

# WORKABLE RELATIONSHIPS TOOLS FOR ADULT CHILDREN

Little Book II

KATHLEEN S.  
12-STEP RECOVERY



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RELATIONSHIPS  
TOOLS FOR  
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# DEDICATION: TO FELLOW TRAVELERS

*"I once was lost, but now I'm found;  
was blind, but now I see. . ."*

**From "Amazing Grace," Traditional hymn.**

What makes all of the 12-Step Recovery Programs special?

In a word, it is *choice*.

Membership, participation in a 12-Step program is *voluntary*. Courts, employers or anxious loved-ones may send us—even order us to attend—but only we can *decide* to join. Sure, attendees can bring a court-ordered attendance slip to an AA or NA meeting, drop it in the basket and get it signed. But that doesn't make them a member. Only we can decide "*we want what you have,*" and thus become a member of a 12-Step program. *By our own free choice.*

Some of us realize that this may be the first *real* choice we have made for ourselves!

This book is for us.



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# INTRODUCTION

*“In ACA today, the adult child looks at the patterns of family dysfunction and is encouraged to talk about all aspects of the childhood in ACA meetings and with a sponsor or informed counselor. At the same time, the AA-adapted steps require the individual to inventory one’s self and to change destructive behavior. We take responsibility for our behavior knowing that some of that behavior was handed off to us by our parents.”*

**Tony A., an ACA Founder (ACA oral interview, 1992)**

## What Is the Purpose of These “Little Books?”

These “little books” are aids to merge the ACA 12-Step materials created by Kathleen S. and others in the ACA fellowship of Intergroups (1987-1991) with the ACA Big Red Book, Yellow Workbook and The Laundry Lists Workbook that are currently on offer through ACA/WSO, Inc.<sup>1</sup>

Our aim in this work is only to strengthen and empower ACA as force for healing in this world—a force now desperately needed in these times of peril, confusion and distrust! The Kathleen S. 12-Step Recovery materials for adult children aren’t new, but they have been updated and revised to reflect new findings and research. We believe that reliance upon *“a Higher Power (God) as we understand this Higher Power (God)”* is in no way in conflict with accepting the new information science and research have to offer. Faith and science are allies and each is a source of light we gratefully embrace.

These ACA 12-Step materials have a track-record of success. They’ve been vetted and in use in ACA Intergroups and meetings and by individual therapists working with substance abusers and codependents, and they’ve remained continuously in print since 1987. Adult Children who are co-members of Alcoholics Anonymous will find these materials offer an interface for working on the “underlying issues” of alcoholism. It is a matter of “practice these principles in all our affairs,” to integrate Adult Child recovery, as may be appropriate, into *our gradual progress on The Road to Happy Destiny*.

Enjoy this workbook! It is a part of the bridge-building we are engaged in at this time, to “grow” our wonderful way of life, in Service and in all our relationships, great and small!

**MEDICAL SCIENCE IS OUR FRIEND, IN 12-STEP RECOVERY, AND IT HAS BEEN SINCE AA’S BEGINNING.**

<sup>1</sup> We include a partial summary of ACA’s Service Network’s *omitted history*, 1984 (approximately) to 1991, “Reclaiming ACA’s Legacy,” at the end of this book (pg. 82) for those who have an interest in it.



*1 Sculpture at Turtle Bay Wild Flower Garden Sanctuary, Redding, CA 2018.*

# OWNING *OUR* BOUNDARIES

The HAPPY JOYOUS & FREE ACA Phone Meeting<sup>2</sup> (CA1312) Boundaries Handout is the basis for this “Little Book” on creating workable relationships for ourselves in Adult Child recovery.

## What Are “Boundary Issues?”

- We have what therapists call “boundary issues” if we aren’t clear where we, as a separate person, end, and another person starts.
- We have what therapists call “boundary issues” if we have difficulty connecting (forming a comfortable interface) with others that are as intimate or as reserved as we feel comfortable having.

It is safe to say that most adult children who come to recovery suffer from confusion about appropriate boundaries. Adult Children wonder:

- What do others have a right to expect—or demand—from us?
- When—and how—can we refuse, or assert conditions, on what we will give, or do, or accept from others?”

These are the persistent “big issues” we bring to Adult Child recovery. “Recovery,” for most of us, amounts to finally developing a clear sense of where we stand, along with owning some good guidelines we can comfortably live by in all our relations, with the help of a Higher Power and our program, one day at a time! When we’ve got this much, we feel safer and more confident and we’re free to set some goals, to dream some dreams as we experience each day.

With shaky boundaries, we may feel uncertain, anxious, worried much of the time. We may try to guess what other people want, try to entertain them or impress them. We may often find it impossible to just relax. We may quickly become defensive—feel attacked—if we are asked to explain how we’ve come make some choices or why we hold some of our opinions. Instead of sharing, we may push people away. Or we may be so anxious to smooth over what we fear is criticism that manipulative people see us as “an easy target” for control, because we seem to

<sup>2</sup> Adult Children of Alcoholics World Service Organization, Inc. <https://adultchildren.org/meeting-details/?meeting=554>

welcome having someone “run the show.”

### ***Fortunately, we can outgrow these boundary issues.***

Science—biology, brain neurology, medicine, clinical research—the synthesis of many disciplines, combined with the practical experience and shared insights of those who have actually experienced recovery from trauma and abuses they sustained in childhood and/or life have opened up new doors, doors that, until very recent times, seemed locked, bricked up and forever closed.

Adult Child recovery in the 12-Step programs remains, as it has always been, a spiritual program, a fellowship of peers and fellow travelers, but that is not in conflict with scientific research. Nor is spiritual recovery in conflict with plain facts. Truth is what does finally set us free and it is important to remember this.

One of the “old ideas” to reconsider and toss out is the maxim: *Ignorance is Bliss*. Tyrants and liars say this, but a Higher Power loves the truth. Here is what we know to be the biologically grounded facts<sup>3</sup> about *our underlying issues* in recovery.

## **What Are Some Facts About Adult Child Issues?**

**Fact #1:** Dictionary Definition: “Boundaries” are marked off spaces enclosed within some sort of limits<sup>4</sup>. Our physical bodies are our *visible* physical boundaries. But our instinctive drives<sup>5</sup> for safety, nourishment, intimacy and recognition are just as real, just as much a part of who we are as our hands or feet. We express these needs to those around us from birth—without apology! We anticipate care and acceptance. **This is normal.** Unless these drives are recognized and satisfied, we fail to thrive or die. Denial of these elements doesn’t alter or get rid of these drives.

**Fact #2:** As infants, we automatically bond to those who parent us. After all, *we are part of our mother* until birth! Our *instincts* are what we sense as “who we are”, at birth.” *Instinct* reaches, *instinct* wholeheartedly accepts, our providers. We want to please; we emulate how they respond and mirror how they behave. We only gradually

<sup>3</sup> As of March 2020. More will be revealed!

<sup>4</sup> Some boundaries are easy to see—like shorelines at the ocean, mountain ranges or walls around a house or a public park. Can’t miss them! These are physical boundaries. But other considerations, less obvious, also are factors: For example, Antarctica’s seashore differs from Australia’s because it is much colder in Antarctica. Glaciers, not sand. If we just saw continents as outlines on a flat paper map, we wouldn’t know this. But if we know about *latitude*, we can guess it will be colder in the one place than in the other, because *we’re better informed*: If we know that latitude impacts temperature, *and* we can read a map, we’ll take skis and a parka or a skimpy Speedo, depending on what’s our destination. Survival may sometimes hinge on what isn’t superficial, and certainly our comfort does!

<sup>5</sup> “Instinctive drives” as AA’s Bill W. (Wilson) called our basic needs, and termed “surely God-given,” are what we (whether alcoholic or not), Bill stated, need to restore to balance in order to be internally at peace. (*Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* 1952.) These core needs and drives—under a variety of names—have since been located through medical and psychological research as components of our brain, endocrine and nervous system.

become aware that we are *separate*—have feet, can focus on light, on color, on a face. *Satisfaction* is our first goal; *discomfort* is a motivator. Awareness, curiosity grow out of *instincts satisfied*, contentment, as fruits. **This is functional, normal development.**<sup>6</sup>

**Fact #3:** To the extent that our parent-figures are safe, serene, secure, well-fed and not too tired, a human child internalizes these conditions, too, *as part of normal*. We adopt these outlooks in ourselves<sup>7</sup>. If, instead, caregivers are preoccupied, ill-informed, confused, fearful, rigid and/or biochemically impaired, an infant accepts these distortions, as best they can, as part of their *normal*. We internalize what we receive from our caregivers<sup>8</sup>, holistically, with the milk that feeds us, unconditionally. As a result, we find some (or many) of the behaviors and outlooks on Tony A.'s Laundry List may be *subconsciously embedded*, producing distortions in our adult lives!

## What Do We Do? Phases 1 & 2 of STEP ONE

**(Step One) We admit we are isolated, confused, distressed, angry, anxious<sup>9</sup> as the result a dysfunctional experience, and our lives have become unmanageable.**

Adult Child Recovery begins when we stop denying that we have these problems! When we admit we have a problem, we are exercising an adult right to choose by deciding to come out of denial. We are taking action to detach from what amounts to a kind of lingering parental control<sup>10</sup>.

Step One is special in Adult Child recovery. Unlike active substance abuse issues (where *what we do* is obvious), it isn't always easy to spot *our coping behaviors* that are tied to the *dysfunction* we had to live with and survive. But if we are really going to get well, it is necessary. So, Phase 1, we admit *how it was*: "They shouted at us;" "I had to take care of my young siblings when I was only eight!" This is a very important beginning for us. After all, "*don't talk*" is a rule we lived by! Sharing and hearing from others cuts away a kind of barbed wire fence of isolation we'd been

<sup>6</sup> Babies born with substance abuse syndromes may require extra care due to their experiencing "withdrawal" from whatever the substance issues of the mother were prior to birth. These distortions may require medical care throughout a considerable period post-birth, but these issues are presently being addressed with good results.

<sup>7</sup> See stages of development theories. Jean Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development is but one respected model. See: <https://www.verywellmind.com/piagets-stages-of-cognitive-development-2795457>

<sup>8</sup> This mechanism, parent-to-child bio-environmental transmittal, is, of course, how *the parent* got some of whatever distortions they are handing on! In many cases, dysfunctional patterns can be traced to generations—even centuries—of acculturated fear, distrust and genocide prompted by superstition, ignorance and panic that's been mis-codified as "the way it is," often in reaction to natural disasters (volcanos, droughts, previous ice ages.)

<sup>9</sup> Fill in these blanks with whatever issues and circumstances best describe your *powerless* situation.

