and women who are constitutionally incapable of being honest with themselves. There are such unfortunates. . . . They are naturally incapable of grasping and developing a manner of living which demands rigorous honesty. Their chances are less than average.”

Co-members of ACA and Alcoholics Anonymous share how they related to this warning, which is read at the beginning of most AA meetings as part of “How It Works,” “Am I one of those unfortunates? Am I ‘constitutionally incapable of being honest with [my]self?’” Fortunately for all of us, whether alcoholic or not, we’ve learned that even a very timid or discouraged Inner Child can be “reparented with gentleness, humor, love and respect,” and can rebuild their willingness to “join the human race,” again! Step Five—sharing where we are coming from and what we’ve done to cope, or as reactions—is often as much “news” to us as it is to the sponsor or fellow traveler we’re sharing with. We are becoming “who we really are” in a freeing non-judgmental atmosphere. Self-disclosure is empowering. It takes some getting used to!

Here’s a first person “lead” on Step Five, used with permission, written in an early ACA Intergroup Writers’ Workshop. “Leads” are short introductory shares often used in meetings to introduce a topic or a Step for group discussion.

STEP FIVE

INTO THE SUNLIGHT²

*Admitted to God, to ourselves and to another human being
the exact nature of our wrongs.*

If I'm going to admit anything to God, I'd better have a God-concept that will accept me, not condemn me. That's my first issue with this Step.

One of the ways my ACA childhood warps my present day is the "either-weak-or-mean" misconception of authority I formed, including a God-concept that either stood by helplessly or else condemned me, punished me, abandoned me. Anything admitted, it seemed, would be raked up later - used against me, used to mock me. I deeply hated what I used to conceive of as God. In childhood, I tried lying to God. I tried to appear the way I thought I was expected to appear, tried to take on the right look, say the right prayers. I felt like such a phony, trying to look like a little angel while I felt false and angry. I finally ran away, and it was years before I stopped running and began my own recovery.

In the Third Step, we are encouraged to ". . . turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God". I reflect on this again here as I begin Step Five: I need a God that I can really trust!

I find that the Serenity Prayer provides a guideline I can use to reconstruct a healthy concept of spiritual support. I can reasonably ask a loving God for Serenity (Peace of Mind), Courage (Strength: Centered-in-Security, NOT-Fear), and Wisdom (Reliable Good Judgment). I can reasonably expect my loving God to be powerful enough to grant these three things under any and all circumstances, including when I talk to God, admitting all my wrongs. I say the Serenity Prayer over to myself, listening to each word.

The Serenity Prayer

*God grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change
Courage to change the things I can
And wisdom to know the difference.*

Sometimes, I find it helps to go outside and be in nature as I do this, taking in deep breaths of fresh sweet air. I wait until I feel calm, strong and centered, then I begin Step Five.

I see that secrets, false appearances, avoidance, and resistance had been my way of life. I coped, survived, held out, escaped—but I had admitted very little in my loneliness and fear. Such hard work! Small wonder I had felt tired all the time! Now as I take the first two parts of Step Five, I see that I am living my recovery. As I admit these things about me, I am becoming someone who is different because I am doing something different, admitting to myself and God how I survived. I often get stage fright fluttering of butterflies in my stomach at this point, or else I feel anger, almost enough to tear up the whole project. I've come to see either of these reactions as symptoms of returning hope.

Sharing

When it comes to sharing "... with another human being ... ", it's important that there be no fear of gossip. The sponsorship relationship is the basis I've used for working a formal Fifth Step, an actual going over, point-by-point, incident-by-incident, of what I feel has crippled me. The sponsorship relationship, as I understand it, is a commitment to trust and to grow in trustworthiness. I need this sort of reassurance from another human being as a requirement of doing Step Five.

Just asking someone to work Step Five with me is a tremendous healing risk. I don't rush into it to prove how well I am or to please another person. Yet in my experience the pressure to open up about myself is great. I continue to refer to the centering exercise I have established with the Serenity Prayer, getting calm,

strong and clear each step of the way—using spiritual power to guide and direct me in my selection.

Over the years, I've had the experience of sharing some "lesser Fifth Step" at meetings or one-on-one within the fellowship and having it "get out" and become a subject of gossip. It doesn't seem to matter how long I'm in recovery, I'm still pretty sensitive and gossip doesn't fail to sting.

Since we are committed not to screen our membership, but instead to welcome all who seek recovery, these lapses may occur. I've got comfortable with most of "me", past and present, so there are fewer sensitivities. Now, when I shock or upset someone in the fellowship, I consider living with those sorts of minor upsets as a part of "family life" in my ACA "family". But part of taking responsibility for my own recovery includes healthy self-protectiveness - not exposing myself to rebuff, insensitivity, or rigidity needlessly or carelessly. I'm careful to share my most personal issues with a person I can trust.

The Fifth Step is a step toward a new relationship to others - out of isolation, concealment, fear and into feedback and response, indispensable ingredients to a balanced point of view. I choose to take this Step for me (not as people-pleasing, other-centered behavior). There has been a tremendous sense of relief from this—no more the secret dweller, masked person or person in a world apart.

The biggest surprise came in the response of my sponsor to my sharing. I had shared things I greatly feared might make my recovery impossible, things which I felt would revolt or prompt rejection. I expected severity, a crinkled brow. Instead I found compassion, understanding, gentleness. I couldn't believe it. I went so far as to find a different experienced person in the fellowship, to see if I wouldn't get harsher reaction, but once again I was surprised: Gentleness! Compassion! Directed at me!

Finally, I began to accept healing human fellowship, and to realize that my old fears were not an accurate estimate of reality. It is as different a world as a sunny morning is different from life lived in a basement without windows, and I can feel the difference in my mind and in my heart.

Steps Six and Seven

In the original 12-Step program³, Steps Six and Seven, combined, are given *about a page* in the text! "Becoming entirely willing to have [HP] remove our defects of character and asking [HP] to do this" were Steps initially thought of as a kind of post-script to taking Step Five (sharing our whole story

with a trusted ally.) Fifteen years later, however, Step Six received a major re-write in AA's second text, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952.)

What did AA co-founder Bill W. and the AA fellowship discover in the meantime that led to this (really quite radical) revision of Step Six? As AA caught on and the fellowship grew, it became apparent that everybody's definition of a "character defect" wasn't the same, for one thing! Here's a little story to illustrate how it seems to matter who we choose to work with when we do Step Five.

Cecil B. Shares: "It Matters Who You Choose to Do the Steps With!"

A fellow in his thirties, "Zak," attended our meetings and talked about wanting to do Step Five. Three people offered to work with him. All three of us had "time" and he'd know us all for several months. My wife and I had met in the fellowship and had been members for more than ten years. Another fellow came to meetings irregularly but spent most of his time online, in chat rooms. He lived in his mom's house and was known to strike up personal relationships online with people who would come from other localities and move in, too. The third was a therapist who specialized in trauma therapy and volunteered at juvenile hall. Zak hemmed and hawed but after a month or two, he also moved in with the online guy who Zak said he worked the Steps with. Some romantic stuff developed in the chat rooms and a couple of potential partners came out—all moving in on Mom, until she kicked them all out. They stopped attending meetings and last heard, Zak had moved on to another venue, "done" with 12-Step programs.

The therapist said it was as though, given the choice, Zak had decided to do his Fifth Step with her dog, Minty. She said, "If you told Minty, 'I'm sneaky and I steal,' Minty would say, 'Oh, don't give that up! Sneaking and stealing are big assets!' And for Minty, who is a Labrador Retriever with a taste for counter-surfing tidbits, that's a true statement of how she sees the world!" I agree.

Reparenting Tip: Self-responsibility is unavoidable. It is *our choice* to decide to reparent our Inner Child with functional, life-affirming standards and boundaries. Choosing a sponsor or the fellow travelers we walk with in recovery is where we need to be especially careful not to "just shift the deck chairs on a sinking ship" by keeping our old defective behaviors and finding those who co-sign these weaknesses to hang with!

Step Six in AA's "12 X 12" Isn't "Gospel"

AA's Bill W. wrote Step Six in AA's second textbook⁴ with the support of a Jesuit priest who was also a sober alcoholic. This support brought to bear a great deal of focus on the Seven Deadly Sins⁵ as standards for "character defects" we are asked to inventory and be willing to "have removed" in Steps Six and Seven. For many of us, this approach seems anything but "gentle, humorous, loving and respectful!" Our Inner Children cower at the prospect of self-attack--that whatever we are doing, it isn't good enough, or that our motives are never "pure!"

Achieving *balanced* integration of our Laundry List/The Problem *traits* is not a “quick fix” matter. Terror, pain, and fear, in the form of aversions and humiliating memories, prompt us to want “yes/no” quick ways to “solve” our “triggered” reactions. While addictions to alcohol, drugs and overeating are reactive behaviors pretty easy to spot (if not to admit), other behaviors that are *effects*, such as “hiding out” through over-work, taking a deeply suspicious approach to other people (and their motives) or gossiping/fault-finding to control others, are “problems” only if and when we become willing to let go of them! **Honesty and willingness to feel all of our feelings is the key to lasting recovery and opens us to new life experiences.**

Most Adult Children have vivid, humiliating “Critical Parents” in our memories that we really do not want to deal with as “sponsors” in Step Six! Tony A. and ACA WSO “authorized” literature tries to soft-pedal “character defects” by approaching “traits” as having a positive feature we can integrate into our characters as a resource. That’s a supportive, affirmative approach to becoming “entirely willing.” This approach, however, can easily become what AA calls “a half-measure” (rationalization) for not challenging some of our own self-limiting behaviors that persist. We need to identify the *effects* of our experience in dysfunction that are *present barriers* we’ve internalized and carry forward. A lot of patterned behaviors we have fall into this class.⁶

Reparenting Tip: *Going from one extreme to the other* is, itself, a characteristic (“character defect?”) of Adult Children. Our recovery goal is *balance*.

“Overwhelmed” is a feeling many of us can relate having when we begin “peeling back” the layers of the onion this is our memory of the past. If we’ve been living lives marked by “cutting ties, pulling up stakes, moving on, starting fresh” jumps, whether to escape consequences of our own screw-ups, or to escape reoccurring cycles of abuse due to behaviors of others, “a quick fix” may be what we hunger for in ACA/ACoA. Tony A.’s version of “continue to love ourselves unconditionally” has unmistakable appeal, because just being in fellowship, among others who are pledged to these principles, solves a giant gap adult children share—the feeling of **personal isolation!** This is a valid use of fellowship membership, and many ACA/ACoA’s attend meeting just to feel “*I’ve got company!*” in this big, safe playground where our Inner Children don’t hurt one another, and we can practice being kind. We are devoted to preserving “*space to be, space to grow,*” as we are guided, in our own time.

Here is a chapter from *Handy Guide to the Twelve Steps* that makes use of Step Six in a straightforward manner, free of the heavy-handed tactics in AA’s “12X12,” but with the self-focus required to pare away our tendency to shy away from self-appraisal. Real change in recovery, and meaningful change in our personal and professional lives, is closely matched with our mastery of the original goals of Steps Six and Seven, followed by application of Steps Eight and Nine, for the simple reason that these four Steps are the *action Steps for self-transformation in our recovery*.



STEP SIX⁷

Let Go . . .

6. **Become entirely willing to have God remove all our defects of character.**

We look at the problems we face and find the behaviors in ourselves that keep them in our life.

We are probably more used to looking at life in terms of problems we face rather than character defects we have. Being in jail is a problem, for example, not a character defect. We may be sharply aware of several problems we face in life, but only dimly conscious of having character defects. Step 6 reminds us we can only solve problems by becoming willing to change something about ourselves. If we are in jail, for example, what weakness in ourselves caused us to do the crime?

The character defects we work to release in Step 6 are the behaviors and attitudes that keep us bound to our problems, whatever those problems may be. Since most of what we do that causes us big trouble we do more than once, our character defects are usually among our habitual behaviors and ingrained attitudes. Most of our problems simply will not go away until we become willing to let go of the thinking and acting that ties us to them!

Habits are essential structures in our lives. They are our practical boundaries, the limits we really live by, whether we're aware of them or not. We are defined by our habits, both to ourselves and to those around us.

Habit accounts for how we spend most of our time. If our lives are going to change and stay changed, we are going to have to become willing to say goodbye to some habitual behaviors.

This can be a lot like saying goodbye to old friends. A present character defect often is an old coping behavior that once was a useful part of our survival kit. We usually don't become aware what old routines have become excess baggage until they cause us problems.

The statement, "People don't change behaviors that work," is truer than we may realize. Manipulating people or defensive touchiness, either of which may have been lifesavers for us in a world of threats and uproar, are good examples of behaviors that can outlive their usefulness when we change our way of life. We can easily continue these habits, treat people like objects and react to them defensively, if that's been a style we've learned. In safe situations, we can fail to make friends because we don't know how to let our own guard down. If we continue to feel and act more vulnerable than is actually the case, we negate our

own power in situations where we could take a more positive kind of role. We can feel pretty foolish when we realize we've been shadow boxing!

Step 6 is an action Step. The first action in Step 6 is the action of review. We try to see ourselves in terms of all of our habits, not just the ones we think are troublesome. What do we do, from the time we open our eyes in the morning until our final sleepy yawn at night? Which side of the bed do we get up on? We look at how we dress, eat, spend our money. Do we pray, meditate, exercise, do something for other people? Are we moving toward a vision for the future or just getting by?

We look to see if we are dragging our old miseries, in the form of habitual reactions, into our present lives. We review what we have written in Step 4. Are we still defending ourselves from threats that may once have been quite real, but aren't today? Realistically, are we objectively still being threatened? Do we continue to act from habitual fears, habitual suspicions or defensive patterns? On the other hand, do we continue to expose ourselves to threats that we know are unhealthy to endure?

If we are willing to become more in touch with our real identity, the Worthy Person God made within us, the action of Step 6 makes sense.

Looking at our daily routines may seem like overkill. But is it? We may be inclined to speak of our issues in general terms, as past mistakes, no longer a part of our life today. General discussion, however, doesn't impact behavior. Most of us find we are usually more willing to talk about our problem behaviors than we are to actually let them go.

Why is it that we seem to be so attached to habitual behaviors, even ones we admit are not desirable? One way to look at this is to acknowledge that we are, to an extent, addicted to wrong-doing. If we keep it simple in Step 6, we must be willing to look at the ways our pride and laziness, our lust and greed and envy impact our lives. Our needs for safety, for physical gratifications, for emotional security and a role in the community are real; every human being is driven by these needs.

We believe what separates us from other people are feelings of shame we have associated with some, or maybe all, of these strong drives. We have found that immorality seems to be rooted in behaviors that deny God's power and willingness to provide us with what we naturally all want.

Think about it. The Worthy Person God made and intends us to be has no need of pride or envy. S/he is not threatened by other people's happiness or prosperity. After all, part of being a Worthy Person includes deserving a family, friends, a job, a place to live! A Worthy Person can afford to be generous, gentle, patient, even fearless and direct.

A Worthy Person doesn't have to appease other Worthy People: They aren't a threat! Worthy People don't have to bully or manipulate each other. They are able to make commitments, work together toward goals.

If the Worthy Person within us had been free of the false beliefs and bad reaction habits that got us so crossed up in life, we wouldn't have gotten so lost. So much of our anger is directed at ourselves! We've mistakenly identified ourselves with our bad habits; we've believed we were our reactions. No wonder we are angry. Our own confused thinking and our learned behaviors have worked against us to mark our lives.

To the extent that we are blind or stubborn, weak or underhanded we are out of touch with the Worthy Person within us that God intends us each to be.

Our desires and appetites push us to act. In the absence of healthy ways to work out satisfying our needs, we impose on other people. We'd really have no reason to hold a grudge toward other people if we could always live in faith that our basic appetites are normal, healthy and that satisfying them is part of God's intention for us all!

Most of us live pretty far away from this perfection. If we are honest, we find that we believe in scarcity, in lack, in competition. We've been greedy, blind. Maybe we still are. Often we fear that we're not worthy to be the Worthy Person God created us to be.

Step 6 isn't a trap designed to make us feel worthless in a world of better people. We take a tip from those who live in faith: Global thinking is a luxury. A daily plan is more down to earth and, with willingness to change, it serves us well. Worthy People are not saints. Worthy People live in the present. We are letting the Worthy Person God made and intends us to be into the present when we recognize we can't change everything at once. We can't go back in time. But we can take action and make a beginning, now.

If we are willing to be willing, we are going to experience a change in our identity. We are going to stop thinking of ourselves as identified with what we don't like and try to conceal. Instead, we're going to become willing to let the Worthy Person live through us.

To get through this identity change, it is helpful to see our attachment to old habits in terms of what we understand about the grief process as it relates to change.

Change in our lives, even the change that comes with victory and triumph, brings about a measure of feeling loss, anxiety and sadness. It isn't easy to change. Our bodies and minds are biochemically attached to old patterns, we now know. Even Olympic athletes have to learn to let themselves win. It is part of the training necessary to success.

Our bodies grieve change, even changes that are wonderfully rejuvenating. We need to see changing our lives as a training process, something we need to work at, stick with. We will need help.

Fellowship with others who are willing to let the Worthy Person God made live through them is really essential. We need to get over our fears that the grief we feel when we look back on our lives will last forever. It, too, will pass. We need the encouragement of others who are changing, too. We're on the same team! Suppose you're carrying some very serious excess baggage from the past. Suppose as is not all that unusual in a 12-Step program, you have actually killed or maimed someone, with a car while drunk. Or with a gun. Suppose you've acted out of rage, frustration, vengeance, hurt somebody with your fists or with a club. Or maybe someone you love did that to you or to a family member. Maybe somebody who has gone this far now wants to join your church. "What kind of a Worthy Person does that?" you ask yourself. Hasn't this behavior made it impossible to ever really turn around? Can I accept this person? If it is me who has acted out, can I expect to ever earn these people's trust? Or can I trust myself?

If we are tempted to write off someone, or ourselves, aren't we just putting a limit on God's power and mercy?

We believe we are falling into a trap when we insist on second-guessing what is possible before we do our end of the job.

Step 6 asks us to become entirely willing to let go of all our defects. Preconceived ideas about what is possible for God is probably one of the most serious defects of them all.

If we find it hard to live with ourselves because of something brutal we have actually done to someone else, we need to be willing to feel remorse. The inability to feel sorry for hurt we cause to others is a serious defect, too. It cuts us off from the Worthy Person God still holds out for us to be.

Trying to outrun remorse often runs us until we drop, or someone locks us up. The Worthy Person God made and intends us still to be just naturally feels a lot of pain and sorrow for the hurt he or she has caused. We've got to give that Worthy Person—who is us—a chance to own those feelings in the present. This is willingness to change.

Another side of this same problem is the inability to genuinely forgive another person. We have trouble letting go of the past. Are we willing to let someone who has hurt us or hurt other people change? Don't we tend to hold them off and justify doing so out of our fear, no matter how sincerely they may struggle to overcome a past mistake? How long are we justified in holding on to a suspicious attitude? What does a person have to do to win our trust? If we are troubled with these sorts of questions, we need to look to God for answers and directions.

Suspicion probably cuts us off from the Worthy Person God made us to be as much as any other defect. Other people can't make this sort of fear subside, even if they spend their lives trying to make up to us. We need to become willing to stop controlling them through guilt or shaming them to make ourselves feel superior. If we beat others with the past, we are not justified; we are getting lost ourselves. Becoming willing to be changed and restored to child-like innocence is not easy. If the fruits of willingness are attractive, we must try.

We challenge our self-imposed limits in Step 6. As we realize that we need not be bound by our habits and reactions from the past, a more positive self-image becomes possible. Limiting self-concepts such as, "That's just the way I am," can always be challenged by choosing to behave differently.

We remember, too, that we are not in recovery to meet other people's standards, just our own. If we find that we aren't willing to let go of some behaviors, self-honesty remains the best policy.

We ask our Higher Power that we be given the willingness, when and if it is in keeping with God's plan. We help ourselves become more willing by actively imagining alternatives to behaviors that remain in the way. "What would I be like if I didn't smoke? What might I do differently? How would I spend the money?" Alternatives and the willingness to accept them will come.