<sup>10</sup> Abusive, inescapable trauma from whatever authority can be substituted for "parental control."

wrapped in. Reading helps.<sup>11</sup> But, after admitting these experiences and a period of grieving, we can choose to re-work Step One: *What, as a result of this dysfunctional history, do I do?*

*“The family (or trauma-situation) is in the past, and, once I’ve admitted all of that and felt the buried feeling I had locked away, where do I go from here?”* This is the **Phase 2** of Step One question every Adult Child eventually comes to face. *“Exactly what of my behaviors ties me to re-living cycles of dysfunction in my life today?”*

Not every Adult Child in recovery asks this question. An AA/NA old-timer, Sylvia M<sup>12</sup>, put it this way, “Not everyone in our fellowship is the same, and that’s OK. Some people just go to meetings. They don’t have to work the Steps because they get what they need just from the fellowship. But some of us aren’t comfortable unless we go deep and really change. That’s the beauty of a 12-Step Program! We don’t tell each other what to do or when we have to do it! We share what works for us, as individuals, and offer our support, but your HP is your Guide.”

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*“Not everyone in our fellowship is the same, and that’s OK. . . .some of us aren’t comfortable unless we go deep and really change.”* ○ Sylvia M., AA/NA/AlAnon

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Those of us who have been members of other 12-Step program fellowships often come to Adult Child recovery at the suggestion of a sponsor or a therapist, to “get

at those underlying issues” (whatever triggers prompted us to abuse a substance, or to gamble, act out sexually, etc.) because we’d felt we’d gone as far as we could go in our recovery, but still found ourselves “hooked” back into patterns of frustration, maybe different ones, but nonetheless, unsatisfying, flat. If that’s our situation, **phase two** of Step One may be a miracle. **Instead of a generalized, “I’m powerless over alcohol,” or “I’m powerless over my dysfunctional family:”**

*In Phase 2 of Step One we try to get specific. If some events in the present trigger a past coping mechanism, (1) We identify the “trigger” and (2) we state, in some detail, just what we are triggered to do.*

<sup>11</sup> ACA/DF’s official book, the “Big Red Book” (BRB) contains a wealth of information about family dysfunction.

<sup>12</sup> Sylvia M. got sober in AA in 1962. As an early NA member, she took 12-Step recovery to San Quintin Prison (Marin County, California.) She worked for the USPS in Oakland, CA as Intervention Liaison for several years.

**Example<sup>13</sup>:** *“When an authority-figure (usually a man) refuses to give me a place at the table where ideas are discussed and decisions made when my job description states I’m supposed to be an equal or a trusted advisor, and they enforce this by speaking harshly to me, cutting off my input and slandering me, either directly or behind my back (or both), I am triggered to feel small. I am afraid I will be hit, thrown against a wall, publicly shouted at and set upon by a mob made up of everyone who is there or who hears about it. This is what my Inner Child goes back to, from my childhood experiences of how my family treated me when I tried to confront the “family secrets” about how I’d been molested. They would rather I’d die, than to have that secret out and they all went to their grave with the “lid” still on that “can of worms.”*

Intellectually, I may know I’m over-reacting, but the “trigger” takes over what I can feel, and, without a program to support me, *what I do* isn’t decided by my conscious normal self.

*What I used to do (continuing the Example), was (a) give up, inside, (b) get rude, use swear-words, get personal, lose control of my emotions, and (c) quit, leave, run away and not come back until the angry person was calmed down, or had left—if I ever did come back.*

This, my reaction to my dysfunctional family *coping mechanism* may have *worked*, to the extent that I lived through my stormy childhood—But it’s clear, once this is written down, that *my behavior*, when triggered, was far from sane and balanced! For one thing, I could be counted on to blow up and run away by anyone who’d observed my pattern. If they shouted at me, told me to shut up or even gossiped about me to others in whatever picture I was in, I’d run out on myself, right or wrong, and leave the goods (whatever they were) to whomever ran me off. I not only ran out on other people, I ran out on myself, on what I loved and cared about as well.

My next question? Stepping back, I consider what a *manageable* substitute would be, if I were trying to find a 12-Step program for this, my personal “acting out” compulsive behavior. If my behavior was *drinking*, then, in AA, the *positive alternative behavior is staying sober*. So, if I’m going to change this *underlying* “triggered” behavior, I’m going to have to have a goal.

*We state what we are powerless over: If, “I am powerless over freaking out when someone doesn’t want to hear what I’ve got to say; I blow up and run away,” is the specific behavior we want to change,*

*An alternative behavior is: “I stay present and I stay civil,” so this can be used as a “day at a time” goal for making gradual progress on this specific issue that’s a personal result of experiencing dysfunction trauma.*

Objectively, *“I stay present and I stay civil”* is my behavioral benchmark, for one day at a time measuring my success with this *issue* in my personal program. That’s my goal. If I am faced with real danger—an armed strangers in my yard—I don’t try to fit those circumstances into my old memories-template. I stay in the present and call 911. If I’m faced with sexist discrimination

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen S. draws upon her own recovery for this example. The details are just that—examples. We each will find our own individual core memories and dysfunctional “triggered” patterns to pinpoint and then replace.

(which is as real, in my experience, as any menace at the door), I *do my end of my recovery* (by staying present and civil, as best I can), but I stay in the present about what the other person (group, institution) is doing from their end. *My Inner Child may feel scared, frustrated, hopeless, weak and small, but I don't make her try to change the other end of the situation. I stick with her and work the Steps. I find a fellow traveler to share my feelings with. I let my Inner Child pet the dogs or take a hot tub. Adult-me uses all the tools and avenues my Higher Power shows me to not abandon my Inner Child. How life unfolds is in the care of a loving Higher Power who keeps us safe, well-loved and secure in fellowship. Little Kathee isn't hopeless. She has faith.*

**Space for Notes:**

## We Can Have Enduring Fellowship and Love<sup>14</sup>.

The *working belief* that functional, satisfying relationships are possible for us—for humankind in general—is a foundational principle of Adult Child 12-Step Recovery. Functional relationships, we believe, are *normal, and possible for us!* As we choose to reclaim our Inner Child whose real parent is a loving Higher Power, we do gradually discover our core identity and reclaim our natural boundaries. We find that we do become effective and able to communicate. We come to instinctively sense where to draw a line and where to take a risk. We will learn and grow in an atmosphere of safety, tolerance and understanding, through service and through sharing in the safe, supportive fellowship environment we, ourselves, build and sustain.

We do not do this work alone. Functional relationships are, at core, a living network of health and encouragement. They are based in mutual support, in nourishment and the happy



recognition of one another's creativity. In recovery, we each need to build a fellowship that serves and sustains us, day by day, in all our affairs. We, in turn, serve and sustain this fellowship to *be there* for those yet to come.

If we, adult children of dysfunctional families, develop and embrace a way of life that works for us as individuals, can this open up new visions that change, perhaps even save, this planet and our world?<sup>15</sup>

Simple answer: Well, why not? If 12-Step recovery, rooted in principles with a track record of success, one person, one day at a time can make our lives in recovery, as individuals, satisfying, joyful and rewarding, what happens if a million—or a billion—of us do it?

This is an exciting prospect for a long-range vision, isn't it! But even as we take the long view, we remember that it is by Grace *we live today!*

<sup>14</sup> Anthropology, the study of human evolution and culture, has built up a large body of data, based in science—genetics, artifacts, archaeological digs, linguistics, historical records—that illustrate that our species has had many cultures which were cooperative, peaceful and sustained over long periods. The idea that humans are “by nature” warlike, competitive and self-seeking is just that: an idea. As research reveals more about the impact of adverse climate, natural disasters such as volcanic eruption, fire and drought, it is becoming more widely accepted that these PTSD-creating circumstances have exerted wide-range and long-lasting impacts upon human cultural development.

<sup>15</sup> In the “big picture,” our species—and our planet—probably does depend on what each of us chooses to do, how we choose to live and what we choose to build together now, as never before. “*For far too long,*” George Orwell said, “*our governments have been like families—with the least functional members in charge!*”



## The Tony A. “Laundry List<sup>16</sup>” Message

In reading over the Laundry Lists as newcomers, most Adult Children immediately discover several traits that identify “What we do,” or “How we look at things.” This is often our first clue that we aren’t alone. Others have found a way to recover! The Laundry List is our “Welcome Mat” at the door to fellowship and hope. Thus, our journey as fellow travelers begins.

What do these traits tell us about boundaries—our own and other people’s? This is a Step One exercise. We can’t change behaviors or attitudes we “take for granted” or refuse to look at. This is called “coming out of denial.”

In this Exercise, we do our best to keep the focus on ourselves. As a worthy, valuable child of a loving Higher Power, we have inborn rights to care, appreciation, and respect. A good way to do this is to notice, as we read each trait, the *feelings* that come up. If our inborn rights have been trampled or ignored, we will probably have “a gut” reaction—anger, shame, a desire to turn away. Put a check mark by each Trait and pencil in the feeling that came up for you.

We do the same thing with the Flip Sides of the Laundry Lists. Where have we gained ground, owned a boundary or asserted a limit? Note where we feel a sense of relief or accomplishment with a plus or a star.

### **Are we being silly?**

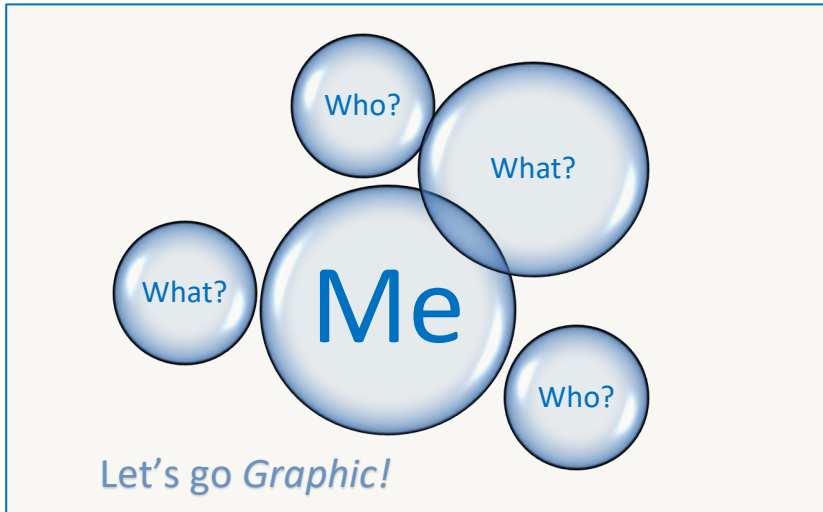
Our Inner Children like getting stars!

Be generous and encouraging to him or her!

It’s OK to be silly! It’s fun! This is a way to build trust.

<sup>16</sup> “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. 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.

## Try A Visual Approach to “Identifying Boundaries”:



Working with the Laundry List,<sup>17</sup> place yourself at the center of this diagram and add names to the “others” you interact with (or want to interact with.) The colors and the boundary variations you choose are only suggestive in the above example. Your Inner Child may have a lot to say about what colors are appropriate! Let him or her be in charge!