There may be behaviors we choose to keep even though others object to them. Success, in life, is ultimately measured in terms of how well we can accept and live happily with ourselves.

As we accept self-responsibility, we become increasingly aware of our independence. We are responsible for the fruits of choices that we make. Sometimes willingness comes when we recognize how stubbornness isn't bearing fruit.

Periodic review of Step 6 is a good idea. What may be useful today may one day be excess baggage. Rather than a steep staircase we climb once, the 12-Steps are more like stepping stones that lead along a path we can travel, day by day. When we take Step 6, we have the opportunity to act, not react, as we choose to release or reaffirm behaviors. Choice is a blessing God intends for the Worthy Person who is us.

What habits no longer serve me?

Resistance to Steps Six Within ACA/ACoA

The “Tony approach” to ACA/DF recovery doesn’t *intentionally* skip over doing the self-reflection aspect of taking responsibility for our *liabilities*. Tony was, after all, a long-term sober member of AA⁸ before the start of ACA/ACoA. Like a great many co-members of other fellowships, Tony had already done Steps Four through Nine with the focus entirely on his own behaviors, faults and omissions, followed up by amends. ACA’s Big Red Book as well as Tony A.’s version of the Steps are directed to our Inner Child, in order to create an atmosphere of safety and acceptance for this often timid and fearful side of ourselves to risk coming forward out of isolation. This is what our Inner Child needs. If we’ve been “infected” with the disease (ACA’s Problem/Traits) as children growing up in dysfunctional households, we do need clarity. We also need to grieve. Getting out of isolation is a “first things first” in ACA.

It is important to note that, for the many ACAs who are co-members of other 12-Step fellowships, Adult Child 12-Step recovery is an *add on* to the original AA program’s recovery. Adult children who find ACA/ACoA through therapy or who are referred by the courts may, on the other hand, have little or no experience with the 12-Steps. For them, the 12-Steps may be the *add on* to the work they’ve done. Our perspectives differ. The self-scrutiny needed to round out recovery by working these Steps is often a process of integration. Our goal is to combine what we’ve found in other programs with a new lens. Not everyone is eager (or even willing) to make this transition. Adult children co-members of AA who have experienced AA’s approach to Steps Six as being “called on the carpet” by a harshly critical parent may be especially resistant to revisiting these Steps. “Special focus” meetings to use these ACA 12-Step materials is a good option, especially online, as is working one-on-one with a sponsor or a therapist.

These materials, although faithful to the 12-Steps are not harsh or judgmental.

Humility Is Not Humiliation

Resistance to Step Seven is often a reaction to AA’s *wording* of this Step:

Step Seven: Humbly Asked God to Remove Our Shortcomings.

Here’s a better understanding of what we mean in adult child recovery when we use the term “humble” (From *Handy Guide to the Twelve Steps*⁹)

The intention of Step 7 is not to rob us of self-confidence. Humiliation isn't the same thing as humility. Humiliation comes of trying to put a lie over on life and getting caught in the attempt. Humility is not like that at all. Humility is the result of facing facts and having the courage to ask for the help we really need.

Humility involves looking at things realistically. Although it may not be our idea of an exercise in humility, an engineer is actually being humble when s/he says, “Yes, I want to build this bridge,” and adds, “but I'll need this list of supplies and these skilled workers to bring it off. Here's the estimated cost.” The engineer is taking on a project while being sure to assess it realistically before jumping in.

If the support isn't there, no matter how attractive the project looks, a competent engineer wouldn't try to kid anybody about the facts. If he or she did, the fraud involved might very well show up in a half-finished project or a collapsed bridge. Either outcome would not bring credit to the engineer's sense of self-worth and reputation!

When we have the humility to be realistic about what we can or can't do, it saves us from failure and humiliation down the road.

Nobody wants to look like a fool. When we begin to change our old habits, we don't know exactly what to expect. There isn't a check-list of the materials necessary to rebuild or repair our damaged lives. But it isn't humble to give up. Humility isn't weakness; it is a source of courage.

Endnotes:

¹ *Alcoholics Anonymous*, © AA World Service, Inc., NYC, NY.

² Reprinted from *Healing A Broken Heart 12-Steps of Recovery for Adult Children* (1987, 2019) by Kathleen S.

³ *Ibid Alcoholics Anonymous*, Chapter 6 "Into Action," pgs. 75-76

⁴ *Ibid Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

⁵ The Christian version of the Seven Deadly Sins are Pride, Greed, Envy, Anger, Lust, Gluttony, and Sloth. There are other similar lists, describing what are considered barriers to peace of mind, enlightenment and/or salvation. Ignorance is included as a barrier by Buddhist scholars, while some of the others are lumped or ignored.

⁶ Another approach is to deal with these "effects" (addictions/compulsive patterns) in other fellowships or in therapy. In the Little Books, we approach 12-Step recovery as *inclusive* of ourselves as a unified spiritual being with the goal of "practice these principle (the Steps) in all our affairs." This is an optional approach that works for those who prefer to see themselves as a single person who has various issues instead of attending many different groups.

⁷ Used with permission from *Handy Guide to the Twelve Steps* (1997/2019).

⁸ Tony A. didn't take part in the Intergroups that developed the materials in these Little Books, although Jack E., author of the ACA Problem and Solution, did. The Little Book Series by Kathleen S. excerpts early ACA 12-Step Workbooks that were written during the period 1987-1997 within the ACA Intergroups. These IGs participated in ACA iWSO between 1986-1991 through the Literature Committee and Anonymous Programs for Adult children of Alcoholics (APACA), a standing committee of iWSO. Jack E. and Kathleen S. were both co-members of AA, AlAnon and ACA, but many early (and present) members active in compiling the "ACA Big Red Book" were not.

⁹ *Ibid*.

5. Realization of Real Freedom

Core Concept to Hold

We enter into the remainder of the 12-Step process as individuals who have a way of living that’s been changed by what we’ve already done. We are reparenting ourselves as empowered authentic people, able to survey our past, assess our responsibilities and make a contribution out of willingness and care. In Steps Eight and Nine, we see those who let us down or hurt us with compassion—they didn’t have a way of life that worked—they didn’t have a program, and we do. It becomes possible to stop hating or fearing them, which could be our best amends. We keep an eye on how we handle stress and challenge in Step Ten and leave off lying to ourselves when we’re inadequate or wrong! We try again and let it go. We find comfort, joy and clarity in the practice of Step Eleven. We live and share, and what we do has power and meaning.

Step Twelve is a merry-go-round we ride and ride.

A Better Assessment of Harms Version of Step Eight

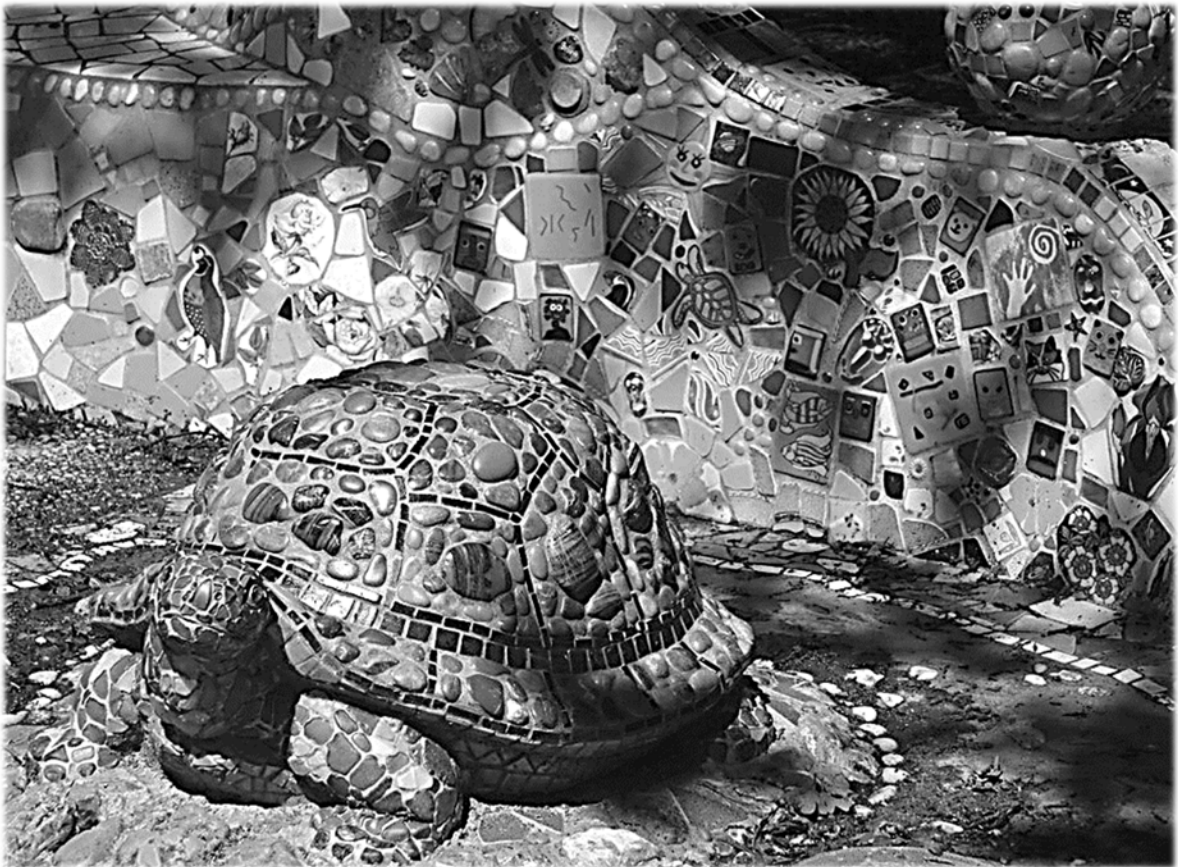
Instead of inventorying our family’s lacks and errors in Step Four (which is the Tony A./BRB approach), the Kathleen S. version of 12-Steps for ACA uses Step Eight to delve into identifying these, charting what *we didn’t get or got misinformation about* as infants or as children¹. We include Step Eight in its entirety from *12-Steps to Freedom, A Recovery Workbook*, which was written within the ACA/ACoA Intergroups fifteen years prior to publication of the ACA BRB.

The *Freedom Workbook* explores, “*What do we have a right to expect from other people, and from which other people?*” as a **baseline** for figuring out what kinds of harms we do each other, starting with identifying the harms (including empty spaces of neglect) we’ve had to overcome or cope with, ourselves. Once we’ve gotten a perspective on ourselves, it becomes a much simpler matter to see just where we’ve *passed on* these “chain letters” of dysfunction to other people or have set up *coping mechanisms* in ourselves that cut us off from having a full experience of healthy relationships.

If you have already done the *ACA Yellow Workbook* version of Step Four, you can easily transfer the family history factors recorded there over to the charts in the *Freedom Workbook*.

Most of us find it difficult to truly forgive those who have harmed either us or those we love without perceiving these instances with more clarity. These charts—and this approach to Step Eight—do a lot to “organize” the emotional patterns and reactions we may have by identifying “triggers” and myths that often have been passed down to us, the unfortunate “heirlooms” of our ancestors! In recovery, we find we can step out of many of these old ruts and genuinely feel compassionate toward those who imprinted these on us or set up our reactions to them. *They didn’t have our program! But we do.*

2 It Helps to See the Patterns!



STEP EIGHT²

Make a list of all persons we have harmed and become willing to make amends to them all.

The pain of one is the pain of all; the honor of one is the honor of all.

- Native American proverb.

As much trouble is caused in this world by taking offence as by giving offence.

Maury S., Trinidad, CA

In Step 8, we undertake the work that heals our relationships with other people. This may sound like a very big order - and, for most of us, it is. Some of our personal relationships may have become the focus of frustration, heartbreak or confusion, perhaps for a long time. Indeed, some individuals entwined in our histories may have died or exited from our lives. Healing change may seem, at first glance, impossible.

Our purpose, however, in Step 8 is to build ourselves a gateway into a bright new world where functional relationships are possible for us. Working Step 8 is a spiritual undertaking, like all the Steps. We seek to bring a new dimension of spiritual understanding to bear in the relationships we have, or have had, so that healing becomes possible in us. Persuading other people is not the goal of Step 8, and we are careful not to take on that responsibility. We remind ourselves that, in a spiritual universe others, too, have the option to heal, if and when they are willing to accept that option. We keep the focus on clearing our side of the street, even as we reconsider the feelings and needs of those we love, and we trust the outcome of our efforts to the care of our Higher Power.

Just what do people have a right to expect from each other, anyway? In the 12-Step programs of recovery we accept ourselves as being worth healing, as the "children of a Loving Parent," and as members joined in fellowship.. As valued individuals, we accept our spiritual rights, including rights to be cared for, respected and appreciated by our peers. The promise of recovery is the promise of fulfilling these deep needs, not just to survive, in the care of our loving Higher Power established in our lives.

Just as we joyfully claim and affirm these rights for ourselves, we must, logically, affirm them for others—all others—whether we are acquainted with them or not, whether we like them or not. If any of us has the right to heal and be whole, then each of us has that same right. This is a bedrock premise of recovery. Human beings harm each other in direct relation to how much they ignore or lose sight of this, our underlying biologic commonality.

All relationships, then, are at core spiritual connections between spiritual beings. As people with God-given value, we can expect to have our basic worthiness acknowledged in the many forms of care and support we receive and give to others. If we are tempted to deny this, we remind ourselves that, though these expectations may not always be met by others, it is still our right to have them. Self-respect and respect of others are really other names for acknowledging the God-centered nature that's within us all. In practical terms, however, unreleased anger or fear tends to cut us off from feeling our underlying connection with some individuals or groups. Nothing is to be gained by denying such blocks where they exist; the path free is the path through. (See Exercise, "Releasing Terror & Rage," in this chapter.)

We receive practical survival-help, guidance, affection and/or companionship from others. This starts before we are even born, or we wouldn't survive. What we do for each other ranges from a little to a lot, depending on the relationship involved. In turn, we are instruments in the lives of others. Acknowledging some degree of spiritual "common ground" is implied in every contact with others. All interactions involve honoring each other's spiritual identities.



Of course, we don't have the same degree of responsibility toward all people in our lives. Neither do all people have the same degree of responsibility toward us. Personal commitments and responsibilities depend on the kind of bonding we feel, along with other more contractual responsibilities. Parents, for example, not only usually feel deeply bonded with their children, but a contract of responsibility exists from the moment of birth, which is in part enforceable by law and is a powerful social custom. Among friends, employers and employees, however, our connections include a mix of stated and implied agreements worked out in advance or over time. Greater and lesser degrees of intimacy depend on factors such as how much trust and contact exists. We also have many brief or superficial contacts with others—store clerks, public figures, neighbors—where not much bonding is felt. What we get from them or give them is more or less a matter of routine—a smile and money in exchange for goods, applause for a song.

We all vary in our relationships. One person may be deeply bonded with people or pets, while another may be surrounded by generations of relatives. Some may feel a strong sense of obligation and commitment toward family members, even if all feelings of bonding are strained or broken. Some acknowledge only a very few strong connections, one or two primary relationships, and prefer to have only superficial contact with everybody else. What satisfies and fulfills one person may seem bleak fare to someone else.

How, then, do we determine what is reasonable to expect, of ourselves and others? What do we say to those who vocally insist we owe them, whether we like it or not? Where do we draw the line?

The principal goals in Step 8 is to develop a sane present perspective on the relationships we have, and have had, with others. We need an independent standpoint that makes it clear, at least to us, our bonds and duties to others, to our families, communities and to the planet. If we lack this grounded point-of-view, we can only guess at our responsibility—or remain a pawn to the demands of others that flood in on us from those around us and from the media.

To gain this insight in Step 8, our first task is to focus on our own experiences. We want to diagram, as best we can, the boundaries of intimacy and commitment we learned and rehearsed growing up. However fuzzily they may have been stated or understood, we did learn some boundaries and limits on what to expect from others in our family system. What were they? Looking back, did we get what we needed to be whole and healthy human beings by using that set of rules? Were our spiritual rights to feel loved, nurtured, included and respected made clear within our family? Or were they violated, neglected, or denied?



If we imagine ourselves at the very center of a circle that includes all of our relationships, we come to see the spiritual underpinnings of our relationships, both past and present, more clearly. Everyone in our circle is a valuable, unique spiritual being. No matter how distorted our relationship may have become due to the effects of addictions, compulsions or codependencies, this is still true, biologically and socially, as a survival-baseline, for every one of us. Love is a chemical bond we have in common with many life-forms.

If we are willing to think of ourselves as having entered life at the center of such a circle, biologically grounded in to nurture life, we will be able to evaluate our relationships, thinking in terms of what we had a reasonable right to expect, and of what we either did or didn't get. All those within our circle, we think, have some degree of responsibility to us, and we to them, even if it's only to acknowledge our mutual right to be alive.

Our job in Step 8 is to determine the boundaries separating the different kinds of relationships we have and have had. We want to admit where we've been let down or where we have failed others. From this realistic point-of-view, we can then become willing to act in the present based upon this new perspective. We aren't dependent upon others in doing this. From the center of our own circle, we are free to investigate and to act—whether others do or not—to heal our circle of relationships.

We look at the kinds of relationships we have as human beings. First, there were those who were our primary caregivers—our parents or those who took that role.

We had the deepest need and right to expect unconditional love, nurturing, guidance and companionship from these individuals from the very beginning of our life. Later, as parents, we become the primary caregivers to our own children and, to varying degrees, to our partners. From these relationships we gain or fail to gain the strongest validation of our authentic selves. This is our primary circle. Beyond the boundary of these primary contacts, but still very intimately involved in our lives, are trusted intimates—siblings, grandparents or others who are deeply committed to us. Trusted intimates have a great influence in our lives, too. They are expected to give us practical help as well as dependable loyalty. Although they are committed to us, they aren't our primary caregivers. They have other responsibilities and interests that we must recognize and accept. If these limits become blurred, issues of authority and abandonment result. As adults, our trusted intimates probably include our closest friends and family members who are committed to stick with us.

Outside the boundaries of this circle there are those who have some influence on us—aunts, uncles, cousins, family friends—and, later on, there are the friends and colleagues we make for ourselves. These are secondary, extended family relationships. Limits of commitment in these relationships vary, depending on a range of factors including which ethnic group we identify with. Mutual loyalty and companionship are the important responsibilities in this circle. So are shared activities and voluntary cooperative efforts. As adults, relationships we form at work, church or other places where interests are shared become, in effect, part of our extended family ties. We practice recognizing, negotiating, and respecting each other's limits and boundaries in this circle. If we lacked an extended family growing up, then we may tend to isolate ourselves as adults. We may also confuse the companionship of shared activities with deeper commitments. This can lead to social confusion. Overcommitment, inappropriate disclosures, and/or a tendency to impose, overreact to or flee from social stresses can result.

Finally, there is a fourth circle, made up of non-intimate elders and authorities in our community. These are our role models. They inspire our confidence and respect. Teachers, doctors, ministers, and heroes such as athletes and public figures are within this circle. Although day-to-day companionship may not be involved in these relationships, we still learn from them. We give respect and learn to earn respect through relating to these leaders and the ideals they represent. If our family lacked positive identification within this fourth circle, we may have grown up seeing ourselves as part of an underclass group.

In this phase of Step 8, if we are thorough and honest, we put an end to codependency patterns that have infected our lives and bound us to addiction, whether or not we've been addicts ourselves. Our goal is to diagram just what we learned—or missed—about receiving and giving care, support and recogni-

tion in our childhood environment. We use the blanks provided to chart our circles, past and present. We insert the actual relationships we did have, in each layer. Use real names instead of abstract categories. How difficult or easy is it to decide in which circle people in your life belong? Have pets, social media or games filled some slots?

Denial and other coping mechanisms may make it hard to undertake this effort. After all, coping was our only survival option if we were trapped in a maze of toxic or unfulfilling relationships as children! But now, as individuals in recovery, we undertake this work in Step 8 to gain clarity about our past situation, in order to regain the ability to choose how to rebuild our new way of life.