### “How Big Am I, Compared to Them?”:

- In your present-day situation, are there people or conditions that dominate or ignore you so that you feel blotted out or covered over by this influence? How BIG do these seem, looked at from within the central circle, “Me”? Pick a color that feels right. It can be any color, as light or dark as you wish.
- Is there someone who rigidly imposes their needs or their expectations on you, heckle or find fault with you in order to manipulate you to accept their ideas or beliefs? Draw them with whatever seem like appropriate boundaries—heavy, jagged, fuzzy—that show how it feels to you, when they encounter “Me.”
- Are there those you would like to touch or get to know who run away, reject your outreaches or show you contempt? What kind of boundaries do they put up (electric fence, brick walls, a moat full of alligators?) Draw them or make a collage to show your Inner Child’s view.
- Are there dreams, fantasies? Are there wild birds, people laughing, you can barely hear but would like to be with? Are there relationships you miss, feelings you can only vaguely recall? What colors are these? How wispy are the edges of these hopes and dreams and memories?
- Try all the graphic ways you like to encourage your Inner Child to inventory their

<sup>17</sup> Try this Exercise with Step Four, Steps Six-Seven-Eight, or Step Ten if you’re feeling stuck. Who has power?

boundaries—their power, importance, value in their world. Try using your non-dominant hand<sup>18</sup> to draw these circles (or use the examples, below.) Take half an hour or so to do this.

- Ask your Inner Child to show *how noticeable he or she feels*, compared to *others* or to your *neighborhood* and *institutions* you must deal with in your life.



Draw periods you remember—family home, school, on the job. How does your Inner Child fit in these?

Going over the Laundry, encourage your Inner Child to use colors, shapes to let out feelings. (These needn't be round!) Have fun! Break all the "*don't talk, don't feel*" rules. And remember, it's OK for our Inner Child to express all their feelings—get angry, need a hug! It is safe!

To build a bond of trust between our Adult self and our Inner Child, move at a pace that feels comfortable. Nothing stops us but there is no rush.

Ask your Higher Power where to put up your creative efforts. If there are still unsafe people who will sneer or make fun of your Inner Child in your present environment, reparent yourself by sharing your work only with trusted Fellow Travelers, or your therapist or spiritual advisor.

<sup>18</sup> *Left* hand if you are right-handed or *right* hand if you are left-handed.

**SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:**

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

# DISCOVERING A HIGHER POWER

Owning our boundaries and limits is a result of reparenting ourselves.

Reparenting is a remedy, a healing process, not “a quick fix.”

## **We face a dilemma:**

- If we are going to reparent our lost, unhappy, suspicious Inner Child—start fresh and do a good job of growing up all over again—we’re going to need a Higher Power’s guidance and powerful help, because we already know we can’t just snap our fingers or wish on a star to transform our whole world overnight.

---

*In our experience—if we are honest about it—  
God as we’ve understood God has flat let us down.*

---

- But, if a Higher Power is real and in charge of the universe, how did we end up as stuck, as disappointed, or as frustrated as we are? In our experience—if we’re honest about it—God as we’ve understood God has flat let us down<sup>19</sup>.

**We need a new idea:** What if, instead of feeling hopeless, we take a fresh approach? *Perhaps we’ve somehow misunderstood our Higher Power!* And, stop and think about it, if this *mis-understanding* can be tracked right back to “old ideas” we were infected with in our dysfunctional family of origin (or traumatic episodes,) then, haven’t we just made a start on working Steps One and Two? The Steps seem to *welcome us*, once we’re open to them.

Honesty, Open-mindedness and Willingness (the *HOW* of AA) are important keys to unlocking the recovery process we are in, because Step Two accurately describes what takes place when we *reparent ourselves*. Our Inner Child and our Adult-Self start to work as partners to challenge and replace old dysfunctional concepts!

**(Step Two) We seek to discover<sup>20</sup> a power greater than ourselves (that we come to believe) can and will restore us to sanity.**

Here’s a secret fact: *Our Inner Child is not guilty of any crime, wrongdoing or evil.* Our Inner Child is *a spiritual being* who has always been in the care of our loving Higher Power, throughout

<sup>19</sup> Or we may think we’ve let our Higher Power down, have sinned, are unworthy, not “good enough” for God.

<sup>20</sup> We’ve modified Step 2. because many Adult Children have to re-work their “old ideas” about what can be trusted and also what defines “sanity.” “Came to believe” may be, for us, a matter of learning how to engage in *internal dialogues* with various “committee members” or “guides.” These often represent subconscious or autonomic functions that have a history of “triggering” behaviors our conscious-self hates and wants to change.

all eternity, from before we were born or even conceived. To whatever extent we have lost sight of this, our spiritual reality, we've lost touch with our Inner Child. *Reconnecting is recovery!*

Newcomers sometimes do find this concept startling. *"I've committed crimes,"* they may say, *"I've harmed people; I've deceived those who loved me, abandoned them, betrayed their trust. If you knew who I was, you couldn't say there's a part of me that's still innocent!"* Or, if, instead, the newcomer has been the victim of these kinds of abuses, it may seem like an appalling, outrageous leap to be asked to consider that the perpetrator's Inner Child is in the care of a loving Higher Power. *"What about justice?"* they demand. These real questions are what we each sort out for ourselves in Step Two. *God as we understand God* gives us permission to look into our heart and discover what we find to be true.

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*In 12-Step recovery: We try what's suggested, and if we experience real change, we just admit it. To anyone who's been told, "Don't talk; don't trust, don't feel!" in their dysfunctional past life-experience, just adopting this new experimental approach is a real major change—and an achievement.*

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Permission to discover—and then reconsider and refine—our personal concept of God/Higher Power is one of the great blessings of all 12-Step programs. Oldtimers tell us, *"Here's what I've tried. It's worked for me, but don't take my word for it! Try it yourself and see what happens."* This is how "we come to believe," in 12-Step recovery: *We try what's suggested, and if we experience real change, we just admit it.* To anyone who's been told, "Don't talk; don't trust, don't feel!" in their dysfunctional past life-experience, just adopting this new experimental approach is a real major change—and an achievement. Step Two turns out to be tool. If we run into a problem—any kind of problem, not just what we believe about God or a Higher Power—we can explore what we already think or have been told about it, and if that's not working, we can look for some new approaches, until either something works or we don't need to worry about it anymore<sup>21</sup>. This is a non-obsessive approach to problem solving that sane people do use.

Step Two suggest we are free to *reparent* ourselves with better, more life-affirming, factual information about any topic—including what we come to believe is true for us about a Higher Power/God. If, for example, we learn to own our physical and emotional boundaries as biological facts, this may modify what we understand about our concept of God. As we accept and honor ourselves as the creations of a Loving Higher Power, worthy of dignity, care and respect, our Inner

<sup>21</sup> Here's a way the Serenity Prayer comes to bear, too, in living recovery. *"Accept the things I cannot change; Courage to change what I can, and Wisdom to know the difference"* is another example of keeping an open mind to what's in front of us and what we can just let go of, accept and go on—a very different approach for many of us.

Child feels this validation and begins to return. Now, as allies, we can then choose to exchange old coping mechanisms—including all sorts of “acting out” behaviors, not just our substance abuses—for alternatives we find attractive.

Informed by this growing awareness and bond with our creative, joyful Inner Child, trust and kindness grow. Fun becomes a part of everyday reality for us, no matter what our pasts have been. As we rescue and re-build Adult self/Inner Child harmony, we do find renewal and release. We come to accept that our Inner Child has always been in the care of a Loving Higher Power, and never a party to our confusion or mistakes. Instead of an endless struggle for “self-control,” we build a new kind of confidence in the care of our Higher Power who has always been there for us, no matter how greatly we may have misunderstood!

*This, as the oldtimers tell us, has been our experience—but don't take our word for it! Try it and see what happens—That's how it works.*

## Step Two Exercises:

### Journaling or drawing:

These are both proven ways to open up communication with “old ideas”

1. about God,
2. about right and wrong,
3. about what it means to be “a good person,”
4. or what you must “always” or “never” do, think or say.

### Agree/Disagree Meditation Exercise on Feeling Feelings<sup>22</sup>

Here's a good way to discover what boundaries and limits we already have:

1. Read the quotes below and let yourself feel whatever emerges from you as you do so. Notice how what the author has shared communicates to you, *on a feeling level*.
2. Does the image take you to a place inside that *feels* honest? Or do the words seem false, or hollow to you?
3. Imagine that you are the writer's audience and critic, that you've gone back in time to visit and that the authors are very interested in your response to this comment shared here. What do you have to say to them?

<sup>22</sup> This Exercise is taken from *With Gentleness, Humor, Love & Respect* (1989); used with permission.

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*"If [someone] suddenly sees a child about to fall into a well, they will all without exception experience a feeling of alarm and distress. They will feel so, not as a ground on which they may gain favor of the child's parents, nor as a ground on which they may seek the praise of their neighbors and friends, nor from a dislike of the reputation of having been unmoved by such a thing."*

**Mencius, Chinese (372-289 BC)**

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*"We think so because other people think so;  
Or because - or because - after all, we do think so;  
Or because we were told so, and think we must think so  
Or because we once thought so, and think we still think so;  
Or because having thought so, we think we will  
think so."*

**Henry Sidgwick, English (1838-1900)**

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*"It is when we try to grapple with another [person's] intimate need that we perceive how incomprehensible, wavering and misty are the beings that share with us the sight of the stars and the warmth of the sun."*

**Joseph Conrad, Polish (1857-1924)**

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*"All [her] his faults were such that one loves [her]  
him still the better for them."*

**Oliver Goldsmith, English (1728-1774)**

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*"The old Quaker was right: 'I expect to pass through this life but once. If there is any kindness, or any good thing I can do to my fellow beings, let me do it now. I shall pass this way but once.'"*

**William Gannett, American (1840-1924)**

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*". . . I was drifting sand in the wind of the world's anger.  
It is just fate that has brought me back alive. The fence gate is filled with  
neighbors' faces, Sighting and shedding a few tears.  
In the deep night we light a new candle  
And see each other face to face as in a dream."*

**Tu Fu, Chinese (712-770)**

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*“Do not ask from people what Nature has denied them ... Do not beg the monkey to have fine deportment nor the ox nor the donkey to have a sweet voice.”*

***Iacopone Da Toda, Italian (died 1306)***

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*“The wish to be independent of all [others] and not to be under obligation to any one is the sure sign of a soul without tenderness.”*

***Joseph Joubert, French (1754-1824)***

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*“Govern a great enterprise as you would fry a small fish.”*

***Lao-Tzu, Chinese (604-531 BC)***

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*“There was, however, one small incident of my boyhood days which must have meant a good deal to me or it would not have stayed in my memory, clear and sharp, vivid and shadowless, all these slow-drifting years. We had a little slave boy whom we had hired from someone, there in Hannibal. He was from the eastern shore of Maryland and had been brought away from his family and friends, halfway across the American continent and sold. He was a cheery spirit, innocent and gentle, and the noisiest creature that ever was, perhaps. All day long he was singing, whistling, yelling, whooping, laughing—it was maddening, devastating, unendurable. At last, one day, I lost all my temper, and went raging to my mother and said Sandy had been singing for an hour without a single break, and I couldn't stand it, and wouldn't she please shut him up. The tears came into her eyes and her lip trembled, and she said something like this:*

*‘Poor thing, when he sings it shows that he is not remembering, and that comforts me; but when he is still, I am afraid he is thinking, and I cannot bear it. He will never see his mother again; if he can sing, I must not hinder it, but be thankful for it. If you were older, you would understand me. Then that friendless child's noise would make you glad.’”*

***Mark Twain, American (1835-1910)***

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- iv. Do you find it hard to identify within yourself some of the feelings expressed in these quotations? Do some of the quotations elicit feelings you have difficulty naming?
- v. Imagine these authors as sponsors or parent figures and practice expressing your feelings (whatever they may be) to them in a meditation utilizing Guided

Visualization/ Active Imagination.<sup>23</sup>

- vi. Allow them to speak back to you in response. Look at any memories that these quotations prompt and note them (or *draw* them) when you finish your meditation.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

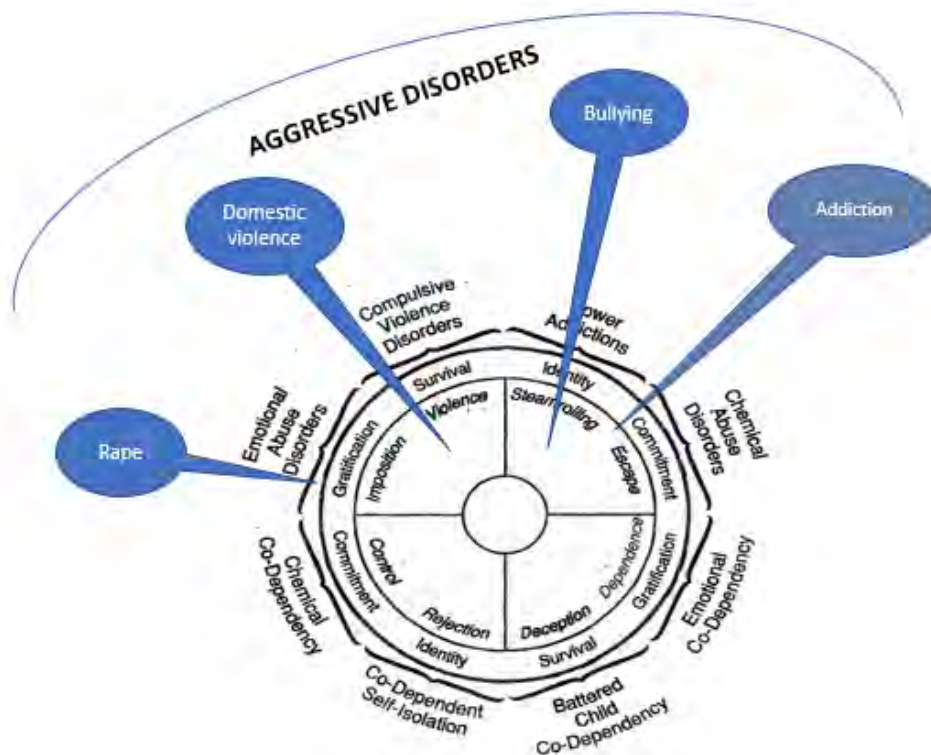
<sup>23</sup> Or speak out loud while looking into a mirror or with a fellow traveler, your therapist or spiritual advisor. The goal is to get comfortable telling your old authority figures and ideas how you really think and feel, and then listen to their reactions and responses. Discussion is a skill for overcoming misunderstanding. This takes practice!

# THE RECOVERY WHEELS<sup>24</sup>

Here's where we start:

## ADDICTIVE & COMPULSIVE DISORDERS

*Alcoholism is a treatable disease.* But, for those who grew up in households or communities where alcoholism was present, everyone was impacted. Alcoholics often display other aggressive behaviors—physical violence, molest, playing the bully or “big shot.” The Recovery Wheels show the “triggers” and “coping” mechanisms as spokes on a Victim Wheel of reaction and denial. Then, on a second wheel, the Freedom Wheel show how anyone—anyone at all—who is trapped in one of these dysfunctional behavior loops can spring themselves out of it, whether or not those on the other end of the Victim Wheel spoke do so or not!



<sup>24</sup> The Recovery Wheels graphically illustrate how dysfunctional behaviors “dovetail” reactively and feed on one another. The Recovery Wheels characteristics of addictive and codependent behavior traits are adapted from Bill W. (Wilson)’s “instincts out of balance” theory of alcoholism in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* (1952). Kathleen S., Jewell E. and Jim W., of Humboldt ACA Intergroup Writer’s Workshop, Eureka, CA in 1987 created them. They are reprinted with permission from *With Gentleness, Humor, Love & Respect* (1989) and *12-Steps to Freedom* (1990,) edited and updated by Kathleen S., 2020, Cottonwood, CA USA.

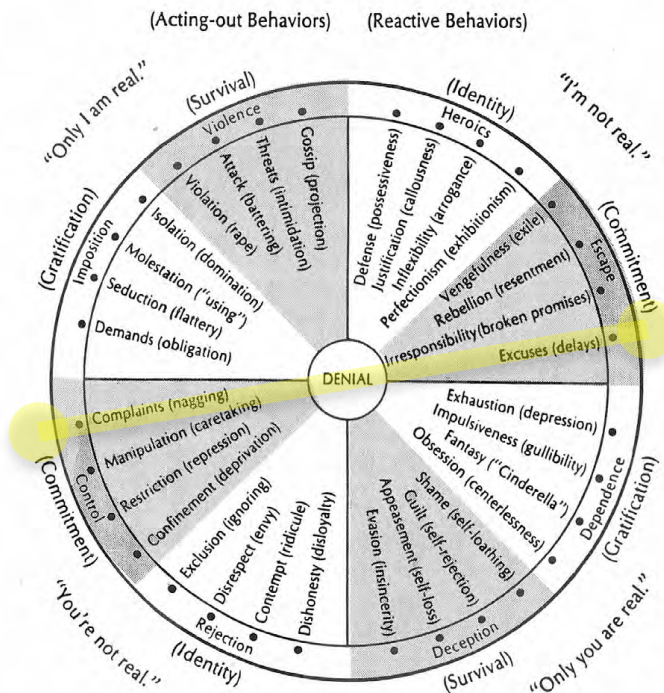
**How It Works:**

Identify something dysfunctional on the Victim Wheel. It can be either something you do (or had done to you) or it can be a behavior you have to deal with in your life (past or present)

Now, follow the spoke across the Victim Wheel to the opposite end of the spoke. These two ends of a dysfunctional pattern tend to “trigger” each other.

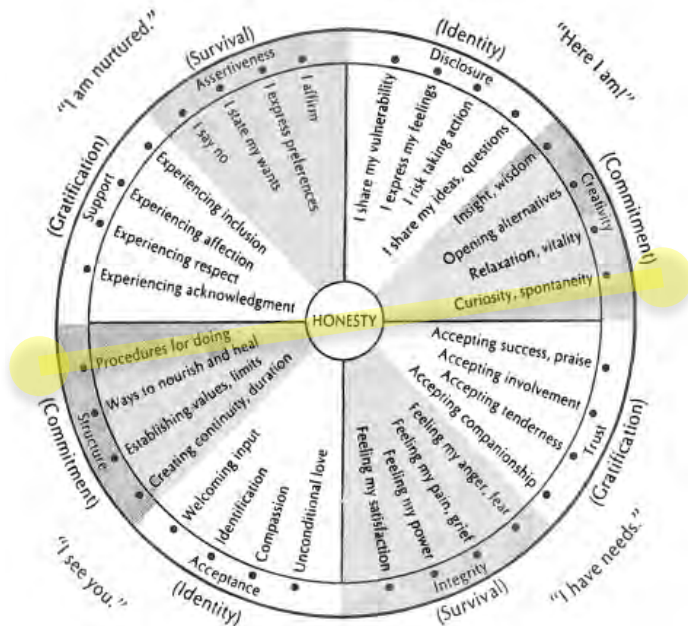
Using a highlighter, color in both sides of the spoke. (Use Paint or another graphic app to do this on your phone or PC.)

**VICTIM WHEEL**



**FREEDOM WHEEL**

(Responsive Behaviors) (Expressive Behaviors)



Now locate the same spokes on the Freedom Wheel (see illustration) and highlight them.

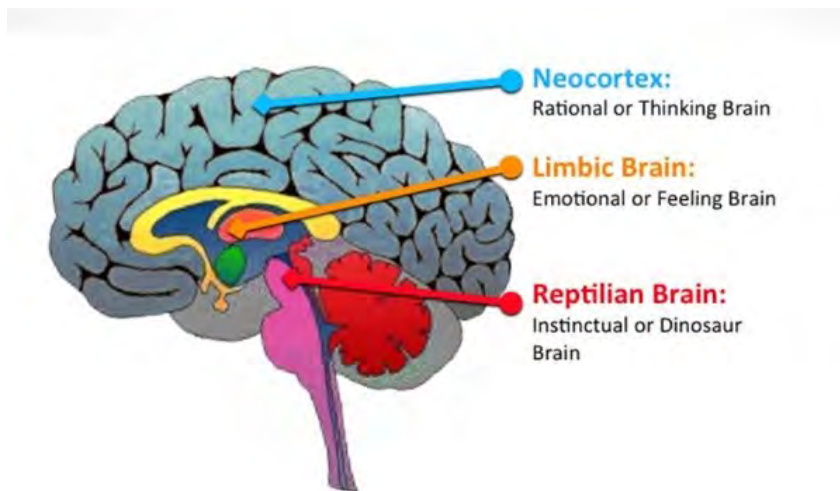
The Freedom Wheel spokes give us an *affirmative replacement behavior* or attitude needed to transform *our end* of the loop and step free of it.

**Example:** If I deal with a partner who lets me down, makes excuses, I tick that. Across, I see “complaining”—my end of this dysfunctional loop. On the Freedom Wheel, I see “Procedures for doing”—what I can do to model how I want to live. The other end, “Curiosity” opens a door for my partner to check out my style and make up their own mind whether to join me or not.

## The Recovery Wheels

Instead of the Laundry *List*, the Recovery *Wheels* arrange various “triggered behaviors” that feed into one another on *spokes*, across from each other *on wheels*. This simplifies identifying and learning to de-fuse the dynamics that trigger out end of a dysfunctional pattern (Victim Wheel) by consciously choosing to replace it. On the Victim Wheel, dysfunctional characteristics are grouped with the instinctive drives that underlie them, as motives. They are also arranged across from each other, in linked pairs of opposites. When one end of a spoke of paired dysfunctional behaviors is stimulated, we tend to instinctively react with the opposite behavior.

The Freedom Wheel offers specific “antidotes” to each of the dysfunctional spokes. The Freedom Wheel is a *reparenting* exercise. Affirmations, repeated out loud or written over and over, do replace “triggered” dysfunctional reactions, not because we are “brainwashing” ourselves, but because these are healthy alternatives our Inner Child wants and welcomes.