If, in our primary circle, one or both of parents was absent, toxic, or abusive—did someone else act as a primary parent? If a parent demanded that we take care of them, do we continue to lose ourselves in caretaking others, or do we avoid making all commitments now? Did we have to do without closeness or care? Are we still stuck in that pattern, holding ourselves back from those who have a right to be closest to us? Who are we the primary caregivers for today? Can we be a consistent source of unconditional love to them?

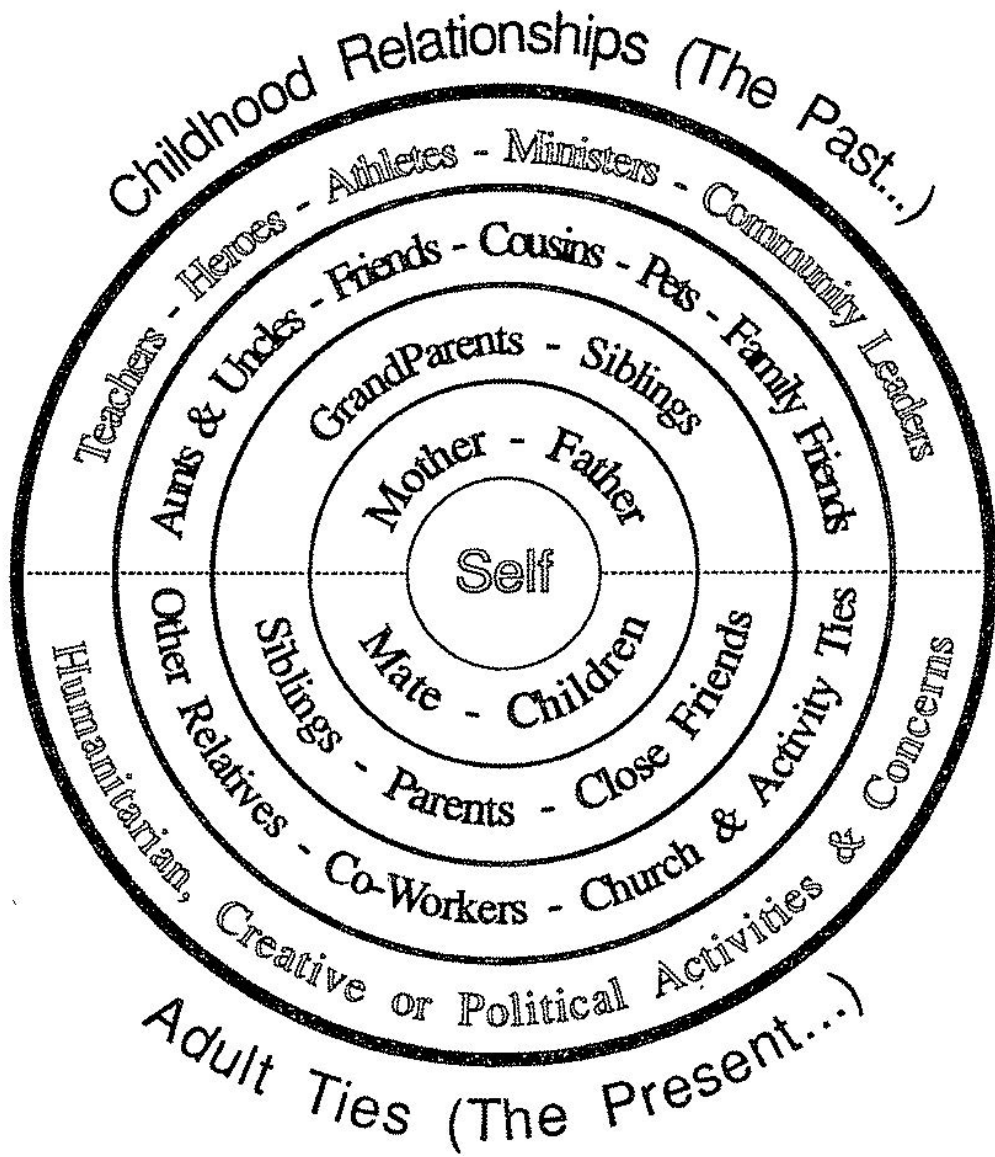
Did we have laughter and fun in our household as a family? Or were we socially isolated, lonely or did we become vulnerable to peer pressure? Did we instinctively try to fill holes in the family by over-depending on friends or community role-models? Were we rejected or used? Do we still make demands or to get used in close voluntary relationships? Are we workaholics or otherwise inclined to escape human contacts with compulsive activities? Did family members vent frustrations upon us, break promises, lie, or use up resources that, by right, should have been used to nurture us? Are we, as a result, suspicious, selfish, manipulative or unavailable? Do we see where unresolved stresses within a dysfunctional family—severed ties, lapses of contact, long-distance moves—cost us the support we deserved within an extended family or in the larger community? Did family secrets cut us off? Have we been inclined to continue those patterns, functioning as loners, or lacking the skills to clear up conflict or repair a damaged sense of trust?

Layer by layer, as we take time to place each name where it belongs within our circle, we begin to see where patterns of distorted, misunderstood responsibilities between ourselves and others have contributed to hurt and bitterness in our lives and in the lives of others. Some relationships are, admittedly, confusing or complicated. Some people who may have been very close to us during one phase of our life—for example, former sweethearts, childhood friends—may later have become less important or drifted away. If we are unsure where an individual fits in our life-circle, now or in the past, we ask our Higher Power to show us. This is hard work but, if we are willing to allow our Higher Power to restore sanity to our circle of relationships, the guidance we need will come to us.

If, in reviewing our family ties, we see that we were born into a family system where the boundaries between the various circles of caring weren't understood, or became blurred, it follows that we too, became confused. To some degree, we have lost touch with our authentic spiritual inner self. Without a strong sense of our own inner identity, we probably adopted the dysfunctional family system, whatever it may have been, even though we may have instinctively rebelled or tried to escape it . As dependent children, we remained enmeshed, involuntary trainees, learning the family rules that infected our circle of caring relationships. As adults, we become the perpetrators of these patterns in the lives of others. Fortunately, the 12-Steps of recovery give us an opportunity to learn and to practice new, healthy patterns. We can be free, even if our family or social histories happened to be disastrous.

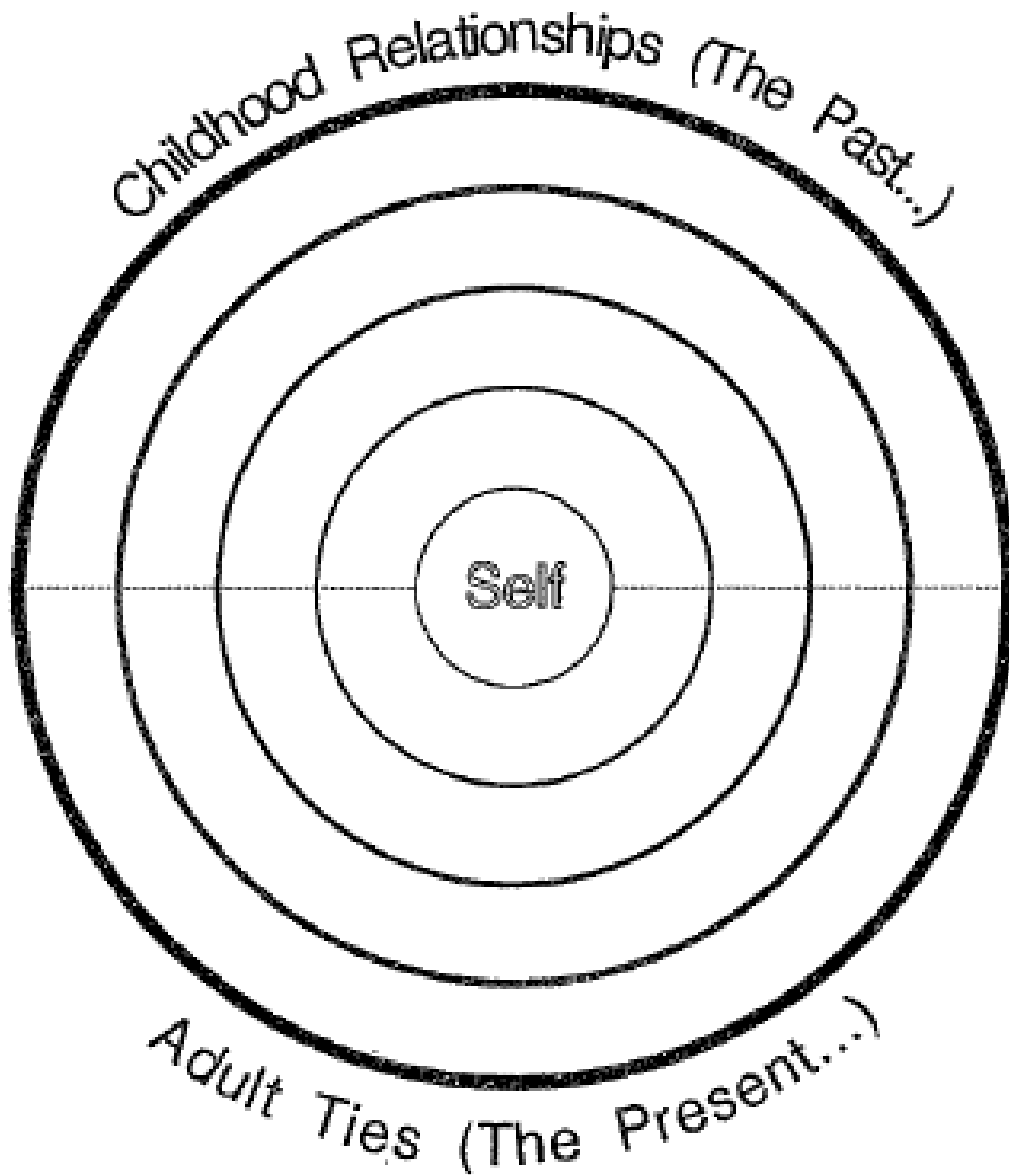
Sample Relationships Chart

Levels & Limits of Care & Responsibility

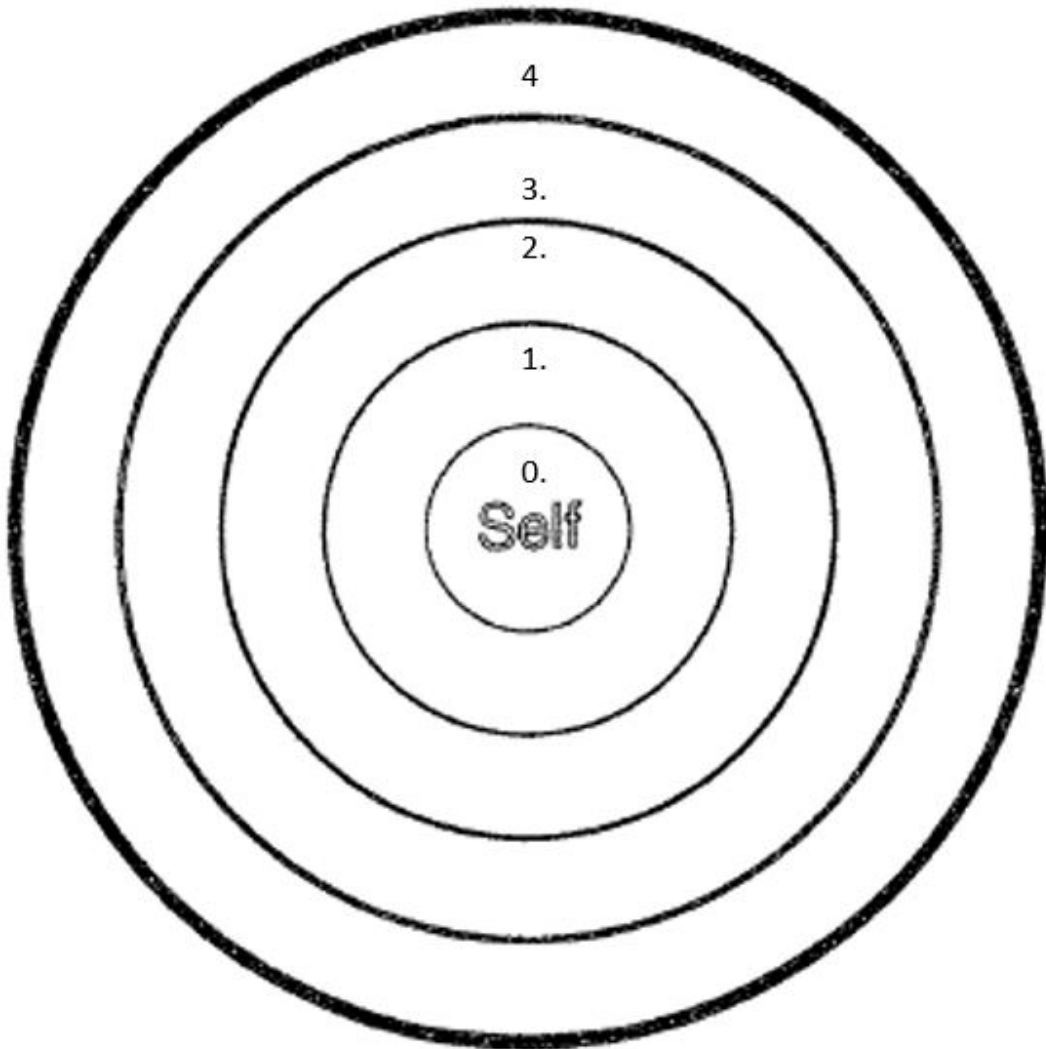


Actual Relationships Chart

Levels & Limits of Care & Responsibility



Relationships Chart Blank



1. Who am I? (Self)
2. Who takes care of me? Who do I take care of?
3. Who are my support group? Who am I bond to by loyalty and duty?
4. What are my *tribal* bonds? My professional, social and spiritual affiliations?
5. Who do I admire (or hate)? What is the “wallpaper” of my world?

As we become clearer on what we received and did not receive in our childhood relationships, we can finally grieve these losses and injuries —perhaps for the first time. In giving ourselves the opportunity to be honest about these wounds and about our feelings, we finally are able to reclaim our authentic self, the Inner Child within.

We may have been gravely deprived or hurt then, but now in this phase of our recovery we realize that we need no longer depend upon those people, whoever they were or were not to us. We are free to turn within, to our Inner Higher Power, and to ask that these deepest needs be met at last. We ask that even unmet needs and distortions going back to infancy be healed in us, and that our Inner Child be freed now, to live in the present. We have always had this spiritual right, but now, in Step 8, we have the clarity and faith to begin to claim it.

Now, finally, from this new standpoint, as people who are no longer victims, we reconsider those who have harmed us, past and present. Without justifying their misbehavior or neglect, we consider how they, too, may have been spiritually lost, addicted, confused, or misinformed. Were these people also the hapless victims of addiction or codependency—probably without ever finding a way to step free of the maze? Haven't we been harming these people by blaming them for not giving us what they either didn't have or didn't know how to give? Now that we have found a sane perspective and a way of life for ourselves, we aren't stuck in those ruts with them anymore. That's a recovery blessing. Wrong and hurtful as they may have been {or still may be}, our bitterness is just a chain that binds us to that old dysfunction, whatever it was. We unlock ourselves and let go. Nothing and no one can stop us from freeing ourselves!

Now we can and do recognize our needs as valid and affirm our Inner Power's willingness to see them filled. If we love people who remain angry or cold, we do our best to share our insight. We want to give them time to heal, too, without "taking the bait" to argue, beg or lecture. Manipulation of others or overcoming their resistances or their denial isn't our role. They, too, are free to choose. Our responsibility is to own up to our end of our relationships and become willing to do our part. We aren't being disloyal when we disregard dysfunctional family rules; we are showing leadership. Tact and patience are a help. We honor what is genuine in our relationships, as we act to break out of the web of lies, false choices and distorted concepts we've been taught to see as normal, inescapable. Our recovery is truly the best amends we have to give!

As we become willing to stop harming others with our blame and hatred, we may find a flood of sadness stored behind the barriers we built with fear and anger. Even a great flood of dammed up feelings, however, may be seen as a symptom of our healing, like a storm that brings a long-parched desert into bloom. As we realize that we no longer need to hold on to old fears and defensive anger to protect ourselves, many

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From our new perspective, we now consider those we've directly harmed: In our close relationships, have we treated some people (or kinds of people) as "throw-aways," people to be used, lied to, robbed or physically harmed? Who have we slandered, sneered at or been willing to gang up against? Are we willing to actively make these things right? Are there groups in our community we hate or fear? Without minimizing any real dangers that exist, are we willing to detach ourselves, psychologically, from living in reactive fear or retaliation to other people's blindness and denial? This is our long-term goal.

Reflecting on the whole fabric of our past and present relationships, we ask ourselves if we are willing to rebuild each of these relationships as is appropriate, acting as a sane and spiritually centered adult. Perhaps we will not have a clear plan for making amends yet, but that should not stand in our way. The question we face in Step 8 is: Are we willing? If we are willing to make our amends and to live from the sane perspective of our recovery from this day forward, we can trust our Higher Power to provide us with the guidance and opportunity necessary for success. We can plan to come back to this Step again and again as our willingness grows.

Exercises

Exercise 1: An Inventory of Harms

Reexamine the materials from the 4th Step Inventory. Place each name on a Relationship Chart blank where it fits as a childhood or adult relationship. Add any groups or institutions you resent or fear to this chart. Setting aside any injuries done us by these, list the kinds of harms we have done to each of them:

Note any dysfunctional patterns you learned as a child that you've carried on.

1. **Violence.** Have you physically or verbally attacked them? Intentionally threatened them? Betrayed a confidence in gossip? Told lies or presented a distorted version of events to make them look 'bad'?
2. **Imposition.** Have you tried to make them feel you were their only resource? Have you deceived them or tried to make them feel guilty or ashamed in order to get them to do something for your pleasure or gain? Have you lied about how you feel or how you see them to get them to do something or give you something?

3. **Control.** Do you insist on a system of rules to keep yourself on top with them? Did getting them to do things your way (“*the right way*”) justified you to lie, conceal facts or feelings? Have you withheld things or denied your true feelings to try get your way?
4. **Rejection.** Have you treated them like a throwaway, someone whose existence meant nothing to you? Have you ridiculed them? Are you part of a clique that is basically a hate group directed at a person or group? Have you justified taking their things or cheating them?

Exercise 2: “We Only Harmed Ourselves”

Anyone who has attended an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting on Steps 8 and 9 has probably heard someone claim, “Well, after all, I only harmed myself with my drinking.” This, of course, isn’t so, nor can it be, even if the person making this claim it is a hermit living in a cave. Talents wasted, joys not shared, misunderstandings not cleared up—these are among the large and small omissions that separate a poor life from a rich one. The amends we owe depends on what we’ve been withholding or leaving out of life as much as on fixing our mistakes.

Step 8 is our opportunity to re-draw the boundaries of our living world. Reviewing our Step 8 Relationship Charts, we can check to see where there’ve been distortions or holes in our circles of intimacy. What could we have been putting into life—and what has that loss meant, at least potentially, to others—or to our community? Each of us is free to answer these questions for ourselves.

Of the four circles—Primary, Other Intimates, Extended Family, Community—are there kinds of relationships you skimp on or lack? Which one(s)?

1. **Do all these exercises with a sponsor, therapist or at a retreat.** Imagine yourself living a day, week, month of your life with *only* the kinds of relationships you are now avoiding or neglecting. What kinds of conversations or interactions can you imagine? What feelings? Do you dread these contacts or want them but feel you are unable to have them? Give yourself permission to say, think and feel anything that comes up without restrictions.
2. Write a short play, poem or create some art with yourself as the subject as you imagine life would be with only these relationships in it. Share this creativity with someone and talk about your feelings or fantasies about these kinds of relationships.
3. Based on your writing/art and sharing, develop a plan for adding relationships you’d like to your life. What will you have to do, learn, change in order to make this happen? Or are there kinds of relationships (or activities) that take most or all of your attention, time and money that you will have to cut back on? How will you benefit? Which others will benefit?