### 2 Three “Brains” Our Survival Allies Once They Get to Know Each Other!

Usually, it is easier to spot what triggers us (the other person’s behavior) than it is to see our own reactive patterns of *instinctive self-protective fight/flight/freeze*,<sup>25</sup> but *both ends of each of the spokes is dysfunctional*. Once we’ve anchored one or more of these reactive patterns as coping mechanisms, we automatically pick up our end of the spoke, when triggered, before we even realize!

The circular (mandala) arrangement of spokes is designed to take the focus off of the other guy, and their faults or weakness, and to bring it back to ourselves. This circular arrangement is a prompt that welcomes our “whole brain” to engage subconscious images. We find, if we change our own patterns, the “other end” of the spoke(s) must change, too.

<sup>25</sup> 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>

# VICTIM WHEEL

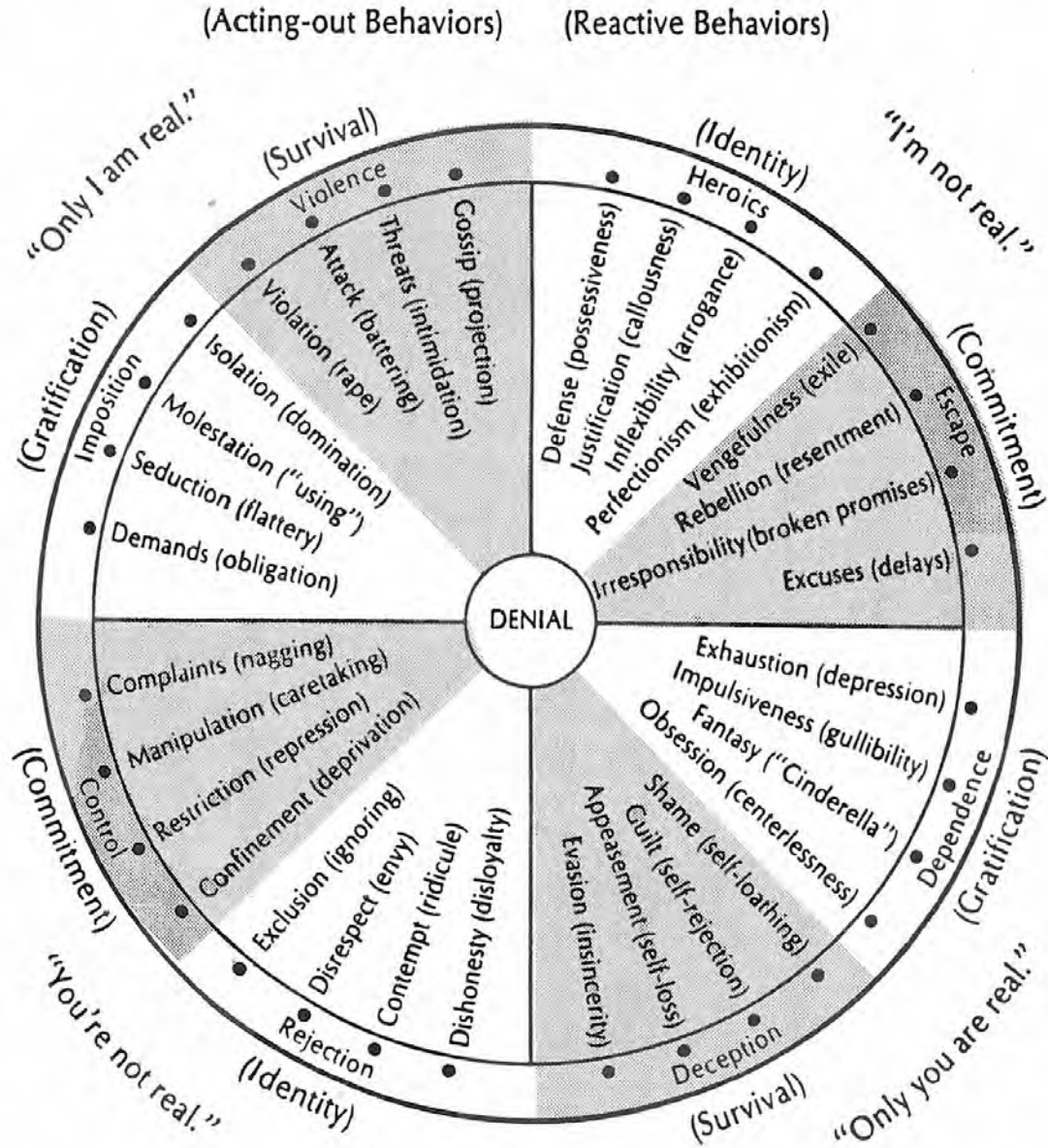


Figure 3

# FREEDOM WHEEL

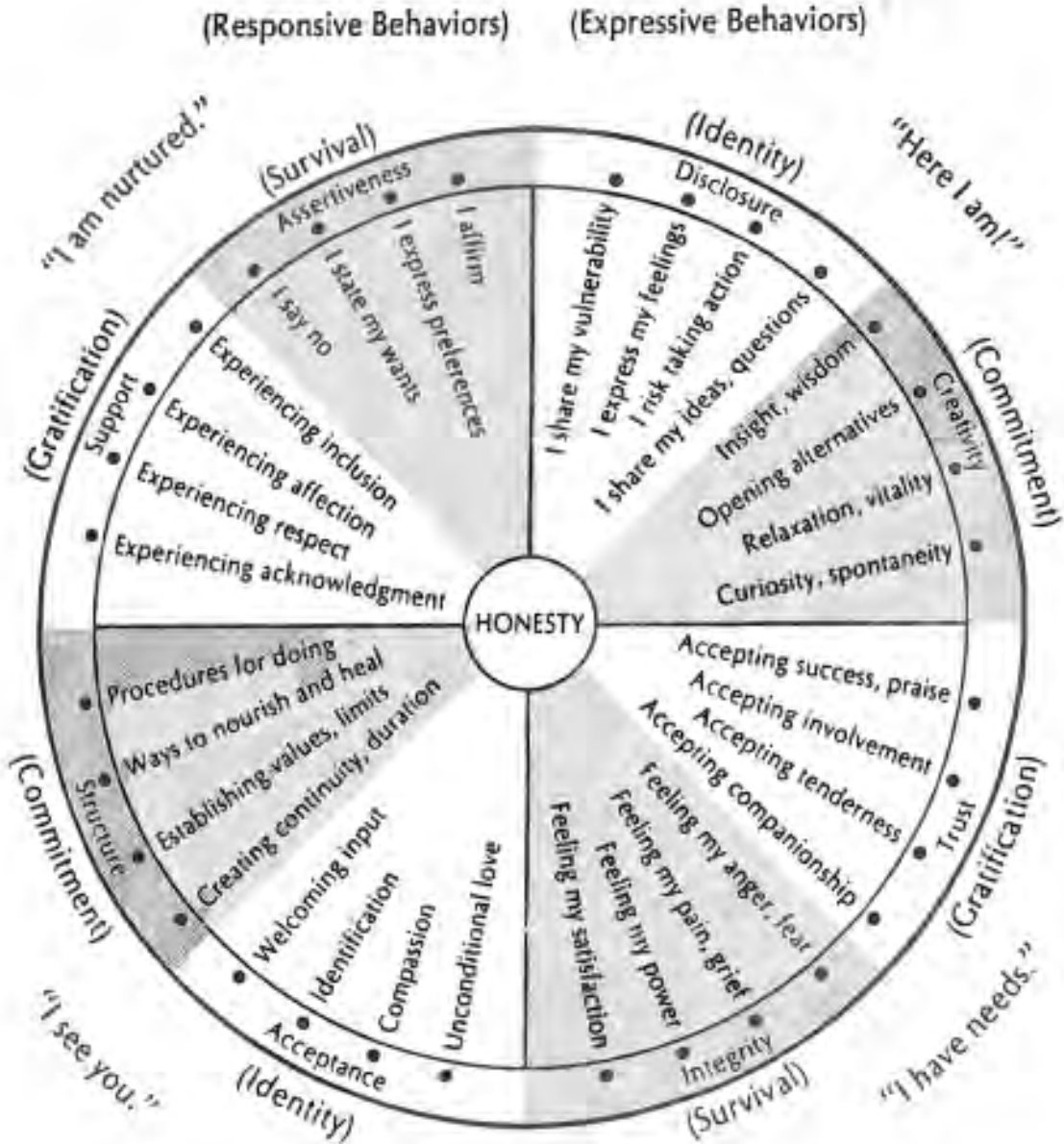


Figure 4

For example, if we are challenged by ridicule, we are likely to feel the need to justify who we are or what we think. If we feel threatened by someone in authority—a boss, for example—we may conceal our honest questions, or seek to appease, but not risk dialogue.

Dysfunctional families frequently set up a dynamic where one family member becomes a main target for the perpetrator's aggression, and the remaining family members adapt. "Back the Bully" is a self-protective dynamic. "*I'm with him (or her)!*" not only keeps us from becoming a target, but it *adds us* to the power-end of the equation. Mobs, for example, trigger this underlying motivator, self-protective fear. "If we're *on the side* of the dysfunctional aggressive 'leader,' then we won't get hurt!" is the "gut" reaction. Fanatics are running, deeply afraid!

We can't learn and grow so long as we continue picking up our end of any dysfunctional spoke around this Victim Wheel. Sometimes this results in an addict or codependent stopping one "problem" successfully, only to see themselves replacing it with another!

## Growing Up After We Are Already Adults

Instead of being stuck trying to painfully challenge each and every possible dysfunctional reaction that our frightened Inner Child has or remembers, the Freedom Wheel offers positive alternative behaviors and attitudes. If we are challenged with ridicule, we can choose to respond by disclosing how we are feeling. We can own our power to deal with threats appropriately, if we feel intimidated. If standing up to the threat is not realistic, we empower ourselves to get help or leave. When we encounter what feels like pressure to play the victim, we can reparent ourselves by choosing to operate from the Freedom Wheel, instead.

Getting used to operating from the Freedom Wheel, instead of from Victim Roles, takes practice. To make the best use of these devices, photocopy or scan and print the Wheels and put them up where they are easy to see. The Wheels often bring insight into motives and behaviors - your own and other people's. They're more likely to be used if they are posted on the refrigerator than if they're in a book.

You don't have to wait for anyone in order to begin making progress. Try using the Wheels on issues or problems as they come up in life. Use the Victim Roles Wheel to examine problem areas in your family, personal, or business relationships. Whatever irritating behaviors you are encountering in others, look across the wheel to see what spoke is on the other end of it. Are you slipping into that role, yourself? Then, on the Freedom Wheel, locate the *affirmation concepts* to replace your victim patterns with healthy ones.

### Principles to Remember:

**Let's be clear: It isn't dysfunctional to be dependent on our caregivers when we are children.** It isn't even dysfunctional to be dependent upon our intimates and our extended family-community, even as adults. All mammals nourish and care for their young. It is entirely normal for human beings to be interdependent! It is biologically built in us, into the very core of our development as a species. Our dilemma, as Adult Children, is to clarify the healthy limits and duties in our relationships, taking into account our age and the nature of the bond involved.