4. If you are resistant to making a definite commitment of time to putting this plan into action (Step 9), consider whether unreleased fear or rage is at the root of your unwillingness. Do the names of specific individuals come to mind from the past? Memories of embarrassment or abuse? Ask your Higher Power to give you the guidance needed to release these memories and the strength to take initiative in reclaiming this aspect of relationship-healing as is appropriate for your highest good and purpose.
5. If you tend to justify avoiding certain kinds of emotional risks by thinking you are hurting only yourself, who do you fear? Do you abandon people or break commitments out of old anger from the past? Are you complacent about being shy, timid, or sensitive? Are you willing to be willing to be stronger?
6. Do you justify these behaviors or reject those who give you critical feedback about them? Which social circles are most affected-Primary, Other Intimates, Extended Family, Non-Intimates?
7. Imagine yourself acting brazen, aggressive, or coarse (whatever you imagine is the opposite of shy, timid, sensitive). What feelings come up? Memories?
8. Draw a picture of an incident you remember when you were hurt, battered, humiliated. Write a news story about the terrible thing that happened to the innocent child (you) to go with the picture. Name names and put in all the facts. Tell how unfairly the perpetrator acted. Make sure you interview the victim (you, the child) and put down how angry and outraged s/he feels.
9. Paste the picture and the story on a large piece of paper, and write a headline at the top, in bold block letters, **"Extra! Extra! Read All About It! Rotten So-And-So Exposed!"** Imagine this story appeared on the front page of the newspaper in the town where you grew up and was read by everyone. Imagine the praise and support you receive for your leadership and courage from your grateful community.
1. Share your story with someone. Take your Inner Child through this exercise, as though you were reliving the incident. ***Leave the guilt where it belongs!***
2. Take action to overcome shy, timid or sensitive demands you are making on present relationships as a result of these old injustices.

Exercise 3: Emotional Clearing—Releasing Terror and Rage

If we are honest with ourselves, many of us have to admit that we are deeply unwilling or unable to forgive and forget some incidents. They may have been too devastating, humiliating or lasting in their effects-or they may be ongoing

behaviors, still a threat and a source of irritation in our lives. We may feel rage or terror every time we think of some people, or so defensive we behave as automatically as wind-up toys whenever we encounter them. Not only do we find we can't wish away these reactions, but we feel like we don't even want to! These Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD) reactions are now understood to be associated with domestic violence and gang experiences as well as with war and natural disaster trauma.

What's to be done? Are we up against a limit to the healing possible for us in recovery? Do the bad guys win—leaving us permanently the prisoners of our terror or fantasies of revenge—and prove we're still the same old victims, poisoned by our own terror, rage, and vengefulness?

Without willingness to try some new behaviors ourselves, we are, indeed, stuck. But if we're open-minded enough to try some new techniques, our situation is far from hopeless. Fear and rage, we remind ourselves, are not just mental experiences; they have a physical component which is bound up with certain chemical processes in our bodies, triggering involuntary fight, flight, freeze reactions. We can't just think them away!

We have to release them, physically.

Here are some simple and effective exercises for gradually releasing physical components of terror and rage. Don't be afraid that you are hurting the actual person when you do any of these exercises; these aren't intended as voodoo. You are only releasing the anger that is trapped inside you.

1. **Sock It to A Pillow.** Beat, kick, punch, and/or strangle a large cushion or pillow. See it as a specific person you are mad at and imagine you are hitting or kicking that person. If you have privacy- scream, cry, call the person names. Direct all the rage, fear and frustration that's in you at that pillow. Keep it up until you feel a release, or, if that doesn't come, for at least 3-5 minutes.
2. **Chop It Up.** If you have a woodstove, release terror and rage by naming some of your pieces of wood, and then chopping them into kindling! Or name some celery sticks or carrots and chop them up into bits. This is especially helpful in releasing irritation in on-going relationships.
3. **Kill A Picture.** Draw a really ugly, exaggerated cartoon picture of whomever you fear or hate. If you are mad at a bureaucracy or other non- person, make a cartoon monster out of them. Use strong colors and let out lots of physical energy while you make the picture. Take 5-10 minutes to make this as detailed and as ugly as you can, but don't put yourself in the picture. Then, crumple the drawing up. Throw it across the room. Jump up and down on it. Scream and swear at it. Tear it up, shred it, burn it to ashes. *(Do this until*

you feel release, several times, if necessary, or combine this exercise with the Pillow exercise, above.)

Exercise 4: Loyalty and Intimacy

1. Referring to the Victim Roles Wheel and the Freedom Wheel³, ask yourself what the difference is between Imposition and Support, and between Dependence and Trust. Be as specific as possible. What is different about what gets said, body language, possible repercussions, etc.?
2. Review your experiences in childhood and as an adult with these issues as your focus.
3. Imagine you are surrounded by a sphere of protective, healing light, and deepen and expand this review to include all of your feelings, along with any memories that are prompted by them.
4. Have you had experiences where you had to choose between honoring your Inner Child's real values and sticking with an important person in your life?
5. In each instance, how did you feel (a) toward the important person, (b) toward yourself, (c) toward the outsider?
6. As your own loving parent, rescue your Child from painful incidents in the past. Imagine you reenter the situation, exactly as it was.
7. Instead of remaining a victim, picture yourself rejoining your child-self in your memory, to support your Inner Child. Hold off the authority-figure (physically, if necessary) so that your Inner Child is empowered to express their feelings completely, stating their limits. Make sure those feelings and limits are acknowledged and respected. You can imagine any sort of help you need to make the situation safe.
8. While you are actively imagining this scenario, do you have a present sense of conflict between loyalty to this (or another) person and loyalty to *principles* that you want to honor and uphold in your life? How do you feel, right now, about this issue?
9. Develop *affirmations* (direct, positive statements) which reflect your goals for loyalty and commitment for your life in recovery. (See Appendix 1 for help in creating affirmations.)
10. Draw or write down these affirmations and put them on your mirror or walls where you will see them.
11. Offer them to your Inner Child as tools to use to build a healthy new reality in recovery. Ask your creative Inner Child to guide you to live up to these values.

Exercise 5: Take Over the World

Going over our Relationships Chart once again, we identify any big, impersonal institutions (threat of war, unemployment, famine, climate change, a corporation where you

work, financial institutions you owe, prisons, cops, your family's religion, racial barriers or taboos.) that are the "wallpaper" of your 4th circle relationships.

1. Do one or more of these *basically limit your freedom* to choose goals for yourself (or limit your inner circle and/or your extended circle's prospects) in life?
2. As an individual, have you knuckled under to an institution out of fear of losing your job, out of peer pressure or fear of injury or jail? Is this still among the "*things we cannot change*," that you ask, "*Serenity to accept*"?
3. Or, if you are willing to become willing to make amends to yourself and to those you care about by seeking "*Courage to change the things I can*," start by informing yourself how others are joining forces to create positive alternatives. Add these new options to your "Extended Relationships" circle.

Questions to Ponder

1. Who let you down? Who hurt you? Who taught you to be a victim?
2. How have you carried these patterned behaviors over to in your life? Who have you used, let down, abandoned or abused?
3. Is there someone you can't forgive?
4. Is there someone you can't forget?

Personal Sharing

A Mindfulness Perspective

I am an adult child of an alcoholic and drug addict on a journey to a place within myself where forgiveness is moot. I believe that, through a process I am unable to fully explain or prove, I chose to be born into my nuclear family; I chose my father and mother. Similarly, I chose and continue to choose all of the people and circumstances that fill my life. Today I look at these circumstances and personal relationships as challenges or lessons that I have chosen, consciously or unconsciously, to engage in to attain my highest spiritual awakening.

As I view my past, I see my own pain and confusion. Throughout my life I blamed others for inflicting this pain. I felt I was unfairly treated or insisted that I was the surprised victim of circumstances beyond my control. Now, I see more clearly. The people (parents, husbands) and the circumstances (death, suicide, addiction, divorces, illness) are not to blame. They were the instruments of my self-created divine plan of growth. They were the actors and stage setting that I chose. A good student does not blame the lesson-giver but is grateful for the lesson and takes responsibility for the need to learn it. The fact that my lessons were difficult

attests to my need to learn them and the great potential they hold for my advancement. This theory also helps me to understand the phenomenon of repeat lessons. For if I choose to ultimately learn a lesson but refuse to learn it at one point in time, I will continue to choose similar people and circumstances to provide the opportunity again and again to learn it.

This brings forward a challenge to me, in a way greater than any other in my recovery. It is the challenge to fully accept myself and my life, which means an acceptance of the lessons I have chosen to learn. The challenge is to fully forgive myself for the misguided blaming of others and for the lessons unlearned and repeated. Perhaps the greatest effort must be expended in order to forgive myself for the suffering I have allowed myself to endure throughout these lessons.

In the past, I experienced pain because, in part, of my misunderstanding that people's actions or circumstances were directed against me personally, without my consent. A clearer perspective dictates that people's actions and the circumstances they created were not a personal vendetta against me. I chose the lesson and the other person cooperated in its execution. Within the lesson, the other person expressed herself in the highest way possible at the time. In fact, the person's actions were probably a manifestation of her/his growth process in lessons they chose for themselves. Each situation or relationship brought to awareness lessons for one or all parties and a corresponding opportunity for growth and understanding.

At this point I question the transformation of my painful feelings into judgments, such as blaming others, which requires a determination of what is or who is right or wrong. I need to and want to experience my feelings in every experience, but do I need to accept emotional injury that limits my future? Can I see other people's actions as their soul's attempt to move into a position of perfect spiritual awareness, the soul's innate perfection? If I can be accepting and grateful for these lessons and willing to learn and move on, there will be a change in my perspective. Like the vast open sky that allows storms to move in and through it without influencing its embrace of the next day's weather, I can allow myself to move through each lesson and to embrace—without judgments or prejudices based on past experiences—future lessons. For like the sky, I remain, and the stormy experiences pass. With such an understanding, my choice is not to accept emotional injury for other people's actions. My choice is to set myself and others free from the past through an increased understanding of my life's process.

An important ingredient in forgiveness is release. In this case, I release the lesson, the lesson-giver and myself. Emotions that were present and helpful throughout the lesson need not be clung to when their usefulness has passed. Release is the final step. This is the magic that allows me to move on with maximum freedom to the next lesson in my progression in spiritual unfoldment. This, the substance

that gives final form to the lesson well learned. The joy at the end of a long, hard road. The final gift that I give myself.

-Susan S., Springfield, IL.

Recovery

I weep for the sadness my soul has known
and leap for the Joy I have now
I honor the spirit inside of you
and the spirit inside of me
Side-by-side we have traveled this gnarled road
not sure of which turn to take
But the depth of commitment my soul has made
will be sure at journey's end ...
it was rewarded with Sanity

-Carol Ann F., 7/28/89, Vashon Island, WA

Step Nine: Putting Change in Motion

Have a Plan and Live Into It

One of the side-effects of having placed so much emphasis on exploring and grieving the Inner Child's history of abuse in ACA's authorized literature (ACA's BRB, Yellow Workbook) can be neglecting the recovery transformation of *making fundamental changes in our lives, including all of our relationships and our standards for conduct*. **Reparenting our Inner Child** involves goal and standards setting. Our Inner Child *wants* a way of life that succeeds in living a *happy, joyous and free* experience, day by day. Steps Six through Nine, using this more original but gentle approach to self-reflection we outline here, gives our Inner Child a *realistic plan* for recognizing and fulfilling their needs while not trampling on or taking advantage of the needs of those around us. Trust and love grows between our Inner Child and our authentic adult self, resulting in a natural bonding self-reliance and self-respect developing. Our Higher Power, by whatever name we choose, becomes an integral component of our decision-making. When we risk "walking into our recovery" by sharing our insights about our past shortcomings or mistaken ways of thinking, and then following this up with *active changes* as a result, we have recovered, become whole people, just for today. Living now as members of adult society, trustworthy, resourceful and transparent (to ourselves) is the *practical reality* of ACA/ACoA recovery. That was what our Inner Children sought when we found this fellowship and identified with the Problem or Traits, we remind ourselves.

If we've worked through the previous three Steps, Step Nine follows naturally as our Higher Power guides our reflection over time. Reviewing the Step Eight charts and Step Four inventory for

carry-over patterns we've acted out on others is a good way to begin. Working with a sponsor or fellow traveler, here is a way to approach Step Nine systematically as well as lovingly.

From 12-Steps to Freedom⁴:

“Making amends to ourselves and to others-in recovery always means taking appropriate action. Appropriate action, as defined in Step 9, is never manipulation or revenge, nor does it involve the loss of self-respect. Whether the end result is acknowledging a debt to be repaid or requires substituting honest communication for hurtful defensiveness or appeasement in a relationship makes no difference. Step 9 challenges us to act with courage. It also asks us to let our Higher Power guide us when it comes to timing our amends. We do not know in advance how our amends will be accepted or how our lives will be affected. We leave others free to respond, as is their choice. If we are willing to meet these challenges of Step 9, our very willingness takes us to fuller selfhood of sanity.

In Step 9, appropriate actions include honest self-disclosures and remorse. Even when they may involve making a difficult choice or may not produce an immediate healing in our relationships, making amends still produces feelings which are deeply satisfying and empowering. When we act correctly in Step 9, our actions are the acts of our recovered inner self. They are initiated in our hearts and carried out with the deliberate courage of a clear mind guided by our Inner Power. This is very different from merely making apologies or reacting to pressure.

There are three basic considerations to balance in each amends we make:

Our amends should mirror our innermost values, based in the character and the world-view we are committed to build in daily recovery.

*When we make amends, we must discipline ourselves to **not drive or push for a preconceived outcome**, but, instead, let the results unfold.*

*When we reach out to others, **we remember to honor and respect their circumstances as they presently exist**, and not try to push them aside.*

It is important in Step 9 to consider “the big picture” of what we’ve learned and to make a plan. If we have a plan, we’ll feel more assured when we approach people. We will see Step 9 as a process, with a beginning and an end. Not only will we be less inclined to approach Step 9 in a secretive or haphazard way, but we’ll be much less likely to postpone dealing with some on our list or to drag out the amends-making process indefinitely. Step 9 is a matrix. It is the final act of the work we began with the inventory process. If we have worked the Steps leading up to this one, we will have a pretty clear idea of who we are and where we want to go with our lives. In Step 8, we made a list of those who were harmed—neglected, abused, robbed, exploited—by our old way of living—including ourselves. Now in Step 9 we consider what to do to repair the fabric of our relationships and how to restructure our life’s path into a better future.

It's a good idea to go over our entire list with a sponsor or trusted ally as we begin this Step. Usually, it simplifies matters if we separate the list into several classes of people: Those who are still close to us; those who have moved on (or died); employers, other authorities and social ties; and those we still don't like. . . . "

Steps Ten, Eleven and Twelve

Steps Ten and Twelve are topics in Little Book 4 and Step Eleven is the focus of the first of this Little Book Series, using Guided Visualization and Active Imagination in Adult Child recovery.

Endnotes:

¹ Or in adult circumstances in which we were physically controlled or vulnerable. Gang membership, jail, military service, war, bullying, domestic violence and rape are examples of vulnerability to imprint through coercion at any age. Threats to financial or social standing for not conforming to community authority standards are also a form of subtle coercion, as are pervading prejudices to reject non-members of an "alpha" group. Adult children may be more easily "triggered" by adult-experienced pressures, but specialists in this field now agree that all human beings remain vulnerable to "brain washing" coercion and post-traumatic stress (PTSD) throughout their lives.

² 1991, The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019, by Friends in Recovery, Kathleen S., revised 2018. This Workbook is currently available on Amazon as a Kathleen S. eBook; it will be reissued in paperback in a larger format in 2021. It is also on offer for reissue through ACA WSO, although the Literature Committee process is tortuous even for established ACA material. Intergroups, Regions or Special Purpose ACA/ACoA meeting groups can obtain a link for publishing in languages other than English at no royalty cost.

³ The Recovery Wheels are included in Little Book 2 or in Handouts available at 12StepsMadeClear.com or pull this sort of information from your notes from working in *The ACA Yellow Workbook* or *Laundry List*.

⁴ Ibid, Step 9, pgs. 104-105.

ACA'S ROOTS: "INSTINCTIVE DRIVES"

"Creation gave us instincts for a purpose. Without them we wouldn't be complete human beings...These desires-for the sex relation. for material and emotional security and for companionship- are perfectly necessary and right, and surely God-given. Yet these instincts, so necessary for our existence, often far exceed their proper functions. Powerfully, blindly, many times subtly, they drive us, dominate us, and insist upon ruling our lives...When that happens, our great natural assets, the instincts, have turned into physical and mental liabilities."

Bill W. (Wilson) *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions, (1952 AA WSO)*

Laundry List Traits & "Instinctive Drives"

"Adult Child" Recovery Is What Motivated Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)

One of AA's earliest supporters, Dr. William Silkworth, M.D., in 1935, called **alcoholism** an allergic reaction to alcohol that set up a craving in people who were sensitive to it. This "allergy," as he termed it, was said to be coupled with a mental obsession to go on drinking, although to do so sets up a progressive inner conflict with a person's natural drive for self-preservation. Why would anyone keep doing something that obviously was hurting them?

In some ways, alcoholics *acted like demanding little infants in grown-up bodies*. But not like healthy infants. Alcoholics demanded what was, in fact, clearly a poison for their systems. What sane adult would behave this way? Worse yet, having gotten clean for a few days or weeks, they usually couldn't resist the impulse to start drinking again. *Lack of resistance to impulse is another trait of very small children*. These observed characteristics are analogous to what's outlined in the ACA Laundry List, self-defeating patterns we repeat, and can't seem to keep from going back to, even when we intellectually fully realize that we are hurting ourselves when we do! *That's the very definition of being an Adult Child!*

AA's co-founders, Bill W., Dr. Bob and other early AAs pondered these questions. What they were grappling with (in 1935) was a specific addictive behavior—alcoholic drinking. AA's literature is clear on the point that alcoholic drinking is *only a symptom* of an underlying disorder, but AA's founders were, after all, admitted alcoholics. This symptom, this addictive pattern, once activated, they knew from their own experiences, had a life of its own and was ruining their health, their families and their careers.

Breaking up this addictive pattern was *must do first things first* priority, not only for AA's founders, but it remains the primary purpose of the AA program and fellowship. "Underlying problems" could be looked at later, but the drinking *had* to stop! That's *singleness of purpose*.

The AA program, their initial solution as outlined in *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1938), AA's "Big Book," was a kind of *pragmatic* stopgap measure they'd come up with and then written down afterward, because they'd discovered that if they followed it, as a basic outline, they'd been able to stop drinking and stay stopped. That was the goal they set, out of necessity, for their own survival, and *it worked*.

Why It Works Isn't AA's Primary Mission; What Works Is!

The original 12-Step program, Alcoholics Anonymous, was a simple program: It had to produce *measurable results* right away, to have any credibility! The founders of AA found that *if they didn't take the first destructive act* (drink), *they wouldn't set off the self-destructive pattern* (for alcoholics, an overwhelming physical craving, once started, to keep drinking).

But in order to stay out of the old behavior (and not to take the first drink), AA's founders discovered, they had to change their whole approach to living—which meant tackling a great many "old ideas" that lead them, gradually or instantly, back into the trap of picking up that fatal drink. Here's what they discovered, as a starting point for keeping sober:

- *They needed to stick together and have a simple program they could stress and support each other to apply.*
- This program could not be just lip-service; it had to be dynamic and effective. They knew themselves well enough to know their mental obsession would creep back (because of stress or letting down their guard) to tempt them back into the old behavior.

Thus, from the onset, *12-Step programs don't claim to cure* addictions. They present a method that, if followed, is an effective way to forestall the *effects* of the condition by consciously building better alternatives (one day at a time.) This is done voluntarily by individuals and reinforced in the group and by helping others do the same.

Digging into the "Underlying Problem" of Our Disorder(s)

In AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, published seventeen years after AA was started (1952), Bill W. revisited the Steps to explore the question of what motivates people's self-destructive patterned behaviors—those "underlying problems of which alcoholic drinking is only a symptom" — which are still a focus in the fields of medicine and abnormal psychology. It is important to realize Bill W.'s motivation was driven by his desire to achieve *results*—measurable in terms of happiness and satisfaction, measurable in terms of personal effectiveness—results reported by co-members of the AA program he co-founded, and by the "spin-off" 12-Step programs that it spawned. But Bill was not alone. During the period after WWI through the 1950s, a great deal of work in psychology and in

literature focused on developing a range of new perspectives on human beings—how to motivate them, influence their opinions, change behaviors—not all of it benign¹! A great range of what we’ve come to “take for granted” in our daily life grew out of the explosion of developments from this era, especially as these developments have become integral parts of media, radio, then television, and now on line.

It is important to note that one of AA’s biggest challenges was *the contempt in which alcoholics were held by both medical/psychological professional and by church and moral leaders* at the time Alcoholics Anonymous came into existence. AA’s Big Book used language designed to “speak” to the medical and religious “powers that be (were)” in mid-20th Century English-speaking societies. *In order to not be attacked* by these powerful societal spokespeople and the institutions they represent, it was absolutely essential that AA’s program materials be presented in a manner that endorsed the conventional outlooks and thinking of the times among the upper-middle strata of the culture.

AA history² cites William James’ *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) as well as Emmet Fox’s *The Sermon on the Mount* (1934) as foundational philosophical thinking underlying AA’s approach to “a higher power, as we understood it,” which belies the *language* used in AA’s core texts. These were not the conventional *thinkers* of this era, but they were (and are) *privately supported* within AA, one on one. The psychologist who is called an “AA Founder” by Bill, Carl Jung, was not then or now a non-controversial theorist, either. Jung’s perspectives were almost expunged and replaced by Behaviorist Theory during the 1950’s through 70’s. *Resistance* to the idea that *alcoholics* “are much like other people” when sober and working a personal program runs head-on into “zero-sum³” ideas about “*created equal*.” Those who measure their *own personal value in relation to externals* (be these diplomas, licenses, or wealth, popularity, physical beauty or family history), it does *feel like potential loss* to be asked to step out of this value system and welcome into peership people they’ve felt *superior* to! AA (and Bill W.) were *upstarts*, both in the field of medicine *and in presenting alcoholics as people with a manageable illness* (instead of hopeless degenerates.) *Being better than other people* is, after all, a *kind of side-issue* in spiritual world where we are all loved and valued! AA, conceptually, challenges power structures that a great many individuals and power-groups don’t want to see altered at all!

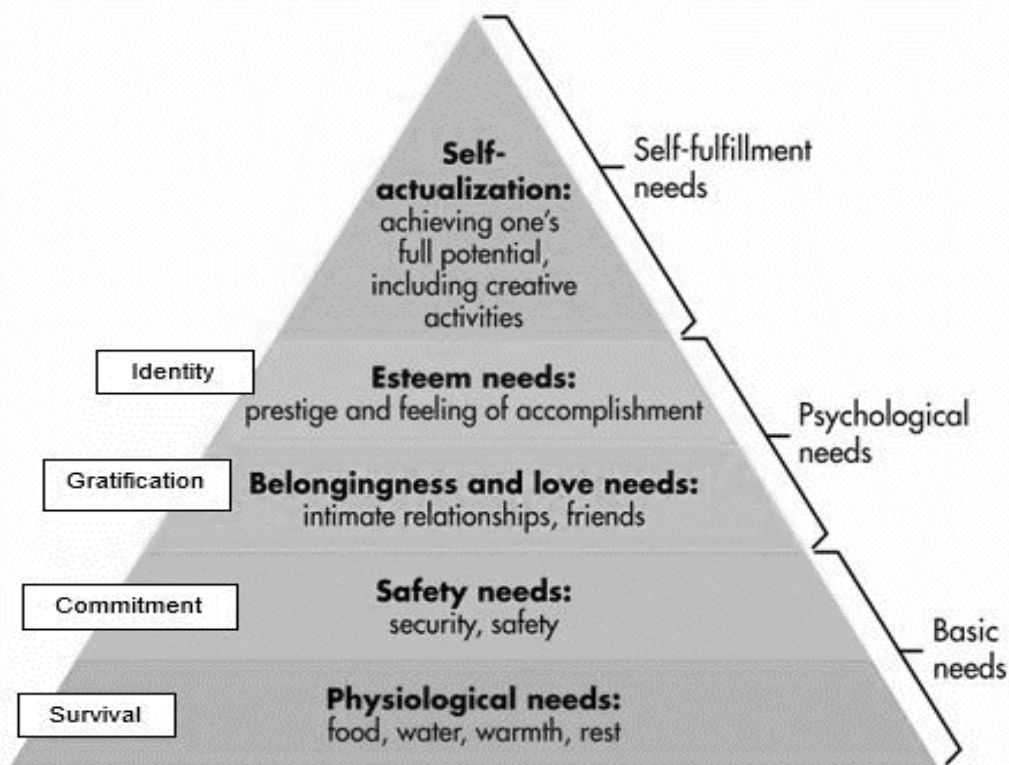
Bill was a genius, a diplomat and a heart-centered leader healer. He searched out the leaders in the field of biomedicine⁴ who shared and supported AA’s vision. He also collaborated with a recovering Catholic priest in AA *to present scientific theory in theological language* in the AA “12 X 12”⁵ (as it is called), to expand AA’s view of what the “underlying causes” of alcoholism are, *without having to argue with medical doctors*.

The proposition that everyone, alcoholic or not, has the same powerful inborn “instinctive drives” which are “hard-wired” (inborn, innate, not-going-away) and “necessary for our existence,” dovetails with a then leading-edge *psychological theory* proposed by Abraham Maslow. Maslow describes these drives as “a Hierarchy of Needs.” Bill integrates his recovery insights with Maslow’s hypothesis within AA’s framework of 12-Step recovery, asserting that these needs are innate, basic facets of “being human.” Maslow’s emphasis is geared toward understanding motivation, Bill’s toward the pragmatic ends of identifying what needs must be balanced and reconciled socially, as necessities for

healthy living. *The satisfaction of the basic drives*, Maslow adds, facilitates people toward the *fulfillment of Self Actualization*, i.e., creativity. This is a drive that only takes focus once we've come to some satisfactory accommodation with the needs that underly it, in his view. (See Chart.)

CHART: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow in his 1943 paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in *Psychological Review* posed this Hierarchy of Needs, which reads from bottom to top. His theory states that human beings have *basic physical and emotional needs* that motivate each of us. The bottom two layers of this hierarchy-pyramid, Physiological needs and Safety needs, are our first priority, followed closely by Belonging and Esteem needs. What Maslow calls Self-actualization and Self-fulfillment needs include those activities and goals that make us unique individuals—hobbies, independent study, creativity, voluntary participation in activities we choose and value for ourselves.



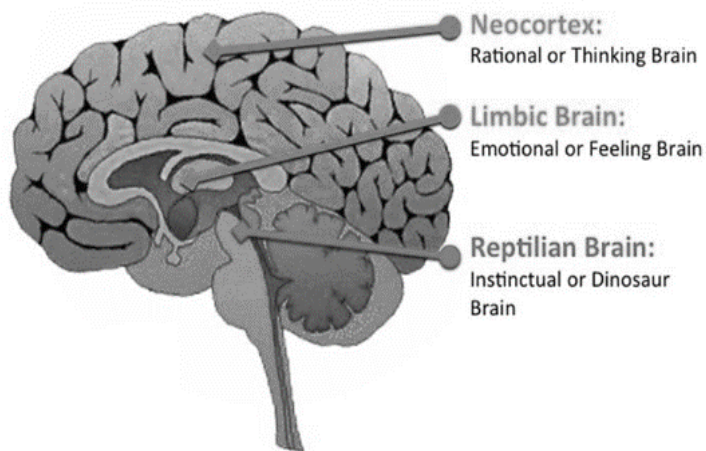
Maslow's Chart's four Basic and Psychological needs dovetail with AA's "Instinctive Drives" for **Survival**, Emotional Security (**Commitment**), Sex (**Gratification**) and Esteem (**Identity**), but Maslow adds an expanded view of what people desire, beyond these "basics," as their Self-Actualization aspirations.

Bill's focus in AA's "12X12" is to apply the 12-Steps to the task of reconciling these basic instinctive drives that have become so obviously skewed in active alcoholism, toward a moderated balance, as a necessary "first thing first" for stable sobriety and co-existence with other people. Maturity, balance, a sense of inner security are seen as *the goals of sane living*, whether addicted or not. All of

the work we do in Adult Child 12-Step program recovery derives from this perspective, built directly from Bill's original work in AA's *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*.

What we call "reclaiming and reparenting the Inner Child⁶" in ACA/ACoA is interchangeable, in terms of the architecture of the brain with what Bill addresses as "reconciling instinctive drives." Bill's work, as the anonymous primary author of this approach is not always recognized (or even known) by many writers and specialists in the field of Adult Children recovery.

Bill W. (Wilson) died in January 1971 and with him, AA's "research and theory" activities ended, too. Recent research, of course, does support and validate the point of view Bill theorized. We know now, for instance, that needs for emotional security seem to be anchored in the *mammalian* level of our brains, while certain self-preservation instincts are resident at even deeper areas within the brain⁷.



Our brains appear to contain a hierarchy of drives, each of which has a contribution to make to our lives as whole beings. Denial of these needs always produces a painful sense of inner turmoil and dis-unity. Ideas and beliefs that create a sense of shame about these needs produce inner conflict. Unresolved, stymied core drives prompt us to act self-destructively or they damage our health. Instead of repressing our biologically rooted drives, 12-Step recovery

first helps us to a) identify the destructive behavior, then, b) diagram inner sources of conflict and shame, and c) seek healthy ways to satisfy these drives without unduly imposing on others.

Integrating New Insight & Science is ACA Recovery

As a result of medical and neurological research, we are coming to better understand many of the processes that AA founders could only guess at and wonder about. Where, in previous generations, we were pressured to join in using *denial as a solution* to "keep the lid" on situations that we had no way in science or in moral theory to make sense of let alone heal, we are making real progress, biologically, to find better solutions. These new insights are becoming gradually accepted as more wholesome and effective approaches by society at large⁸.

We know that our need to bond has hormonal roots.⁹ Those "triggers" early AA's could *see acted out* but couldn't connect to family patterning and dysfunction now are gradually being plotted and unmasked. We now know that our own *instinctive self-protective fight-flight-freeze*¹⁰ "inner guardian" shuts off our thinking brain and "goes on automatic," acts from deep (non-verbal) impulses to

“take care of us” when we are triggered. We now know that these “gut level” responses can be re-negotiated and have been—without fully understand how and why—by using the 12-Step program tools and meetings.. We’ve got more options.

We’ve also got more challenges. Again, we try to make it clear that these fellowships and the tools—therapies, medical treatments, meditation practices, and all the whole spectrum of support—aren’t *cures* to personal or world dysfunction. They are *a method*, a way to organize the *ingredients* we’ve been challenged to sort into *a nourishing recipe for living now*. What we “cook up,” is our unique contribution to this day’s serving of love and care that only we can bring!

Exercise 2. We Can Practice Gratitude

- ✓ Among the “learning deficits”¹¹ a lot of us have—but don’t realize we have—is our innate ability to “re-program” our own thinking as well as our habitual behaviors. While most of us can remember how we taught ourselves certain skills—like using a cell phone or a computer—that we now “just do” without thinking about it, we may or may not associate this kind of “practiced learning” with all kinds of *habits*. Think about it for a moment: How many things do you do, on a daily basis, that you weren’t born knowing how to do (but, instead, had to learn)? Just about everything, right? Turning on and off the lights, locking and unlocking doors, telling time from a clock, putting on your clothes—the list goes on and on!
- ✓ Skill-building and habit-formation are keys achievement. Olympic athletes are one group. Anyone who has learned to play a musical instrument is another group. Just about any skill that requires fine-tuned precision, step by step, depends on *developing a system of habits that we practice over and over again*. But how many of us know that we can train our thinking in a similar way, just as we train our muscle groups to swim or walk a balance, or teach our fingers to find frets? In very similar ways, we can *practice* attitudes and outlooks—*mental* habits—to replace the “empty spaces” where we didn’t get the parenting we need, or to break up and replace old neurological “ruts” of anger or hopelessness. Here’s some suggestions to use:

Exercise 3. Think of Three Things

1. When you get up in the morning, have a chat with your Higher Power and invite your Inner Child to take the lead,
2. Think of three things you are grateful for today. These can be things that you are always grateful for—like, for example, not being in jail (if you’re not), or not being in some particular city or neighborhood or household that you really are glad to be away from. Then think of something, in the present, right now, that you are grateful for.
3. Say all of these things, both to your HP and to your Inner Child,

- a. “Good morning, HP (Inner Child!) I am grateful that I am not (fill in the blank—what place or a condition, illness)
 - b. **and I am grateful that I** (fill in the blank—have gotten over something or escaped)
 - c. **and I am grateful because** (fill in the blank—with something you think up, right now.)”
4. Do this every day for two weeks. See what happens. Do you notice a change in your outlook? Has anything positive happened that you find surprising? Acknowledge any changes and share what you’ve found out with another human being. This is a Step Two Exercise. You can change the wording or do it before you go to bed, instead.

Exercise 4. Pray for Strangers¹²

- ✓ Charlie B., one of AA's original 100 members, started AA in the Kingdom of Tonga during WWII. He was active in Service in the San Francisco Bay Area until his death in 1986. He shared this favorite 12-Step exercise with us. This is a way to redesign our mental programming through our conscious choice:
 1. When you are at a meeting, look around the room and remember what one or two of the people look like. (This works on ZOOM, too!)
 2. The ones you want to remember are people you don't have any relationship with or attraction towards. Perfect strangers are your best bet, but, in any case, stay away from anyone you'd like to pick up or who you think might have something you could use.
 3. When you get home, make a picture of them in your mind and pray for them to have all the things you'd like to have yourself.
 4. Do this for different people every time you go to a meeting. See what happens.

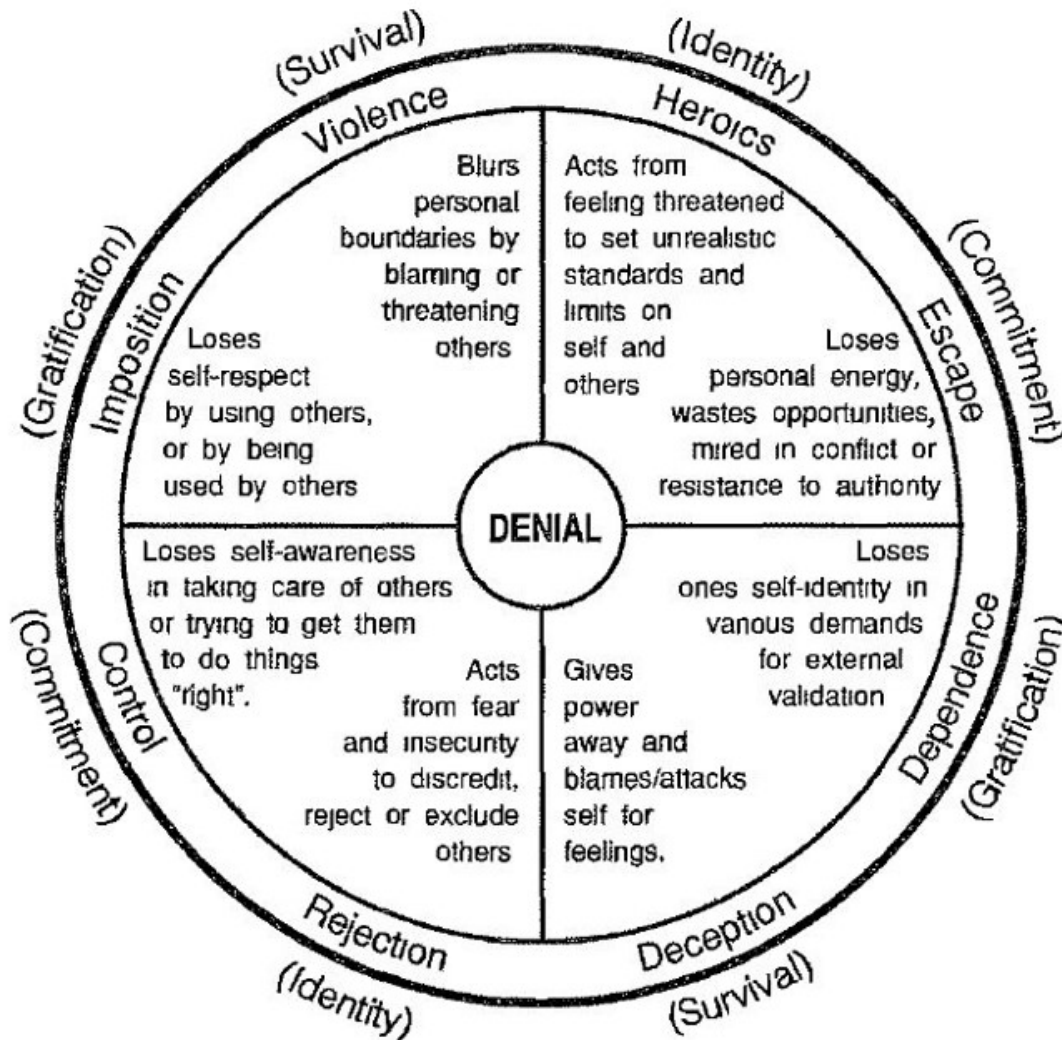
Inner Children Adapt to Dysfunction Dysfunctionally

When our Inner Child’s instinctive drives are *shamed or invalidated* by our caregivers, our Authentic Self is plunged into self-doubt. The drives are undeniable. They don’t disappear just because a parent-figure is so caught up in dealing with a chaotic household situation they want to put a needy child “on hold” instead of having time for us. A bottle propped up for us on a pillow in a crib may be enough to keep us fed, but it’s not a substitute for companionship! Our Inner Child adapts—we’re good at that, or we wouldn’t be here, right? But every break in our human-to-human connections—being understood, affirmed, instructed, and enjoyed—cuts into how successful we feel ourselves to be. We, as small children, are born with a survival instinct that is a drive to learn, to master skills, get successful, and we measure ourselves through the feedback we receive! We feel inadequate when

we don't get enthusiastic approval from our caregivers, and, later, from our teachers or from other people we have come to trust. We can, of course, be manipulated by this responsiveness that is innate. But we don't start out as burnouts. We come into this life full of trust and enthusiasm, trying our best to learn and grow. Here a chart that is an overview of how *unmet needs* may turn into *issues* in recovery:

"Nearly every serious emotional problem can be seen as a case of misdirected instinct."¹³

3 Survival, Commitment, Gratification and Identity Are hard-wired instincts!¹⁴



Laundry List Traits Are Effects of "Instinctive Drives" Not Integrated

It is a good idea to review the ACA Laundry Lists of dysfunctional traits to identify which core instinctive need motivates our Inner Child's behaviors.

- If we are, for example, **compulsive “people-pleasers,”** are we motivated by fear of abandonment (instinct for commitment) and a need for “strokes” (gratification)?
- Do our **reactions to authority** (being told what to do or what to think) instantly show up as arguing (a form of commitment, too!)
- Do we **find fault** with those who present a well-honed appearance because we’ve learned we can’t trust anybody (identity)?

Restoring clarity (Step Two) goes hand in hand with being able to identify motivates—our own and other people’s. Everyone wants to satisfy or to be reassured about these core needs! We all have them. Acceptance of what we cannot change starts with realizing that these needs are *normal, wholesome, good!* Self-acceptance starts here, and so does compassion, clarity and peace of mind.