**Since few of us grow up in ideal circumstances**, most of us have blind spots of reaction to life and to those around us, even if we had both parents and alcoholism didn't play a part in our household. Human society as a whole faces many challenges! If our family of origin was impacted by poverty, prejudice, police violence or social upheaval, these factors, the "things we couldn't change," in our environments impacted our families, and thus, through them, have had an influence on how we see the world and how we view ourselves. Whether we "take these things for granted" or have become sharply aware of them, in our "global world," everyone is impacted.

**Family alcoholism (or other severe dysfunction) is a multiplier of environmental stressors**, whatever these may be, for infants and small children. The problem goes deeper than the present cultural stressors and may account for what appears to be "inherited or genetic family (or ethnic) alcoholism." What an infant *doesn't get* from a dysfunctional caregiver may be a *biological* sense of security, a *hormonal*<sup>26</sup> sense of comfort and well-being that **human babies are "hard-wired" to anticipate**. When an anxious, distracted caregiver doesn't produce this hormone that stimulates an emotional bond between them, the child's sense of security is affected.

**We are biologically, hormonally set up to "grow" a "love-nurture-safe" initial bond and outlook**. Our survival instinct prompts us to *bond We must connect! So, we do*. As infants and children, we unconditionally accept as "normal" whatever conditions exist, with whatever *hormonal cocktail* comes along with our mother's milk and caress. **We make it normal for us**. In alcoholic or dysfunctional families, if learning to deny our honest responses or to sacrifice ourselves to the demands of caregivers who were impaired, preoccupied or ill, we do that. Experimentally, we do everything we can; we mimic and mirror parents and siblings, to live. We make a fuss to gain care and attention *we must have to survive*—or we learn to do with less or do without.

**Adult Children needn't feel hopeless**. Yes, from this point of view, it is easy to see how dysfunctional patterns do get passed down, through generations and even whole cultures: Research even suggests that hormonal distortions—loss of the "comfort" hormone, or partial replacement of it with "anxiety" components, for example—may be triggered by and passed from caregiver to child, perhaps even prior to birth: It is in admitting these facts, we gain a new freedom and choice:

WE AREN'T GUILTY. WE AREN'T CONDEMNED.  
WE HAVE A PROGRAM!  
ADULT CHILDREN CAN HEAL & BE WELL!

<sup>26</sup> 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.

## “Self-Realization” Is Spiritual, Too!

### 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.

## We Guess at What's "Normal"

“Adult Children” are people who had to figure out how to survive in abnormal, possibly even dangerous, hostile, circumstances, without appropriate guidance and support<sup>27</sup>. Whatever our “coping” mechanisms turned out to be, whether superstar or screw-up, the fact that we had to “wing it” without the conscious support and validation of secure, stable adults who modeled a trustworthy path is at the very root and core of our dilemma. “Having to guess,” not being sure, from one moment to the next, *is* dysfunctional. “Insecurity,” for Adult Children, is a very deeply disordered outlook, the result of having had to adapt to situations where our basic needs were not reliably recognized and validated by those we had a right to trust.

Until recent times, the core nature of addiction and of addiction-like behaviors was entirely a matter of conjecture—guess work. But with medical research and technology, our speculations now have a firmer grounding from which to work.

The track-record of 12-Step programs’ decades of success in restoring substance abusers to stable abstinence and reintegration into community life has removed the aura of shame and doubt that so often further confused these problems.

<sup>27</sup> Usually, this occurs in childhood. But similar situations can and do exist outside the family of origin home: War combat, for example, produces “triggered” reactions to severe or prolonged intermittent stress. Torture, rape, bullying-abuse, being the target of group prejudice, or by a powerful individual who exerts control over a group—all are stressors that set up “automatic” fight/flight/freeze reactions in a person who is trapped or believes they are.

**The good news is we can restore this inner security**—biologically already there in human babies—that was damaged by the simple act of learning to *reparent* ourselves. Along with newcomers to 12-Step recovery, many long-time sober members of Alcoholics Anonymous find new dimensions to the proven Steps they already rely upon for sobriety when they revisit these same Steps with the focus on these “underlying problems.” We have the tools and the growing insight now to restore a more unified sense of self, accepting “more has been revealed” guidance from a Higher Power we have come to trust.<sup>28</sup>

## SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

<sup>28</sup> Note to Adult Child Co-Members of AA/NA/ACA: Bill W. (Wilson) did not use exactly the same terms to describe the “instincts out of balance” we must reconcile 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.

SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

## Using the Recovery Wheels with the Steps

Use the Victim Roles Wheel to identify or to inventory your personal issues (Steps One, Four, Ten). Notice where you fit in terms of the four categories of basic needs. Which of the drives tends to dominate you? Which areas prompt strong feeling reactions or judgments?

Inventory yourself using the spokes within the Victim Roles Wheel. Are there ways you manipulate yourself, kid yourself, or scare yourself? Do you feel helpless or confused when faced with some of the Victim Wheel behaviors in day-to-day situations? Notice if you are “triggered” to react by acting out one of the spokes opposite. Go to the Freedom Wheel and find the “antidote” spokes (see illustration.) Write an affirmation

After you have inventoried yourself on the Victim Roles Wheel, discuss your inventory with a trusted individual (Step Five), considering the affirmation concepts on the Freedom Wheel that correspond to the problems you identified. Does using the affirmation concepts to replace the victim habits make sense to you? Do you find you have to stretch your point of view to see how some of them apply?

The Freedom Wheel can help bring light into blind spots where there seems to be a lack of choice, or a limited number of mutually unattractive alternatives in working Steps Six and Seven. Do you find yourself faced with letting go of some outdated behaviors from the Victim Roles Wheel? With consciously embracing a more desirable attitude from the Freedom Wheel?

Use the Recovery Wheels in connection with any of the 12 Steps to get the focus *off the other and back upon yourself*. In Steps Eight and Nine, examine the family patterns you recognize from the Victim Roles Wheel and notice how they are still being acted out. Are you infected with some of these old scripts? Are your present-day relationships being infected, too? Are there fresh options you can introduce (by living them, yourself) from the Freedom Wheel to bring healing and new hope to your relationships?

Create an affirmation for yourself based on whatever spokes you seem stuck on, using the corresponding spokes on the Freedom Wheel. Use your affirmations in your practice of Steps Two and Three to expand and deepen your connection with a power greater (or within) yourself, and in Step Eleven.

Experiment. Utilize any spoke on the Freedom Wheel as an affirmation for meditation and prayer to aid in extending your horizons. Build Step Eleven meditation into your daily routine. Stick with it for a month. Use one or two spokes as the basis for affirmations toward a goal and see what happens in your life.

Space for Notes:

## Creating with Affirmations: Replacing "Inner Tapes"

Affirmations are positive statements—usually brief—grounded and built from concepts we understand and believe to be true. Repeating a simple, direct affirmation counteracts anxiety, fear of failure or of rejection, and helps keep goals and boundaries in focus.

Affirmations may be used in prayer and meditation. They are unifiers, with the power to open channels in the heart and mind. Most people who utilize affirmations notice an improvement in their personal outlook, and objective changes in their lives.

### Try This Inner Tapes Exercise:<sup>29</sup>

Look over the Victim Wheel, spoke by spoke. Listen to any inner tapes (self-talk messages) that you hear, and note any false, compulsive or fear-based messages you are presently giving to yourself. Write the spoke phrase down.

Look up the counterpart spoke on the Freedom Wheel and write down that affirmation concept next to the Victim Wheel phrase. Write a personal truth in your own words based on your understanding of this affirmation concept.

If you have trouble getting a clear understanding of the affirmation concept, talk to a trusted person (such as a sponsor) to exchange views.

Say your personal affirmation to yourself out loud to replace your old tape.

Saying it (or singing it or shouting it) while exercising or while walking briskly down a beach is even better. Writing it fifty or a hundred times is another good way to anchor this healthy self-message and replace the bad tape. It's a good practice to keep at it with an affirmation for two weeks or more.

<sup>29</sup> See an in-depth Inner Tape Exercise, with a chart: "Identifying Lies We've Been Living" pg. 55

## Space for Notes:

### Our Boundaries Get Clearer

As we become familiar with the Recovery Wheels and how they work, most of us notice a change taking place. Instead of struggling, it becomes “our new normal” to *know where we stand* on issues, large and small. This is an example of the Promises: **“We will intuitively know how to handle situations that used to baffle us”** is a result of our growing self-trust! Many old-timers tell us that they’ve found it helpful to use creative self-expression to anchor this growth and change as they go, especially in the midst of big breakthroughs. Taking an hour or an afternoon to make a collage, draw a picture, take some pictures that you edit into an album is a kind of on-going meditation of charting how we change and grow. Write a poem! Sing a song! Dance!

## Dysfunctional Family<sup>30</sup> Myths

A *myth* is a story or legend that is passed along which may or may not be based on verifiable facts or events. Most dysfunctional families pass along dysfunctional myths about our basic needs, how you have to live or what you have to expect in life. Family-held myths presenting false, limited views of what is possible or desirable in life can be both powerful and terrifying. Since everyone in the family hears the myth and sees it acted out, the dysfunctional myth may appear to be true—and life, therefore, pretty hopeless or limited as a result! These dynamics may expand to a larger group—a business, a political entity, even a church.

Look over the Victim Roles Wheel, this time looking for Victim patterns your family internalized as family myth. What did your parents tell you about the world and your place within it? Look at what your family believed were the limits and boundaries about satisfying the basic needs—***Survival, Commitment, Gratification and Identity***. What was your “place” in this “scheme of things,” as your family saw it? In your Recovery Journey, how willing is your family to embrace your progress? How do some (or all) of your remaining family-of-origin members resist or reject your recovery? Here are some examples:

**A "Look Good" Family:** The problems in the family are hidden from the community and the family may enjoy status. People don't end up in brawls at holiday dinners (or those who do become family exiles). It's not O. K. to display (or even to admit having) feelings that don't support the family's self-image. Some (or most) family members may deny having any “issues” and/or exclude those who do—even more strenuously when that member is in recovery. Failure to keep up the family's public image results in scorn, exclusion, ridicule. Drinking and drug use may include throwing big parties or providing the drugs. Various big shots, including community leaders, media stars, and drug dealers, may be motivated by the family myth, "We are better!" The Victim Roles played out tend to be ***Heroics versus Rejection***.

**A "Soap Opera" Family:** This family is on a constant roller coaster of shifting relationships and emotional benders. Threats of sexual transgressions, jealousy, or other emotional tests create cycles of crisis and uproar between family members. Feuds with outsiders tend to pull family members together. Emotional abuses, including overt and covert incest, are common experiences. Drinking or using drugs to counterbalance *the blues* is common and may be an “excuse” that is rationalized. Family members may feel very loyal to each other and often want to protect each other—but can't. The family myth is, "We can't help ourselves!" Victim roles in "Soap Opera" families center in ***Dependence versus Imposition***.