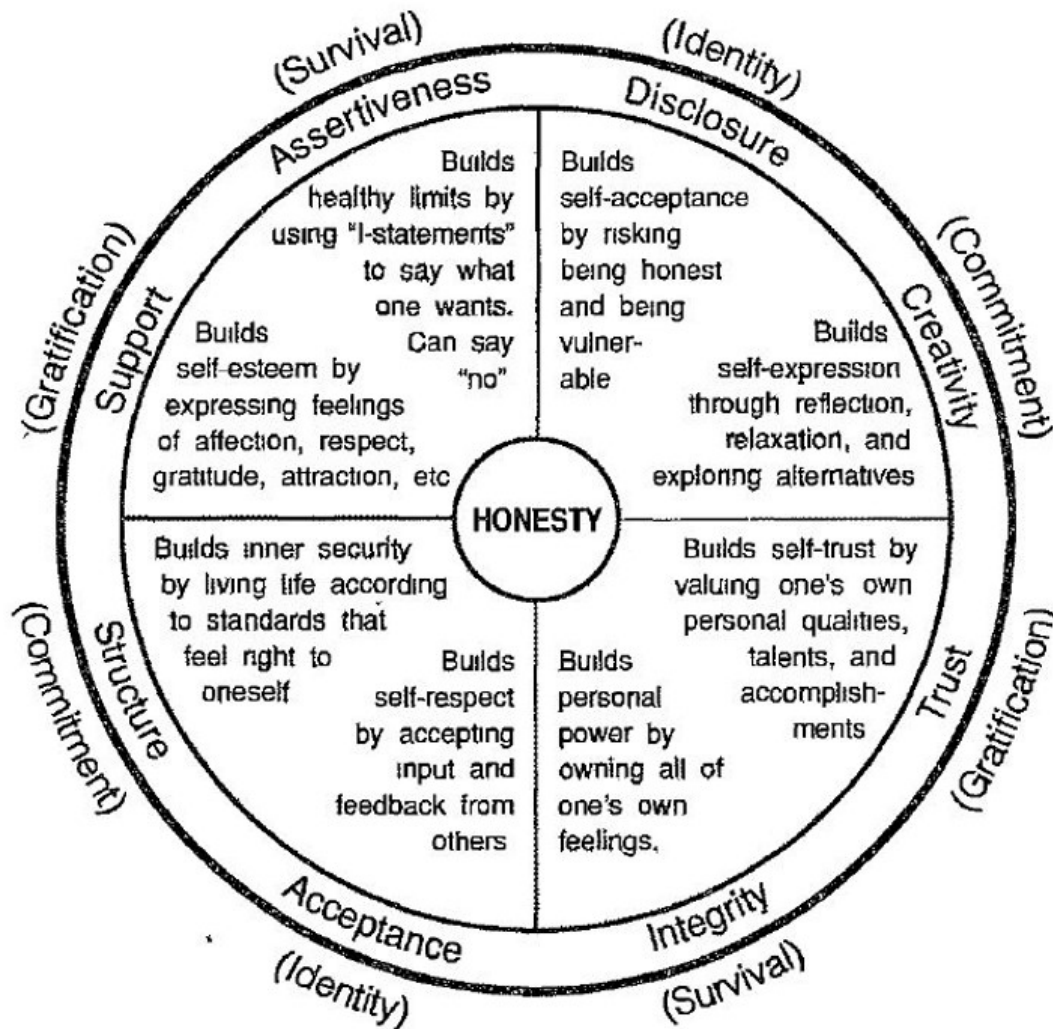
Make a Chart of “Traits” Seen As “Instincts Out of Balance”

1. Look at any three “Laundry List” Traits you identify as your personal legacy of dysfunction (what you do, how you act out) and decide which of the Instinctive Drives you are trying to satisfy (or deny,) based on “rings as bell” with you, looking over the first chart (above.) There is no “right” answer in this. It’s not unusual for more than one of our core needs to be involved. Confusion and “smearing” needs into each other is what we’ve done, working in an atmosphere of family denial or peer pressure! Try this **Step Two exercise** and see what happens:
2. Write a short statement, based on the Affirmative Attitudes Chart (below) that acknowledges your basic need (for whatever you are trying to gain, or, if you are trying to avoid being hurt, for your right to be *safe and accepted without threats*).
3. Say this *affirmation* at least 20 times a day, preferably when you first get up, for two weeks.
4. Say this affirmation when you are “triggered” to fall into acting on the Trait, whenever that happens. Repeat it at least 3 times, looking into a mirror, if that’s possible.
5. Write it down and put it somewhere you will see it (but not somewhere anyone who will make fun of you for doing this will have access to it.)

After two weeks, review the “traits” and notice if you’ve a) *behaved differently* as a result of this exercise, b) *feel stronger and more confident* as a result, c) *have gotten clearer* on your own motivations when it comes to identifying “triggers.” If you’ve gotten good results, thank your HP!

Affirmative, Positive Attitudes Integrate Our Traits in Healthy Living

Working from the standpoint that our needs are *normal, hard-wired features of ourselves*, it ceases to be hard work to grow toward “reparented” behaviors and attitudes. We can replace dysfunctional patterns when we adopt perspectives that **affirm our drives as part of who we are**.



Endnotes:

¹ Industrial psychology, public relations, advertizing, propaganda are also off-shoots of this field of study, all generally with a focus on *controlling* large groups or sub-groups by government or commercial interest-factions who were/are primarily interested in achieving their own aims, not necessarily those which are beneficial to those people.

² *AA the Way It Began*, Bill Pittman (1988) details the early development of “AA thought” through interviews and first-hand exploration of AA Archive materials while he was a “special worker” at AA WSO in NYC.

³ “Zero sum” gain (or games) is a math concept that proposes that if one person gains, the other must lose. The sum is equal to 100%, so any increase on one side has to be counterbalanced a like loss on the other. This kind of thinking does not allow for everybody “getting better” simultaneously. Hierarchies where there can only one “on top” imply and foster this kind of thinking.

⁴ Notably, Humphry Osmond, MD and Abram Hoffer, MD, both psychiatrists and researchers in treating mental illness with vitamins and psychedelics. AA’s Board of Trustees also included psychologists and medical doctors.

⁵ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952)

⁶ Note to Adult Child Co-Members of AA/NA/ACA: Bill W. (Wilson) did not use exactly these terms in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952). We’ve updated his terms and added some helpful new information that furthers this work. Remember, in 1952, *neuroscience didn’t exist*. MRIs hadn’t yet been invented. Bill *intuited* what he calls “*the drives for physical and emotional security, sex and social standing.*” *Science has since validated the thrust of Bill’s insights* and how these bear upon recovery. Intuition and science are partners, not adversaries, in breaking new ground. In Step Eight, Bill states, . . .” *we should nevertheless make an accurate and really exhaustive survey of our past life . . . In many instances we shall find that though the harm done others has not been great, the emotional harm we have done ourselves has. Very deep, sometimes quite forgotten, damaging emotional conflicts persist below the level of consciousness. At the time of these occurrences, they may actually have given our emotions violent twists which have since discolored our personalities and altered our lives for the worse.*” Bill intuitively anticipated what we now understand as “reparenting” our Inner Child-self, using AA/ACA’s 12-Steps. The “underlying issues” Bill cites in AA are the primary focus of Adult Child recovery.

⁷ Bruce D. has been my editor since 2005. Where he disagrees, his valued comments are included in these notes. Editor BD comment: “I’m curious as to where things are anchored in the brain matter to anyone except brain surgeons or psychology theorists. I disagree! I think new insight and science are totally out of place in 12-step recovery programs! We recover through practicing spiritual principals, not through knowledge or science.”

⁸ Editor BD comment: “Are we really? It seems we’re trying to impose our thoughts onto spirituality and define spiritual principals according to human thought, science, and theories rather than truths that are mysteries brought to us by God. I think the more we depend on ourselves, the more we need God.”

⁹ Oxytocin is the name of this hormone. See: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/feb08/oxytocin> Normal mammal-parents produce this hormone while giving birth and nursing their offspring, and this stimulates the baby’s production of the same hormone. Bonding, love and happy contentment are associated with presence of this chemical. Adrenal hormones produced by fear, anxiety, pain reduce or supplant this channel of production in both mother and child.

¹⁰ A portion of our mammalian mid-brain, the amygdala, “emotional response center,” shuts down the “thinking” (frontal cortex) portions of our brain when a threat “triggers” it, and keys in instinctive “fight-flight-freeze” (primitive, reptilian brain) reaction—thus we are hyper-aware of what “triggers” us, but *not conscious* of what we do, once the “triggered” reaction is activated. See <https://www.healthline.com/health/stress/amygdala-hijack>

¹¹ John and Linda Friel, PhD, M.A., *Adult Children the Secrets of Dysfunctional Families* (1988) coined the term “learning deficits” to describe the “blank spots” where skills and functional perspectives that human children learn as a matter of routine development are simply left out. Skills such as “use your words” to resolve misunderstandings, negotiating taking turns with a prized plaything or sharing out a pie equably—or even knowing that such skills exist!—are common “blank spaces” within individuals who grew up in a chaotic, unsettled household where there was little structure and guidance from parent-figures, or in war-torn communities where everyone’s survival is at risk.

¹² “Pray for Strangers” is used with permission from Step Twelve of *12-Steps to Freedom, a Recovery Workbook* (1991, 2018) Friends in Recovery, Kathleen S., ACA Intergroups.

¹³ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, Step 4, paragraph 2.

¹⁴ These Charts, from *12-Steps to Freedom* (1991, 2018), Step One and Step Nine, are used with permission.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

6. TOXIC CODEPENDENCY

“People Don’t Change Behaviors That Work”

Codependency is a condition where who I believe I am depends upon other people being the way they are.

Here’s an example of codependency most of us will recognize: In situations where an alcoholic (parent, spouse or offspring) exists, being a *codependent caretaker* is, in fact, necessary—to “keep the lid on,” “make excuses for lapses,” “cover up with lies and false appearances.” But, if the alcoholic sobers up (or becomes so unruly that it is no longer possible to stay), the codependent’s challenge is to redefine what is *sane* “caretaking” and to let go of what is not. Taking care of a baby doesn’t “carry over” to caring for a maturing family member or a spouse. Lying or presenting false appearances isn’t a healthy way to live. *Recovering* from codependent patterns is discovering the *authentic self’s roles and responsibilities and learning how to identify and own these boundaries in daily living.*

Codependency is a serious impediment to healthy living, but it is a condition that can be treated and replaced with wholesome behaviors that we choose if we are willing to identify *our end* of these problems and use the tools available let go of the “hooks” that tie us to dysfunctional roles and relationships. This isn’t easy! But our experience tells us it is possible, if we are willing to do the work.

Toxic codependency, however, is a different kettle of fish! A *toxic* codependent pattern is one where the codependent person (or institution) isn’t willing to let the one(s) they “caretake” get well and no longer “need” the care. Most of us are familiar with classic “enablers.” Enablers are those who sabotage recovery in order to not have to let go of their own end of the dynamic. “You can have just one, can’t you?” Insisting on the “right” to create situations to “trigger” relapse or trying to manipulate the caretaker into “giving me another chance” are all classic parts of the addiction cycle, long identified in substance abuse treatment as factors in chronic addiction and relapse.

In Adult Children recovery, we, of necessity, enlarge the scope of the kinds of disorders that play out, not just in our family histories, but in our communities and cultures, right up into the present. *Toxic* codependency exists when the “caretaker” *gains* something—money, property, prestige—by keeping *things as they are*, and actively resists input that challenges this stance. This dynamic, where those in charge (of the bank account, or of the government, in a larger frame!) are very committed to keeping their roles or privileges and are willing to sacrifice the welfare of others in order to do so.

Rarely, however, is this stated openly! Justification and false appearances are more the rule.

“Coalitions of Dysfunction” Happen in Recovery Fellowships

Here’s a clue: 12-Step programs are built of *suggested Steps to recovery*. “Suggested” is the operational word. 12-Step fellowships, however, are made up of *people*, individual human beings, all of whom have, to one extent or another, admitted their lives are *unmanageable*. 12-Step programs don’t screen their membership. Anyone who says they are a member, is a member! Are all of these human beings *open to suggestions*? We don’t know the answer to this questions—and we don’t have to know it in order to get well, personally.

“Other People” in Service Roles

Here’s an example: In a Central California Intergroup, a tiny group of “oldtimers” took over the Service Structure and passed the roles of “chairperson,” “treasurer,” “delegate,” and so forth, around among themselves for several years. One member who happened to own a business in the community that might (or might not) offer employment to a “newcomer” was, along with their spouse and their sponsees, at the center of this clique. They did all the Public Information presentations to community service groups; they interacted on the fellowship’s behalf with social services, the courts and hospitals. The member who owned the community business bought two or three TVs to be raffled off at holiday speaker-meeting gatherings. Everything was *fine*. *Just fine!* The fellowship didn’t grow much—but that was because “*A lot of newcomers are just flakes!*” they told each other, shaking their heads. “*If we don’t do it, this fellowship will die!*” So they saw themselves as *heroes* and *warriors* not as appreciated as they deserved.

(Gee. Does this remind you of anything? *A dysfunctional family system?* Huh!)

It isn’t rare that this sort of dynamic crops up in 12-Step programs. Being “big shots” or indispensable hero/warriors is a “quick and dirty” way to justify looking down (or getting rid of) people who aren’t respectful enough or who vie for leadership. These are core Step Six and Tradition Six issues—to be tackled honestly, with gentleness, humor, love and respect, or not.

Is it a big surprise that when this group was challenged by a member who was a new delegate at an IG meeting, “*Hey! What about the Twelve Traditions and the Service guidelines?*” that the response was, “*Well, we are autonomous! We do as we see fit!*”? The meeting delegate could either quit or buy into the group’s rationalization. “Autonomy” was perverted to justify a dysfunctional power/control pattern. This situation went on with fewer and fewer meetings participating with delegates.

Who suffers? People seeking recovery, of course—but *also the clique of big shots did*, as well! The integrity of the 12-Step *process* leaves the rooms when hypocrisy replaces spirituality. Rotation of leadership is *supposed* to prevent leadership stagnation and “bigshot-ism”, but this doesn’t always happen, notably in fellowships where personal substance abuse/addiction are not the *primary* focus.

ACA/ACoA fellowships are challenged, by definition, to face *toxic control codependency and power addictions*. These are the *underlying issues*, core dysfunctional patterns, that have made our lives, and our world, unlivable.

Here's the bottom line: It only matters if we, personally, are open to applying all of these suggested Step to ourselves, as a first thing first. We come to ACA/ACoA for *personal recovery*, right? If we do that, then the Promises² *are promises!* We will "intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us," if we do what it takes to tackle, first and foremost, the anxieties, cowardice, aggression, panic and confusion that brought us to these programs, we will gain poise, insight and courage to take a useful part in how we, personally, contribute to bringing action and understanding to these challenging issues.

The Biggest Gift: "God as We Understand God."

If there were *just one contribution* that 12-Step programs have made to the great cause of healing and empowerment "for those [of us] who still suffer," it is probably the wording tacked on at the end of Step Three: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understand God."

We've put detailed discussion about using Step Three (and Eleven) here in this section where we are focusing on Toxic Codependency and the problems we encounter in society.

The reason? Most of us really don't come to grips with "God, *as we understand God*" issues immediately when we come into 12-Step recovery, except, perhaps, to *resist* either "the whole idea," or to brush over thinking about what our concepts really are. We all have been *told* a lot about "God." Some of us have tried to live up to various codes, preformed rituals, tried to get "God" to do "God's end" of assorted bargains we've tried to strike, to get out of tight spots or to get better outcomes in circumstances of great pain, and, the fact is that most of us have felt profoundly let down. We either blamed ourselves (which is most usual), or we have blamed "God" and have nursed up pretty deep grudges toward whatever our "old idea" about our HP! Isn't that futility a big part of what brought us into these rooms?

We are advised to "*not worry about all of that, just for now.*" Just come to the meetings and put off trying to get into what may, in fact, be a deep, painful, confusing snarl of fear, shame and dread. OK, so far, so good!

Now we are here, reading this paragraph, trying to figure out how to deal *lovingly* with what sounds and feels like *a lot of the same old stuff we couldn't put up with*, going on **in the meetings! Or in the Service Structure. Or at the job, on the street, in the relationships we have (or want to have—or want to get out of!)**

Someone says, “Oh, just turn that all over to God!”

Right! How did that work for us, in the past?³ So, then, we’re at a kind of crisis-turning-point in our personal recovery. Is this program and this fellowship going to be *just another* dead-end, where we’ve gone as far as we can go? Many of us get to this point, including a majority of AA/NA members who “go out” after years of what appeared (to them as well as to their friends) *contented clean and sober time*. But there is secret that anyone who is in this kind of spot can master, if they can open up their mind and not let the pride of “I know it all” stand in the way: It’s time to take a real look at that little phrase, “*as we understand God*,” and probably realize **that we don’t!**

In the original 12-Step programs, a lot of us have heard, or even been told, to sit down with a piece of paper and write out a definition of a Higher Power *that loves me, that won’t abandon me, that can and will help, see me through, whatever I’m facing*: In short, in 12-Step programs, **I am free to develop a personal relationship with a Higher Power that I can trust!**

How many of us have taken that advice *genuinely to heart*⁴? The secret solution: **Do it. Now.**

Almost all of us discover that our concepts of “God”—Higher Power, authority, flesh-and-blood father-figures, “right and wrong,”—are pretty mixed into each other, or, if we’ve rejected the “father-god” religions, we may be pretty unwilling to look at what is we actually do believe we can trust and rely upon, as a source of personal power and guidance for living. It is a real challenge to reparent ourselves with standards and boundaries we can embrace, especially if we find ourselves “reaching back” into old dysfunctional patterns—rejection, running away, giving up—when it comes to resolving conflicts or standing up for ourselves. If we *conflate* a mean, unforgiving, un-please-able concept of *authority* with “something I cannot change,” it may be impossible to not fall back into old triggered “victim/aggressor” behaviors, ourselves!

“Spirituality vs. “Old Ideas” are Core Step Three Challenges

In 12-Step recovery, we are asked “*to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God [HP] as we understand God [HP]*”⁵. This word, “God,” isn’t double-talk. *Spirituality*, (or if you prefer, the life force, quantum mechanics, or seen another way, it’s a miracle or magic!) in the adventure of ACA/ACoA. **Here are some “fresh ideas” to consider when considering how we understand HP:**

- *Recovery*, as a state of consciousness, is the HP that lives *through* each of us, creatively, from a relaxed, unthreatened, undefended awareness, which results, basically, from recognizing and meeting our basic instinct-anchored needs.
- “Reparenting” is our voluntary action to discover and rebalance these core needs, hone the skills required to “own our space,” and, from this *center of poised identity*, express our gifts and make our contributions.
- *Recovery* is the lifeforce in us; it is what *wants* to love, achieve and grow. Chinese sages called this force the Tao. Other philosophies and religions call this *source* by

different names, or *individualize* it as “God,” “Allah,” “Goddess,” but in 12-Step programs, we are free to understand it as we will.

“Toxic Spill” from Mean, Demanding, Concepts of God

Does our fresh new “*spirituality angle*” require us to *ignore* dysfunctional behavior, to knuckle under, get in line, endure exploitation and invalidation? No. Not at all.

The “old ideas” deeply imbedded in the doctrines of some major religions that have “spilled over” into a great many institutions, large and small, and penetrated deeply into cultures everywhere. We’ve been conditioned to “buy” these ideas as “the will of God [HP.]”

These are pretty *limiting* ideas! How come we have them?. When we reflect on how *precarious* human survival has been down through history, it’s easy to see that these ideas are directed to a particular concept of “god”—a “god” who punishes, makes demands, isn’t necessarily always on your side, even if you do your best. These ideas are designed to get people to stick together through circumstances that are dangerous, frustrating and not possible to challenge or escape. This is, in effect, an “accept the things we cannot change;” definition of “god.” Since “god” is defined as “all powerful,” thus, to be blamed (or credited) with putting us in whatever mess we are in, we told this is “*god’s will.*” Take it or be damned. Is sticking together and waiting it out better than rebellion or death?

When Roman soldiers or Assyrian Kings ran the world and you were a part of a tribe that had been occupied or enslaved, these *were, in fact,* your choices! Sticking together and maintaining the integrity of the group (tribe), is *an instinctively rooted* survival drive that was (and still is) tapped by tying a group’s identity to a *unifying* concept (of “god,” or a cause.) Since, even a mean, vengeful god-concept like this, after all, “*can relent and save them, in the end,*” (according to their faith.) A unifying concept is a necessary ingredient for hope. It bonds us in mutual support, especially under stress.

**Everybody’s Inner Child, then, no less than now, wants to be
“*saved, in the end,*” when in difficult circumstances!**

**Looked at this way, a demanding, punishing concept of “god” was
a good survival “parenting” message a tribe during enslavement!**

But does it serve me now?

**A Step Six analysis of what worked in the past compared to now
helps with “*Higher Power as we understand HP*” in Step Three.**

Do “Old Ideas” Anchor and Spread Dysfunction?

Anchoring “parenting” messages to concepts of a HP is what we all do.

As babies, we are completely dependent on our parent(s.) We biologically can’t survive without care, care for period on *years.* Even if we are born in a region where food is plentiful, the climate mild and predators scarce, *parenting* is something we are biochemically set up *to accept* and *to do,* in turn,

as we mature. As a life-form, how humans care for and how they instruct their babies is *an inescapable* “first things first” core issue—for each of us, certainly—but, in a larger frame, for the *viability of our species* (and this planet.) *Functional parenting* includes cultural concepts that are the “wallpaper” we see, from birth. So, yes, indeed, *dysfunctional* (cruel, vindictive, unreliable) *beliefs about what to expect from a father-god concept* are as “contagious” as smallpox! In cultures that *personify the Life Force as a “father-being,”* not only does how “He” is characterized *spill over* into how we conceive “authorities,” but flesh and blood fathers’ behaviors are modeled from this “wallpaper” view.

Positive Concepts to Work From in Reparenting

Let’s take a minute to see what we’re working toward, in recovery goals. Without going into detail about defining “functional” right now, how do we imagine the world would be, if we all got rid of dysfunctional self-defeating false beliefs and behaviors? Here’s an anthropological perspective that’s been in play and historically approached in some epochs⁶):

- *Functional* families, communities and cultures are “parenting” circles we enter at birth.
- *Functional* parents/care givers provide our physical and emotional needs, keep us safe and direct the *functional* messages and care we receive from extended family and community resources.
- Thus, gradually, we are *integrated* into a safe, sustainable set of skills and the “rules” for respectful conduct within our day-to-day experience as we grow and develop. We are the focus, to start with, as children, and the sources, as adults.

What Is the Dynamic We Live In Here and Now?

Some of us, if we’re honest, have to admit we’ve been taught to use other people’s hopes as fantasies in order to take advantage of them. “Manage the suckers,” may sound crass, but it the way advertisers see a lot of us. Nobody wants to be “played.” Some of us have been taught, “Don’t be foolish!” messages that make it difficult to experiment with a HP concept that is genuinely caring and powerful enough to prevail under all circumstances! Our authentic self may ask a lot of us!

In recovery, we are asked to look squarely at the dynamics of every situation and relationship we are in and make no excuses, tell ourselves no lies, about what we see that’s being acted out. If we are being manipulated by a false front, even if there’s a lot of peer pressure behind it, what then?

Just as in Al Anon’s version of working the 12-Steps, we need to *detach* ourselves, emotionally and mentally from what’s dysfunctional within the situation—persons, places and things.

Does this mean *leave*? Not necessarily. Our participation may be vital to the outcome—just as a caregiver’s role is essential to an infant child. What follows, once we have made ourselves as safe and comfortable as we need to be in order to be stable, is a matter of what we have to give, or what

justice guides us to contribute to each and every situation. That's the "*practice these principles in all our affairs*" feature of Step Twelve.

Am I suggesting we try to "*change people*"? No. I'm suggesting we "*stick with the winners*" (if there are any—and there surely are!) in order to get the support we need to work our own program of recovery, and thus, receive and heed the guidance that exists (and is available to us if we will insist on being willing to receive it), so that we make the contribution we have to make, whatever that turns out to be. Our contribution is to *life*, just as it is when we feed or care for a loved child or companion. It is what *we want to give* that we're contributing. It is honoring the guidance we are given, when we follow through. Does that make a difference? It makes a difference to *us!* Does it make a difference *in the world?* The only way to find that out, is to risk living authentically.

Most of us, certainly most of us in 12-Step program recovery, have had the experience of having our care rejected. Not everyone is open. "*Those are the breaks!*" Does that mean we should expect to lose, to not be heard, or to be robbed, exploited, ganged up on or ridiculed? No, not at all. In the

AA



version of the Promises, a paragraph or two before the list, it says, "*The spiritual life is not a theory. We have to live it.*" That's what we *get to do*. One day at a time. What follows are my impressions of some toxic forms of codependence that are rarely talked about but should be recognized for what they are. Where we, as individuals and as a fellowship, go from there remain in the "*more will be revealed*" realm of our experience, in the care and with the direction of a loving Higher Power.

Money, Property and Prestige (Step Six and Tradition Six Issues)

Rationalization is a liability: "*Everybody does it,*" "*What did you expect?*" "*It's only human nature,*" are all what the AA program calls *half-measures* [that] *avail us nothing*. Is this *less true* when our issue isn't alcoholic drinking (or drug addiction, gambling or over-eating)? It's pretty easy to spot the effects of those substance abuse issues (gambling = money, a quite tangible substance, too!) But what about *prejudices*? What about making those we don't agree with *outcasts*? What about . . . *being in charge*?

A great many mean, hard-hearted, *defensive behaviors* fall under the category "*effects of growing up in an alcoholic/dysfunctional family.*" Among the *toxic* codependency coping strategies are just about all of those that *grab control and fight to keep it*. What makes these codependencies *toxic (poisonous)* is the fact that these are *powerful, effective behaviors*, if, in the practical sense that those who employ them end up with *money, property and prestige*, greater than they might if they hadn't struggled to get, and to keep them. It isn't easy to give up *behaviors that work!* It isn't even easy to see *why* it might be desirable to do so.

Illustrative stories come to mind:

Consider Thad, a director of a college theatre program who believed, **“People won’t work hard to make this production wonderful unless they are driven mercilessly!”** So he adopted a style that could be best described as “unpleasable.” He found fault, pushed for more effort, “snapped the whip” every hour of every day in rehearsal and production. The theatre company, being a dedicated group of artists and professionals, put up with this abuse, and despite it, put in the effort necessary to make the play a success **But the director misinterpreted this outcome. He took the production’s success as the result of his berating demands!**

Thus, over a period of a couple of seasons—all great successes—he was fired and replaced. **He felt very badly treated by the group!**

Why is Thad so closed-minded? As an adult child, can we speculate that he may *fear that he won’t be needed* unless he intimidates those he directs? He may be replicating a parental trait he learned from a perfectionist who made him “snap to” unremitting demands. Or he may have taken up this style competitively, with peers or siblings. We can’t really know where the roots of Thad’s harsh style of authority come from. The theatre company, who tried so hard to win his trust because they valued his creativity, couldn’t penetrate his defensive attitude—although they tried! Thad’s just stuck, feeling more and more contemptuous of his peers and justified in rejecting them, out of self-defense and righteousness. That’s how he ended up lonely, bitter, only able to tolerate people who he considers “inferiors” (high school kids) he can control.

- ✓ If Thad were to come into an ACA/ACoA group where he made a commitment to finding the roots of his isolation, he might find a sponsor who would suggest that Thad might look at his situation as an issue with Step Six (if he can’t see it as a Step One behavior that’s making his life unmanageable.)
- ✓ Were Thad to look at his own coping mechanisms (that might have been lifesavers in dysfunctional circumstances in his past, but which are self-isolating liabilities in the present), then, Thad’s Inner Child would have an opportunity to retrieve memories to illustrate how he’d coped and survived by becoming a fault-finder, and impossible to really please. It worked, and made him safe, but not very loveable?
- ✓ Thad’s concept of a Higher Power is very much in question, here. What if Thad took off his spikey shell, would Thad’s current Higher Power just stand by and watch those other hard-hearted creatures out there just eat him like a scallop?

That’s the real, heart-clenching fear, isn’t it? *“Who would I be if I stepped out from behind this mask, took off my armor, let myself be Little Thaddy in this unsafe world?”* (“So, let’s go back to Step Two?” the sponsor suggests, and if Thaddy is willing and able to accept that suggestion, recovering adult Thad has already made a great deal of progress in opening up his mind!)

This is an illustration of how “working the program” works, issue by issue, Step by Step. Thad and Little Thaddy *are* in control, all the way. If we aren’t open to reflecting on how frustrating patterns *are* cemented to us by *our part* (what we do and/or what we believe), these patterns *can’t go away because we remain “hooked” to them!* This is the self-responsible view of Steps Four through Nine

that is so lastingly available in our recovery. If we can't relate to this suggestion now, then we may be, later on. Or maybe they won't be. No one is going to *make* Thad and Thaddy take down the walls that lock out other people. *We share how we've found it possible to replace our own limiting or harmful patterns, as sponsors and as fellow travelers. , Ours is always a program of attraction not promotion*⁷.



Here's another illustration those familiar with the New Testament will recognize:

*“It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich [person] to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”
(Mathew 19:24)*

We often do confuse our innate needs for *physical security*—our bodily needs—*being hungry, cold, naked* with “*What money can buy.*” That’s a very easy jump to make, psychologically. But we can’t eat *money!* “*Physical security*” equals “*having enough,*” “*being comfortable, safe,*” “*not anticipating a threat.*” But *how much is enough?* What is an adequate amount of reserve (to gain or to sustain our lifestyle, or to meet potential disasters)?

These are questions everyone must answer. In many cultures, there’s a great deal of pressure to take the stance: “*There’s never too much!*”

Similarly, we biologically can’t endure *being abandoned, left out, shunned or rejected*—not as the helpless, needy infants we are at birth! These survival instinctive needs are among the hard-wired “*buttons*” we have. They aren’t going away! Children (and vulnerable adults) who have been exposed to survival threats—shocks or neglect—*internalize* these experiences as *feelings* of anxiety, confusion, irritability. If we didn’t receive care—reassurance, validation—near the time of these experiences *we doubt ourselves.* It is easy to substitute *taking on roles of authority* in the present to “*make up for*” unprocessed past experiences where we were invalidated. “*Everybody looks up to me now,*” even if much deserved, can still be a band aid, not a cure.⁸

Advertisements Are Not “Parenting Messages”

Let’s take a moment to consider the *conditioning* every one of us experiences. Advertizing has become a finely-honed tool for tapping into our core drives in order to “*parent*” us with “*suggestions*” of what will make us happy, and what we *must have* to feel whole. Our instinctive drives as human beings respond to offers of “*good things*” and to admonitions of “*what to do to be safe, liked, powerful.*” These “*teachable*” features are essential for our survival as children. But these are seen as vulnerabilities--“*handles*” --to be used to herd us, get us to do what we are told—*not necessarily* for our

own good—but to sell a product, to get us to vote a certain way, to direct our thinking and behavior *for or against* one thing or another. **Advertisements aren't messages from "mom and dad!"**

Our Authentic Self/Inner Child *is* being dysfunctionally "parented"—*constantly*—by loud, insistent *advertizing*—designed to mimic *trusted authority in order to "hook" us at the level of our instinctive drives*. Why? To keep us little children under control. This is legal. It isn't healthy. If we refuse to look at our *conditioned appetites* for money, property and prestige, we are probably going to find ourselves too big to thread a needle because we are all just *camels*.

TURLOCK

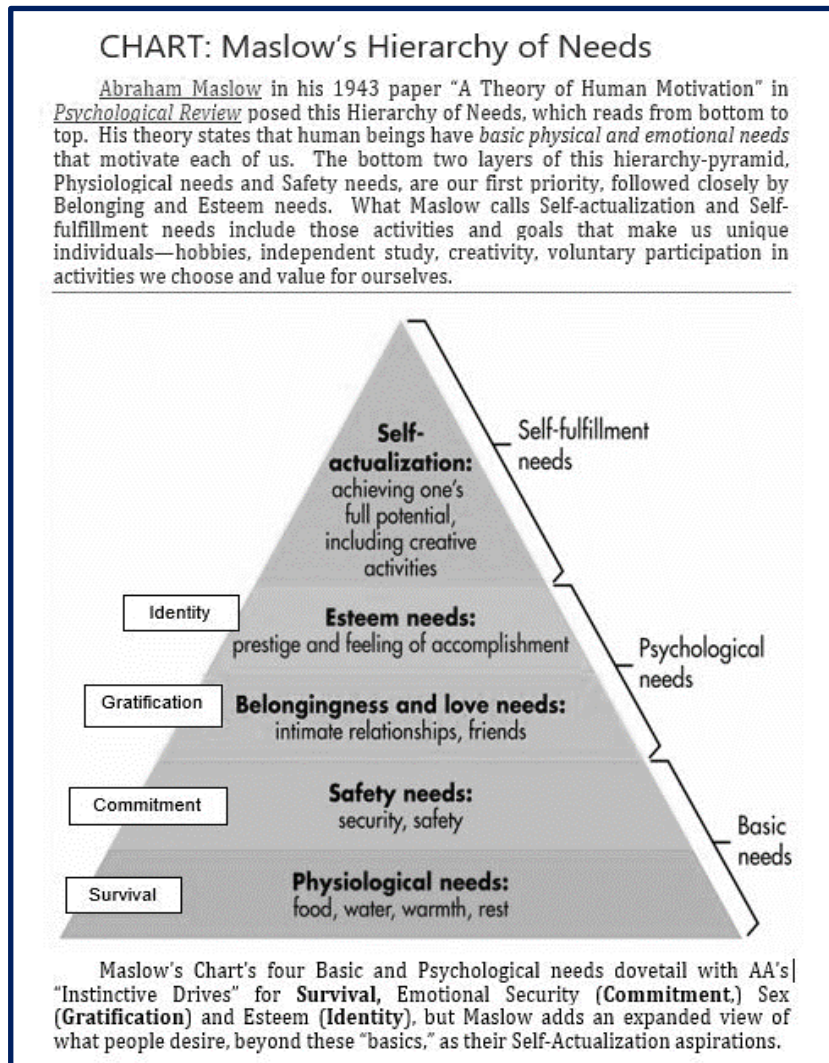
nearing the restaurant I hear
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have their teeth maintained with sixteen
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subdivided farms perpetuating the coming blight transformation that may
not be reversed
their feeding mouths
around me
swallowing the planet by mistake
not minimizing my own
consumption it becomes clear to me
the most important thing to do is silence advertizing permanently
absolutely totally and at once

Raven 10.3.71

“First Things First” Is an “Admit What’s Real” Slogan for Adult Children

Restatement and Summary:

Recovery begins when we acknowledge *our legacy of unmet needs and unhealed hurts!*⁹ It isn't our instinctive survival drives and basic needs (revisit Chart, below) that are our “enemies,” to be suppressed or fought down. **We need to learn to acknowledge a) that we have these drives, b) that**



these are assets, allies to be embraced and celebrated as features of our authentic self/Inner Child, and c) learn the skills we need and set realistic goals for making sure these needs are met, adequately but not at the expense of walking over other people (or doing damage to the planet.)

Our troubles arise out of *real or imagined* shortages—ranging from objective lacks (due to calamities, crop failure, unemployment, war), real or perceived *slights or injustices* where some have a lot and others very little or none at all, and also from our unbounded fears, even if those threats may be *projections, keyed up from our subconscious by body-language, tone of voice, gesture or circumstances that remind us of the past. Learned helplessness*¹⁰, which is a form of *invalidation*

that's been imposed upon adult children to foster compliance and dependence in us, is a real liability.

A *positive approach* to Steps One, Two and Three¹¹ includes *acknowledging and accepting* our instinctive drives as *wholesome and normal*, as the core needs each person has from birth.

When we start from this perspective—which is biologically *true*—we *are grounded in reality*¹². Any *sane* person—of any age, financial status, gender orientation, ethnicity—would surely agree with

the validity of this baseline, this common ground, if it is your starting place. It also provides a kind of test for what is *sane*.

Exercise 5. Identify “Learned Helplessness” Messages

Here’s an Exercise that is helpful in several ways: 1) It helps *organize* the materials in ACA’s Big Red Book, 2) It makes it easier to separate “learned helplessness” conditioning from “powerlessness” in Step One, 3) It gives a *working definition of sanity* with which to approach Step Two, 4) It integrates ACA 12-Step recovery with survival issues in the present.

5. Experiment with Self-Identity: Whether you can believe it or not, as an *experiment* in Adult Child recovery, write up a one or two sentence definition of what *any human being has a right to instinctively want, as their basic needs in life*.

6. What feels uncomfortable? Notice any messages (self-talk) that comes up that makes it difficult for you to *claim basic drives* for Survival, Commitment, Gratification or Identity (recognition) needs (as outlined on the Chart.) Write down these messages (use extra space, as needed.) Encourage your Inner Child to communicate their input, including the feelings that come up.

7. Who told me that? Using guided visualization, journaling, drawing or any form of self-reflection that both your adult-self and your Inner Child are secure is safe, go into your place of memories and look around to see who it is/was messaging you that you should deny or feel ashamed about one or more of these needs. It may be parents or authority figures, or these may be peer, or advertising messages. Write down who conditioned you to doubt your rights, or taught you to believe “If somebody wins, somebody has to lose” (or be used, left out.)

Were they wrong? Discuss the conflicts these “old ideas” about what people need or who has a right to one thing or another with a fellow traveler, therapist or spiritual advisor that you trust or share about these conflicts at a meeting. Are you ready to consider that these old ideas may be incorrect (or manipulative)?

Life on Life's Terms

If we remind ourselves that our troubles arise out of *real or imagined* shortages. Our recovery goal is to become able to tell the difference. What, *today*, needs to be attended to appropriately? And how much of my past dysfunctional conditioning, the traits of codependency or acting out, are still prompting me to shut down, clutch up, strike out or misunderstand?

To the extent that we *are* in unsafe situations—want or threat—in the present, a healthy adult sees what is going on and does what they can to improve their situation. But, as Adult Children, we may, instead, be triggered to “hunker down,” panic. We react to a memory, not to conditions as they are. A legacy of *self-doubt* is a *trigger* that *automatically* “runs a script” of survival threats from deep levels in our brain.¹³ If we may “hair-trigger” reactions to day to day events we may have post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD) that intrude, cause us to lose much of our conscious control over what we do when our “hot button” prompts get activated. A recovery goal is to recognize these patterned behaviors and inventory our “triggers.” This is the self-honesty that begins the healing process. Instead of denial or justifying our over-under reactions, we can give ourselves credit and praise for being willing to accept our authentic selves, our Inner Child, just as we are, unconditionally. If our dysfunctional patterns are linked into cultural “norms” that we find difficult to challenge, we take these risks gradually as trust grows in us.



In AA terms, if we are defensive or aggressive, we
**“fear losing something we have, or we fear not
getting something we want.”**

In ACA/ACoA terms, if we are secretive or insincere,
**we fear we *don't deserve whatever we have*, and
we fear we'll be exposed as frauds and stripped if
anyone gets close.**



Endnotes:

¹ In AA, the original 12-Step program, the initial urge (through the Traditions) was to minimize these pitfalls by ruling out considerations of “money, property and prestige” (Tradition Six) and of personality through anonymity (Traditions Eleven and Twelve.)

² The Promises (AA original version) are on pages 83-84 *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1939, 2001) as *the fruits of Step Nine* (making amends. The ACA/DF version is on page 591 of *Adult Children of Alcoholics* (2006).

³ BD comment” If we turned anything over to God in the past would we seek recovery in a group?”“

⁴ What *churches* encourage us to do that? Not many! We probably thought we were being told something like the “fake it ‘til you make it” suggestions that newcomers so often hear. The idea being that we’ll fall into the herd-mentality after a while—or not. A lot of potential member who can’t just “go along to get along,” but instead want *real answers*, are in the class of people who fail or dismiss recovery programs. However *all of us are* in that class, if life puts us a situation where we can’t get by without it!

⁵ *Step Three*: “*We made a decision to turn our will and our life over to the care of God as we understand him,*” is the original wording of this Step, from *Alcoholics Anonymous* (1938.)