<sup>30</sup> ACA's "Big Red Book" Chapter 3, "My Parents Did Not Drink but I Can Relate" approaches the question of dysfunctional family dynamics, whether or not substance abuse is involved. Our Inner Child is impacted by stress—fear, tension, conflict—as *an emotional undercurrent* well before he or she can notice whether or not alcohol or another drug abuse is a feature of the environment. *Non-verbal* clues are a “language” a child “hears” first.

**A "Not There" Family:** The family home may look like an untidy rooming house with stuff stacked everywhere, or it may be as neat and orderly as a hospital operating room, but the atmosphere is not relaxed. Family members live separate lives, preoccupied with goals that are not shared (and may often be actively concealed) from each other. Everyone defends his/her turf and rights. Unpredictability, uproar, broken promises and pleas or demands for change may be the usual level of interaction - or, all meaningful interaction may have ceased. Family members feel abandoned, misunderstood but can't admit this to one another out of fear of setting off uproar. They may often complain and seek comfort from outsiders, or they may "stuff" their feelings. Substances are abused to fuel or medicate the family members. The family myth is, "It's too much for us." **Control and Escape** are the usual Victim Role ruts.

**The "Crime & Punishment" Family:** Living in fear of punishment characterizes families dominated by force or threat of force. Under stated or unstated family rules, dominators are like wrathful gods without meaningful restrictions. They may violate physical and emotional boundaries of others to enforce rules they themselves have established—and these can change on a whim. Inheritance, money or power in a hierarchy may be substituted for physical forms of violence. The perpetrator(s) hold *meaningful* power and the threat is that this can be used *to do harm*. Family members are made to serve them, to fetch and carry upon demand, appease and flatter. All relationships are seen as based on force and held together by threat, where fights are either won or lost, not negotiated or resolved. "Back the Bully" is a coping mechanism that junior members may adopt to avoid becoming "targeted" themselves, while gaining a sense of security by "being on the aggressor's side" and rationalizing this as "the right side." Family members may either seek out or become bullies in the community. Alcohol or drug use (or stepping on a "taboo" button) precipitates aggression and/or violence. The family myth is "We're not good but we're powerful," and the Victim Roles are **Violence and Deception**.

# PERSONAL SHARING:

Here Is Some Personal Sharing from Adult Children in Recovery:

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## Not Drunk, But . . .

Compulsive gamblers are different from their non-addicted fellows, only by virtue of the fact that non-addicts do not have a gambling problem. If non-addicts gamble, they know when to quit and can. Compulsive gamblers also know when to quit and they can, but they don't!

The only place they feel they really belong is at the poker, dice or blackjack table, or wherever their favorite form of "action" is taking place.

There they are accepted and welcome as long as their money holds out.

In reality, it is only their money that is welcome and accepted. They are only tolerated as incidental bearers of same. When their money is gone, their welcome's gone, too!

While their money lasts, they feel secure and comfortable. No great demands are made upon them, for they have succeeded in slamming the door on the cold, outside world of reality.

They bask (temporarily) in the warm glitter, snug in the womb of a dream world of gambling, until the losing "rush" outlasts their chips and their dream world shatters, shards crashing down around them.

**-Gus H., Gamblers Anonymous, Mountain View, CA**

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## Disillusioned & Embittered About the "God Stuff"

As a young child I had a strong spirituality, an inner sense of morality and justice. This was not from the teaching of others but seemed to be inborn. By the time I needed 12-Step recovery, however, I had become so disillusioned and embittered that I could not acknowledge any concept of a Higher Power.

When I became involved in 12-Step recovery, I considered myself an atheist I put up with all the "God stuff" for reasons of survival. I knew that, for me, to drink was to die. I used the group as my Higher Power. I stayed sober at the meetings. I found it impossible to work the Steps, which I viewed as negative, self-condemning and humiliating.

For four years I remained free from alcohol but addicted to cocaine: In an attempt to clean

up, I joined another 12-Step fellowship. My habit lessened considerably, but I never stayed clean for more than 3 weeks at any one time. I had decided that I was an agnostic, not an atheist, but I still could not get past Step 2.

The following year my younger brother committed suicide, after a two-year struggle with mental illness. During those two years he told me how he shut down his feelings as a child, to avoid being beaten as I was. He acknowledged this as the reason he was unable to open up to his counselors but felt trapped and unable to change it. He was also shamed by our parents' denial of his illness, making it still more difficult for him to accept help.

As a result of this tragedy, I began facing my own inner child issues. My recovery thus far had been focused only on my physical addictions. Simply remaining clean and sober wasn't enough. I now saw that I was powerless, not only over substances, but also over the devastating effects of my upbringing.

Around the same time, I began studying the teachings of a metaphysical church. I found that their beliefs agreed with the inner spirituality that I had felt as a child. In my fifth year of recovery, I finally found a nurturing and supportive Higher Power.

I now believe in a Universal Spirit which dwells within everyone. This Loving Power is available to anyone who will acknowledge it. My Higher Power is not someone outside myself, but rather a Greater Power within myself. This Spirit neither judges nor punishes. It has always been one with me, whether or not I believed this. This has allowed me to work the Steps joyfully and without guilt or fear.

In addition to being guidelines for recovery, the Steps when read or spoken can also be experienced as a form of affirmative prayer. I find that I can pray much more effectively using words which I don't need to redefine as I say them. For these reasons I have adapted a personal version of the Steps. I believe that this adaptation preserves the original power and purpose of the Steps while providing a useful affirmative alternative:

### **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.

■ **Anonymous**



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## 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  
woodburning 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 (October 8, 1987)**

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

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?

-Jim W., Humboldt ACA Intergroup

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## GIANT FUR-ARMED INSECTS

William Burroughs, in his novel, *Nova Express*, states . . . "*Giant, fur-armed insects run the world.*" His perspective, colored by his social class (offspring of the American Burroughs Business Machines family) was, as far as he could tell, *factual*. Born in the mid-Twentieth century, Burroughs was raised in an upper East Coast prominent capitalist family, steeped in privilege and snobbery. His male relatives seemed, indeed, inhuman from his child's perspective. Utterly focused and devoid of tenderness or humor, they were calculating, cold-blooded life-forms intent on wrapping up the world's resources in their complex webs of mergers, bond issues, consolidations, strung by sticky contract-threads, each to the next and former. On and on. He wasn't one of them. He'd been bred to be *one of them*, he knew, yet he lacked the gritty exoskeleton, even in embryo, to make the metamorphose! He sensed himself to be an inadequate, unredeemable fraud as a creation, with nothing to be done about it. Bitterly outraged, he turned his sadness into guile. In the rare fresh air of each other's summer homes, the bugs he lived among vied among themselves to dispossess each other, quietly depositing their spores of self-consolidation among the hors d'oeuvres! So it must have

seemed to an introverted child. The women, unspeakably trivial and vain, claimed to be his kind. They despised their insect-mates, he was told, with their appetites and lust! Still, they stayed on, kept up appearances and put up with enough sex to produce offspring – *him!* Thus, the world was run.

We don't all have situations as graphic or as easily diagrammed as William Burroughs did. Nor are many of us such gifted writers who can turn our personal dramas



into literature! Still, every addict knows how it feels to be a misfit, something of an alien in a world that doesn't work for *them*. Frustrated, ineffectual and too weak to survive alone, they are captives, gripped by whoever or whatever "calls the shots."

Everyone faces the puzzle of identity, who we really are, in life. It is a question we get asked, beginning with, "*What do you want to be, when you grow up?*" Some people seem to have more options than others, but, probably, few respond, "I plan to be an

alcoholic," or "I want to be a battered spouse!" Statistically, however, it turns out many addicts and co-dependents will already have embarked toward those destinations before the age of five.

"Addiction" is an outlook, a set of expectations about our place and power in the universe, more than whatever identified drug or destructive pattern manifests. An addicted person, whether hooked on a substance, or on a compulsive behavior like gambling, or on being abused by people, unfailingly fosters and reinforces the view that, for them, *all circumstances* become both *hopeless and unchangeable*. This is true because "frustrated, trapped" is *who they believe they are*. Their addiction is how the addict *proves* this inner bedrock conviction. And because, again, by definition, addictions *are persistent destructive behaviors*, this distorted self-identity *must* fail, lose, re-affirm itself through producing successive painful outcomes, "*I am trapped! I am hopeless! See? Life may work for you, but not for me!*"

Burroughs, our example, saw his family and his social class, everyone he knew, as heartless and inhuman. As a pre-verbal child, he knew *he* had feeling, so he must be something else, either the rare human among these dreadful bugs or, since he was *their* offspring, was he, then, likewise just a different monster, simply deceiving himself that he was not? Thus, his self-identity concept was influenced, and later, acted out. "*Are*

*we humans among monsters? Or are we all monsters?"* His books pose these questions, an unresolved dilemma that engaged him throughout his long heroin-addicted life.

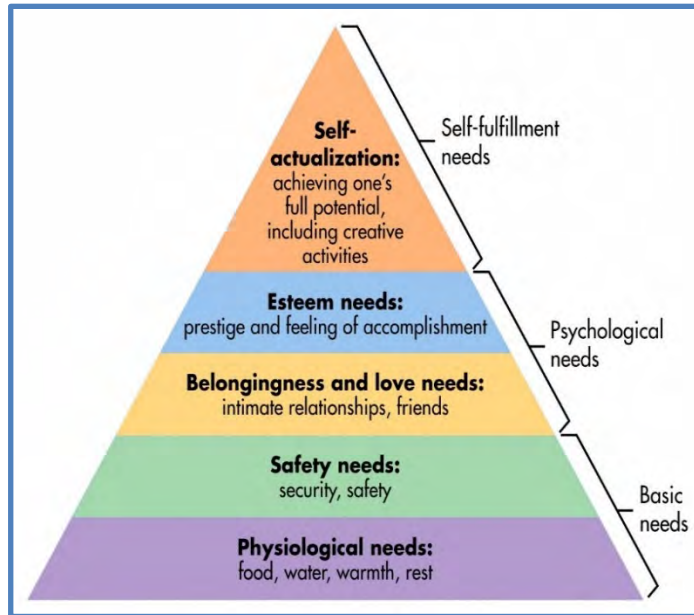
A personal sense of hopeless isolation is the illusion, the common thread, the core identity all addicts share. Addicts inhabit a world apart from "happily ever after" outcomes. No matter who they live with or how much joy, happiness and satisfying progress surrounds them, an addict's life remains hopeless and miserable—unless, until, this aspect of their core identity shifts! An addict<sup>31</sup> *in recovery* becomes, quite literally, a *different person!* Such a shift is a major life-change—analogue to an enlightenment experience—once it has taken hold.

Recovery from addictions, in any of the forms addictions take, represents *at least a momentary displacement* of the addict's sense of personal isolation. Approached neurologically, *concepts* are biochemical circuitry we've anchored within our brain. Our perceptions, patterns of synapsis that fire when "triggered," are, in effect, organized to "make sense" out of our experiences. Dislodgment from an addict's biochemical "trigger," however brief, awakes a spark of hope. Biochemically, *hope* represents a *breakout* of the stereotype circuitry of despair.