⁶ Some remote tribes in the Amazon still have *communities* that uphold care-centered norms, consciously remaining non-internet-based as much as they can. Various “personal choice” systems foster functionality that goes beyond merely individuals and immediate families, but the “larger community” (mass media, interface with large institutions, governments and external wars) impact functionality so broadly it is not realistically feasible to ignore.

⁷ Tradition Eleven.

⁸ Gabor Mate, MD, an expert in the field of humanistic psychology and the treatment of addiction and addiction-like disorders, offers a perspective on how environmental/social conditioning sets up “addiction-in-place-of-authenticity” models. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpHiFqXCyKc>

⁹⁹ As of this writing (2020), ACA WSO publications such as the Big Red Book and the workbooks on the Steps and Traits omit discussion of the *physical* nature of our core instinctive drives. The Inner Child speaks and reaches out to caregivers *from these core levels of our being*. This research has been too recent or was not understood by those who compiled the BRB. Understanding that we have legitimate core needs that are biologically grounded and healthy features of our authentic self/Inner Child is essential to gain clarity on self-identity. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and AA’s Instinctive Drives (see Chart) have since been substantiated by bio-neurological science. With this understanding we are able to set our recovery goals from a positive “claiming and nourishing” point of view, instead of just “trying to get rid of” deficits or rationalizing dysfunctional traits.

¹⁰ See BRB, pgs. 101-02, 134 for an ACA perspective on how *learned helplessness* differs from *powerlessness*.

¹¹ If it seems repetitive to keep coming back to Steps One Two and Three of the 12-Step program, this is due to the fact that recovery is much like peeling off layers on an onion, one by one, as we move through stages of progress, each of us with our own personal jigsaw puzzle of pieces to assemble in a “working life.” Just remember to take what you can use and leave what’s irrelevant or “not for now.” Not everyone has the same challenges or gifts.

¹² Bruce D., Editor, disagrees with “science-centered spirituality.” Here’s his perspective: “Sorry to keep interjecting, Kath. I think that it would make more sense to start from a spiritual rather than a biological outlook. We’re born with a hunger for God. It is usually talked down or denied by adults and society, but it is there. When we depend on our own minds in solving problems and try to come up with a way that we like rather than the way taught by Jesus we, I think, continually invent theories and practice thinks that make sense to our minds and makes us feel smart and able to solve our problems rather than to rely on God—our answer and hope.”

¹³ “Amygdala hijack” is described elsewhere in this book—Also use the internet to research the biology of this neurocircuitry—an area of ongoing research. Here’s an article geared to parenting which applies to re-parenting, too! <https://litchfieldmontessori.org/parent-education?id=632348/emotional-intelligence-and-the-amygdala-hijack>

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

TACKLING TABOO TOPICS

Before giving up on ACA because the issues that plague some of us aren't ever discussed, consider talking to someone! Shame and shyness are both barriers to recovery to toss aside!

“LET’S TALK ABOUT GENOCIDE!”

In 1987, a few members of the Humboldt ACA Intergroup were invited to visit a Native American Reservation¹ to do a public information talk about family alcoholism and Adult Child issues. About one hundred community members attended the talk. The presenters were two Anglo women, and the hosts were a Tribal Chairperson and psychologist of indigenous ancestry. The atmosphere was courteous but reserved. As the host later disclosed, the group anticipated hearing a “churchy” pitch about how alcoholism is a spiritual disease—which they had heard before-- from AA members of Hospitals and Institutions Committee speakers and Al Anon. But when the lead ACA presenter began her talk, she very quickly “broke the ice” when she said, *“Let’s talk about genocide! That’s an objective form of abuse every indigenous person has to confront, both as a fact of history and as a legacy of discrimination.”*

The speaker went on to expand on how whole communities are impacted by abuse and exploitation, citing the brutality that was visited on the nations that made up that group, and citing other examples—smallpox tainted blankets distributed in the Dakotas, massacres and sexual abuses that had been “routine” features of Native American history for centuries. She said that alcoholic drinking didn’t “fix” these kinds of legacies, although it is easy to understand how an individual might fall into “escape” behaviors, feeling rage and hopelessness! When she opened up the discussion for feedback, several community leaders began talking about getting meetings started in the valley—which they did. For a period of several months, the local radio station had an open discussion on-air call in show that a cross section of community members hosted, too.

All over the US and Canada, tribal bands and nations did similar kinds of breaking the “don’t talk” rules, reclaiming their identities, their languages, their cultural histories and lore. This is an on-going process of healing and empowerment². Dysfunction in families is very often a *result*, to a greater or lesser degree, of being part of a marginalized demographic³ (targeted group.) Whether or not our whole demographic catches on to the factors that are triggers in common, we can find firm ground and clarity by taking a “long view” of the forces and pressures that do exist! We do best when we leave off arguing with those who resist our “recovery insights” and reach out to those among us who identify and welcome coming out of denial.

Exercise 6. “Special Focus” Groups in ACA/ACoA

Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility (DIA) is a core goal of ACA/DF World Service. How do we facilitate Adult Child 12-Step recovery, welcoming and supporting our international membership and all the many sub-groups that make up the fabric of our fellowship? Breaking the “Don’t talk! Rules is an important beginning to tackling any “target issue” that makes one sub-group of members feel “cut off” from the fellowship as a whole. We are evolving new and diverse ways to connect, using internet meetings, that erase geographic barriers, to build support sub-groups where “special focus” issues can be opened up for discussion, grieving and working the Steps.

If you find you have traits (Laundry List or the Problem) that are *not on the list*, talk to a fellow traveler, therapist or at a meeting about how you feel different and why.

Expand the scope of discussion. This is a contribution to recovery, not “a violation of the rules.” Getting used to the idea that we are adding to the group, not burdening it, is a symptom of self-acceptance!

If you fear or dislike certain kinds of figures—authority figures, bosses, cops—or ethnic groups—white people, Asians, Icelandic people(!), whomever—write that down, too, and talk it over with a trusted fellow traveler who won’t attack or condemn you. Tell the truth.

If you feel rejected by certain kinds of people who you believe may look down on you—because of your disabilities, or because you’ve been in an institution or jail—admit that, too. Anything we honestly *own* as a problem is on its way out!

HOMELESS, HUNGRY & BROKE

To those who come to our program from homelessness, we extend our heartfelt welcome! There, but for the grace of a loving Higher Power, go any of us. We share a common problem.

Depression, mental illnesses, PTSD/rage episodes are severe *side effects* of dysfunctional family of origin backgrounds. Can ACA/ACoA help, as a “first thing first,” even before we get out of the serious, dangerous, unhealthy circumstances we are in? Yes, it can be a big help.

What if we are currently *stealing* food or other resources to get by, day by day?

How about if we are selling sex or have a big porn addiction we aren’t willing or able to give up at this time? Are we welcome, too?

The short answer is, yes! ACA/DF is a recovery program of 12-Steps that welcomes all and any individuals who identify with the Problem or Laundry List traits. *No exceptions!* If we had to have “our act together” to qualify, none of us would be here!

Do we have to be sober? Clean of drugs? Willing to join a church?

Another short answer: No. ACA doesn’t run your life or make your choices. That’s up to you.

Does that mean there are no boundaries or rules? Is ACA a kind of free for all playground where anyone can act out or do whatever they want, with no consequences?

Not at all. ACA/DF is a fellowship of human beings who get together voluntarily to support each other to gain insight on how we’ve been “infected” with dysfunctional behaviors and attitudes that carry-overs from our families of origin and/or past experiences. Our shared aim is to get well—to overcome these liabilities and become happy, joyous and free people today.

ACA, as a program, is not a social service agency or a branch of the courts. We don’t lend you money or find you housing. We aren’t a treatment program, although many treatment programs may sponsor or refer their clients to ACA/ACoA meetings. Our meetings and fellowship as a whole has standards (rules) of conduct that each of us accept, as part of making ACA a safe place. Anyone who will not or cannot accept these standards will not be welcome at meetings or allowed to act out on others in or around the fellowship.

Each of us “starts where we are,” in ACA recovery. We admit our mistakes. We can and do “start over” when we mess up. That’s how we grow. Our standards are simple and clear, agreed upon by our fellowship as a whole. These are safeguard for all of us and for those who come after.

“Gradual progress, not perfection, is our goal. Welcome. Keep Coming Back!

“BACK THE BULLY” (OR THEY’LL GET YOU!)”

*“You want to know what happens to pioneers?
They get arrows in their butts! That’s what.*

Jeff G., ACA Santa Cruz, CA

Toxic Codependency Is a “Big Tent” Disorder with Implications Easy to Miss! Example:

A member shares: “I didn’t know how my being **the scapegoat** affected my siblings until I’d been in ACA for three or four years. Then, when there was a crisis in my marriage, I was shocked to see both of my siblings joining in with those who were attacking *me*, for no obvious reason. They didn’t even know the facts or issues involved, but my two siblings made disparaging remarks and snickered “*She always had foolish ideas!*” My husband was bewildered by this disloyalty, especially since neither of them was supposedly mad at me. It was a factor in breaking up my ten-year marriage.

“Reflecting on this, over a period of several years after the divorce, I remembered an incident when I was about sixteen and my youngest sibling was under six. The perpetrator went off on me—I have no memory of why—shouting, threatening me and saying I was bad. He was very aggressive, physically leaning over the kitchen table. But I do remember looking over at my sibling, whose feet still didn’t touch the floor, and seeing how afraid he was, his eyes big, frozen in his chair, and my other sibling looking to the side, her lips pursed tight, also afraid and frozen. She was ten, with large expressive light blue eyes.

“And it struck me—their Inner Children had been terrorized by the way that I was treated—not just that one time, but daily, hourly, randomly. Every day, until I ran at seventeen.

Those Inner Children (my siblings) had learned *to cope by being on the side of the Mean Person*, so they wouldn’t be attacked! That was their only option to be safe, in our household! Each of them had their own issues, too, with the perpetrator, who got “touchier” as time went by and, after I was gone, he’d go for one of them, or on their mom. But this “back the meanest one” coping mechanism (from witnessing my abuse as an example of what might happen to them), stuck. Anticipation of *what might happen* if they were on *the weaker side*, was an embedded PTSD. It was how each of them, in their own way, was always triggered to ‘take a side’ in conflicts, down through their lives. Not just with me, but, of course, when it actually *was me*, that really multiplied the effect!

“Although the perpetrator had died fifteen years before the blow up where they acted out this dynamic again in my personal life, it was as though we were flipped back to that kitchen table where their Inner Children learned what they had to do be ‘on the safe side!’ *I get it now, OK!*

“One of my siblings went so far as to become a Federal Income Tax attorney—backing one of the biggest bullies in the country—to make sure she was always on the winning side! What’s *toxic* about this is that it is codependent on somebody being on the attack, to join with.

Understanding “The Other Laundry List”⁴

The “Other Laundry List” is a partial compilation of the ways Adult Children have “taken on” the behaviors (not necessarily substance abuse) of perpetrators who strongly impacted us.

We may “mob up” behind a demigod or boss. Instead of initiating the “targeting” ourselves, we put a double-layer of “not responsible” between ourselves and the abuses that are being acted out on a scapegoat or rebel group, thus making ourselves more “invisible.” We see ourselves, then, as parts of what calls itself “majority rule” (or the moral or “better” group.) We thus detach emotionally from what happens to the targets.

To be safe and secure personally, we may become *strong allies* of authority figures (or institutions, causes) we identify as “in charge” or “most likely to win” in conflicts or competition dynamics. In our jobs, in the family or on the street (in gangs or social movements), we automatically *instantly* “read” “power cues”—body language, tone and volume of voice, grooming, dress, status, etc. —and align ourselves with what we perceive as dominant authority, while rationalizing this as “the right” choice.

Our Inner Child *had* to learn these coping skills because, as vulnerable dependents in unsafe circumstances in the past. We had to avoid being abandoned in order to survive. However, these are severely limiting forms of *codependency* because a) we clutch up in conflict situations and react as vulnerable infants, not as thoughtful adults, b) we tend to perpetrate abusive situations by aligning ourselves with unfair, cruel authorities, which we have rationalized, and c) we may have, ourselves, gained money, property or prestige as a result of this, at the expense of feeling empathy. *This is often the most difficult kind of error to admit and face.*

Read over the Personal Sharing above and review both the Laundry Lists, identifying where you’ve been the target of, or been swept into becoming part of, a “mob” dynamic or have stood by passively when someone was ill-treated by a bully.

Identify these dynamics where they exist in your life and community today.

Imagine your Inner Child s safely in the care of a Greater Power that isn’t mean, vengeful or dangerous, but, instead, is kind and fair and loving at all times. Encourage your Inner Child to stick with that authority! (Steps Two and Three.)

Say the ACA 3rd Step prayer: “Dear HP (or your choice), Please accept me in your care! Guide me and take away my difficulties that triumph over them will be seen as a demonstration of your love, your power and your way of life! Amen!”

Exercise 7. Fearless & Thorough in the Care of a Loving Parent

It is safe to admit just how we've coped and survived. necessary in order to reclaim all our feelings of love and empathy and stop being afraid that we'll be hurt if we let down our guard. We are not going to be abandoned by our loving HP/Parent in recovery! That's a promise! (Step Seven)

This is



- Out of fear of abandonment, have I hardened my heart to someone who deserved my loyalty?
-
-

- Have I benefitted, financially or socially, by character assassination or slander?
-
-

- Have I justified taking "a big slice of the pie" to please someone who said the other person "would just waste it" or "didn't deserve it"?
-
-

- Have I been "a ringleader" in getting others to be mean, in order to please me?
-
-

What am I afraid will happen (what might I lose, who might lose respect for me, who might hurt me or do me harm) if I stop rationalizing this behavior and admit that it's been motivated by fear of "being on the losing side" or wrong?

Endnotes:

¹ Hoopa, California, in Humboldt County, where Hupa, Yurok and Karuk peoples had been located in US ZIP Code 95546, GPS 41°05'57"N 123°40'21"W / 41.09917°N 123.67250°W / 41.09917 .since around 1861, Federally recognized since 1876.

² "The Honor of All" (trailer, 1985 video) <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/honourofall> is an example of how tribal councils and band leadership groups took assertive action to address alcoholism and drug abuse as "first things first" aspects of renewal and economic growth within their domains.

³See this article https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-real-cause-of-addicti_b_6506936 and other work by Dr. Gabor Mate, medical doctor in Vancouver, BC, Canada at his site: <https://drgabormate.com>

⁴ "The Laundry List" is available on the ACA WSO website, www.aca.org as a Quick Link, free.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY

7. USEFUL HANDOUTS

THE PROBLEM¹

Many of us found that we had several characteristics in common as a result of being brought up in an alcoholic household.

We had come to feel isolated, 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 ourselves or married them or both. Failing that, we found another compulsive personality, such as a workaholic, to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We lived life from the standpoint of victims. Having an over- developed sense of responsibility, we preferred to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We somehow got guilt feelings when we stick 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 onto a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet we kept choosing insecure relationships because they matched our childhood relationship with alcoholic parents.

These symptoms of the family disease of alcoholism 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 would 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 the ACoA group becomes a safe place for you, you will find the freedom to express all the hurts and fears you have kept inside and to free yourself from the shame and blame that are carry-overs 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 parents, our Higher Power gave us the 12 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 meetings on a regular basis, you will come to see parental alcoholism 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.

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Identify Primary Problems

*Any behavior that threatens a person's life, health, sanity or freedom is a **primary problem** for him or her. Any behavior pattern that has the potential for killing us, putting us in a hospital, behind bars or that repeatedly places us in unsafe situations qualifies as a primary problem. We recommend working the 12-Steps on primary problems first. ACA/ACoA meeting formats can be adapted to focus on many different issues. Focus groups are helpful because they allow members to keep it simple. We recommend getting professional help in matters involving medicine, psychiatry, getting out of religious cults, or street gangs, ending domestic violence or curbing a pattern of criminal behavior.*

12-Step recovery tells us to get into the mainstream of life. Where resources are lacking—or toxic—our task is to take the initiative and if necessary, create what we need. We own our power!

Our priorities become clear if we take a practical approach: Is something we are doing causing us trouble, loss or heartache? Even so, are we unable to stop doing it? If something is causing a persistent sore spot, then this is certainly a good place to start! Here's a tip:

Work the 12-Steps on a substance-issue if you have one. The least confusing way to work a Twelve-Step program is to stop drinking or abusing a substance that our body doesn't need anyway. Meetings for support are easy to find and progress is measured by staying sober or clean. Gambling addiction is also a 12-Step program with a simple goal and a strong, active fellowship.

If our primary issue turns out to be a pattern that keeps us trapped in situations that are dangerous, we try to describe our problem in terms of *behaviors that we do*.

Codependence, family/parenting issues, homelessness and overcoming gang or cult membership are examples of patterns that often keep people trapped. We aren't vague and general. To make use of the Steps, we pinpoint behaviors we can track. We admit we are powerless over the behaviors we keep repeating in Step One. If, for example, our codependent attachment to “rescuing” an abuser who never stays “rescued” is ruining our health or depleting our resources, we admit it. We try to be as concrete as possible. We count our issue “sobriety” from the day we resist repeating this futile—destructive—reactive pattern of being locked into crisis and panic.

In working the Steps, we focus on what genuine needs we are vainly trying to satisfy in ourselves. We own our feelings of love and tenderness (if we have them!) and we discover healthy ways to give—and receive—fulfillment. We have found big complex issues go down easier if we don't try to take them in a single gulp. We look for our part in the puzzle. If we take responsibility for owning our behaviors and reactions, that will be enough to change the pattern, at least for us!

For issues where acting out with sex, work (workaholic,) or other activities that are normally healthy parts of life, we are aware that *the problem is the acting out*, not necessarily the activity itself. Many people do not lose control of themselves in these activities. We are wary of the long-range implications of joining a 12-Step program that tends to paint one of these activities with the same brush as a drug addiction.

I Am Not My Disease

Imagine a person with the *disease of pneumonia* walking into a clinic and saying, "Hi, I'm Joe, and I am a heavy cough!"

Sounds silly doesn't it, for a person to mix up his or her identity with a symptom of a disease?

Are our problems who we are? We think not.

Clearly, a hospital staff would not believe Joe's cough is Joe's identity, nor would they ask him to see himself in those terms! To get help, Joe just has to admit he has symptoms and be willing to accept treatment. *This is normal problem-solving behavior.*

No one has to shame Joe into identifying with his pneumonia for fear he won't follow the doctor's orders unless they do. We expect he'd rather live than die. We believe recovery in a 12-Step fellowship also can be free of scare tactics and shame. To arrive at this perspective, we have reflected on what is meant by *the concept of disease* and how this term applies to addictions and codependent patterns. We believe *the sense of absolute isolation* that results from finding ourselves powerless, in the grip of forces we cannot escape or control, is a truer description for the condition we share and call by many names.

We see physical addictions as well as the various self-loss patterns of codependency as symptoms of this unwholesome condition of isolation that we act out—each of us a shadow puppet, gesturing behind a blank screen, with no words, no realistic vision, no context to bring us together. ***The underlying disorder that kills us (or makes our lives miserable and unhappy) is this excruciating experience of intolerable personal isolation.*** Fellowship gets us out of isolation. This is a positive basis of power we discover in 12-Step programs and can begin to build on in our lives.

Endnotes:

¹ “The Laundry List” by Tony A. (1978) was revised by Jack E. and the Santa Monica ACA fellowship in 1984 and posted on dial-up Bulletin Boards (early computer sites) located in Washington D.C., Seattle, Hartford, Chicago. In 1988, the Recovery Wheels, which show how various dysfunctional behaviors feed into each other (and how to break these patterns through use of targeted affirmations) was published in *With Gentleness, Humor, Love & Respect* by Kathleen S. and Jewell E., Humboldt ACA IG. The Recovery Wheels are currently in print in *Workable Relationships, Little Book 2* (2020) Amazon. The Laundry List was not in use until Tony A.’s book came out (1991.) If you don’t have ACA’s *Big Red Book* or *Laundry List Workbook*, these traits are on the ACA World Service website, <https://adultchildren.org/literature/laundry-list/> where it is available free. You can also order ACA books, find local, telephone and on-line ACA meetings there.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

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