Awakening hope of freedom, experientially, in an addicted individual is much like introducing "new code" into a "read only memory" segment of computer programming. The *possibility of change* becomes momentarily *real*, whereas, previously, it was quite literally *unthinkable*. Conceptually, an idea springs into existence: "Who we are—our identity—*may* be an ongoing, fluid process, not the fixed or inescapable grind we'd thought!" Since, by definition, every active addict believes their *persistent destructive behavior* is *who they are, what they deserve*, in a word, *their inescapable fate*, entertaining the idea that we are our present choices, made visible through actions, producing the character we build is, in itself, an authentic identity shift!

Structure and support are necessary features in sustaining the process of recovery, once begun. Restructuring ingrained neurologically patterned behaviors is experiential, not just an intellectual exercise or even a matter of gained insight. Theory, by itself, however logical or profound, fails to jar, break up, displace an addict's triggered bio-circuitry unless it directly impacts *behavior*. "Not taking a drink today" is a *behavior*. It is measurable by objective means and accountable in terms of time. What has made Alcoholics Anonymous powerful is its pragmatism. "*If I can do it, you can do it!*" is a kind of challenge as well as a form of fellowship encouragement. "*This has worked for me,*" is an implied invitation to *join*, to *identify* within the group (and thereby, to *replace the neurological patterning of isolation* with revised self-concept of *membership*.)

<sup>31</sup> The term, "addict," is broadly descriptive of "repetitive, persistent destructive patterned behaviors," i.e., alcoholic, drug addict, overeater, gambler, co-dependent, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) patterns.



12-Step programs like Alcoholics Anonymous have a lot in common with Abraham Maslow's Self-Actualization pyramid of needs, especially in AA's second textbook, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, which was written in 1952.

Instead of just *goals*, however, AA's 12 Steps are structured as *behaviors* to be practiced, modeled, discussed, and used to provide focus to the fellowship. This, in addition to offering a template for restructuring each individual

member's approach to life beyond their former addiction that is self-paced. How far and how fast each recovering addict applies and internalizes these principles is a matter of their choice, depending on where their comfort zone lies.

A 12-Step program's recovery premise is that, despite all seeming obstacles, we are *at all times free* to join our personal identity to whatever we conceive is a force for good and only good, and trust that this decision will, unfailingly, transform us. As we come to embrace this attitude and outlook, the *present* becomes a place we feel welcome.

Then, to the question, "*Who am I?*" we respond, "*I am an expression of the most powerful force for good that I can conceive of each passing day!*"

This isn't a prideful challenge. It's just a true expression of how we come to live.

**-Raven, Reprinted with permission from *Against All Odds*, 2000.**

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SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:

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## Gradual Progress is Progress!





# MORE WILL BE REVEALED<sup>32</sup>

## Contrasting the Victim Roles and Freedom Wheels<sup>33</sup>

The basic human needs we are seeking to satisfy, on either of the Wheels, are referred to as *instincts* by Bill W. (*Step Four, AA's Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*). "Creation," he stated, "gave us instincts for a purpose. Without them we wouldn't be complete human beings."

We've adhered to Bill W.'s teachings. Viewing our behaviors as attempts to satisfy basic human needs has proven helpful in gaining a poised sense of ourselves. This outlook also encourages self-honesty because we can accept our inner drives as natural and good in themselves and not evils to be eliminated. Science seems to support this point of view. Evidence suggests that much of our human behavior, such as children being parented, as mates and lovers, as mothers and fathers and as community members, is powerfully influenced or predisposed from deep nonrational centers within our brains. These areas within the cerebellum, medulla, hypothalamus and limbic regions are being examined with increasing interest by both medical and psychological researchers<sup>34</sup>.

As research into the nature of Adult Children issues continues, insight is being gained on the ways these natural instinctive drives have been distorted by dysfunctional parenting in our childhoods. Creating alternatives that embrace these drives instead of eliminating or repressing them is the goal of these Wheels as well as a fundamental goal of reparenting ourselves in recovery.

We've taken a pragmatic approach and updated Bill W.'s terminology to reflect our present understanding and use of language: "*an instinct for material-physical security*" has been renamed *survival*; "*social standing*" we call *identity*; "*emotional security*" we term *commitment* and "*sex relations*" we call *gratification*.

Each of these four basic drives, **survival**, **identity**, **commitment** and **gratification** appears twice on each Wheel opposite from one another. Beneath each pair, groups of four spokes make

<sup>32</sup> Selections in this Chapter are used with permission from *With Gentleness, Humor, Love & Respect* (HCI 1989) by Kathleen S. and Jewell E., updated by Kathleen S. (2020). Except for fixing typos, and syntax errors, we provide these materials as they were written in ACA's original fellowship of meetings and Intergroups during the period 1986-1991. The IGs included ACA's many anonymous "founders" who produced these 12-Step program materials!

<sup>33</sup> Included in this book, see *Recovery Wheels*, pgs. 30, 31.

<sup>34</sup> Written in 1988.

up characteristic behaviors that tend either toward satisfying the particular basic needs (Freedom) or toward limiting basic needs (Victim Roles).

Just inside the Wheels, in bold type, a general word describing the style or class of behavior involved in the four spokes is listed. For example:

1. Under **survival** on the Victim Roles Wheel, **violence** appears across from **deception**. Each is a class or style of behaviors that attempts to secure survival in a threatening and insecure world. On the Freedom Wheel, however, we find **assertiveness** across from **integrity** under **survival**, indicating styles of behaviors that tend to free us from threat, dangerous conditions and physical insecurity and move us to safer and saner environments.
2. Under **identity**, *disclosure* and *acceptance* on the Freedom Wheel replace old false fronts of *heroics* or painful blame-games of *rejection* that formerly characterized much of our experience in relating to ourselves and to others, either personally or socially.
3. **Commitment**, the need to sense connection to others and to life itself becomes structure or a process of limits and values to nourish and support. *Structure* is counterbalanced by *creativity*, which replaces old distortions of *control* and their inevitable counterparts in *escape*.
4. Under the term **gratification**, *imposition* or *dependence* (user-used characteristics of Victim Roles) are replaced by the affirmative concepts of *support* and *trust* (realizations of present internal resources). These new concepts move us toward a world where love and appreciation are freely given and happily received.

Try using the Wheels on issues or problems as they occur in your life and in connection with each of the 12-Steps as you refocus on yourself instead of others. The Freedom Wheel is helpful in circumventing blocks or blind spots where there seems to be a lack of choice or limited alternatives. Prepare affirmations for yourself from the Freedom Wheel to deal with issues on the Victim Roles Wheel that cause you difficulty. Use them in your practice of the Eleventh Step. Also, try using a spoke on the Freedom Wheel as an affirmation for meditation or prayer to aid in expanding your horizons.

Draw or trace these Wheels and put them where they are easy to see. This is helpful in gaining insight, sometimes unexpectedly, into your own motives and behaviors. The Wheels can be aids in seeing your relationship to yourself, to your own reactions in trying to control or manipulate yourself or to scare yourself.

## Inner Tapes Exercise with Chart

Study the Victim Wheel, spoke by spoke. listen to any inner tapes that you have and note any false, compulsive or fear based messages you are presently sending to yourself. Toward the middle of your page write the phrase from the Victim Wheel spoke. Then list the deceptive messages to the side of each spoke.

Look at the counterpart spoke on the Freedom Wheel and write down the affirmation next to the Victim Wheel phrase. If you are able to do so, write down a "personal truth" about the affirmation that replaces the "old tape" for you.

### Identifying Lies We've Been Living

Lies	Victim Role	Freedom Wheel	Truths
I'm important because my appointment book is full.	Exhaustion (depression)	I accept praise!	I accept myself as a wonderful human being!
I'm awful. If anyone really knew me, they wouldn't like me.	Self-loathing (shame)	I feel my anger and my fear!	As a <i>whole</i> person, I experience anger and fear, and acknowledge them!
I don't fit in anywhere. I'm better, or worse, than others.	Exclusion (ignoring)	I welcome input!	I am a valuable person; I welcome input for my growth!
My way is the best way. My timetable is the most important.	Demands (obligations)	I experience feeling acknowledged!	I have valuable input to share, and I take pleasure in my effectiveness.
I need to win approval from others by flattery.	Seduction (flattery)	I experience feeling respected!	I am comfortable being who I am!

## The Victim Roles and Freedom Wheels with Steps 1, 2 And 3

### Choices

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From experience I recognize that anytime I think I only have two choices and neither one of them feels quite right but rather is the lesser of two evils, I'm usually functioning from the Victim Roles Wheel.

When this happens, *I surrender*. This is one of the ways I work Steps 1, 2 and 3. In order to surrender to the wisdom of my Higher Power, I find it necessary to tell the truth. One aspect of truth that I can recognize is that I have a problem I feel I must solve, but I can only come up with one or two choices and neither of these feels comfortable. In other words, I don't know a solution that suits me. I remind myself that it's okay to not know.

Admitting that I don't know ("I'm powerless," *Step 1*) sends me to *disclosure* on the Freedom Wheel; this means I must admit who I am.

I complete my surrender by directing my disclosures to my Higher Power in prayer (*Steps 2 and 3*). I may not always get solutions immediately through prayer, but by turning this over to my Higher Power I am *free* to take the focus off the problem (which I've admitted I can't solve right now). Then I go on to dealing with something I can do, like taking care of my immediate needs. For example, "*Am I hungry or tired?*" "*Do I need to nurture myself in some way?*" "*Do I need to go to a meeting or to call someone?*"

Therefore, I no longer find it necessary to vacillate between two ineffective choices and make myself crazy! From my experience in recovery, I now know that there are many choices that I cannot access from my old behavior patterns on the Victim Roles Wheel. I accept this and take Steps to surrender and become free.

### Using the Recovery Wheels with The Serenity Prayer

Another technique to discover what lies I am telling myself that bind me to the Victim Roles Wheel, is to refer to the Serenity Prayer:

*God, grant me Serenity [calmness and peacefulness] To accept the things I cannot change [acquiescence]*

*Courage to change the things I can [fortitude]*

*And Wisdom to know the difference [guidance from a Higher Power].*

I have divided this prayer into four parts: First, I come to a calm place and then, (referring to the situation I'm facing) I ask myself, "*Is this a situation I am trying to control? Do I need to accept it instead?*"

Or, "*Is this a situation where I am assuming the role of victim (and, therefore, need to face it with increased courage)?*"

If I am unsure about what is going on or confused about which role I am playing, I postpone taking hasty action and seek wisdom/ guidance from my Higher Power.

**Example:** *Suppose someone owes me \$100 for some work I did, and I should have received the check in the mail at least three days ago. I really need the money for basic expenses and bills. My first thought is to call the person. I notice that I have told myself that it's okay for me to do something about the money because I need it, but not just because I worked for it and deserve it.*

*My next thought is to become afraid they'll be offended and suspect I don't trust them. Because they did express that they liked my work and I have the potential of more work from and through them, I don't want to offend them by pressuring them to pay. In a matter of about 60 seconds, I have managed to visualize this person as an authority figure whose reactions I feel threatened by (in the area of financial security). I've slipped onto the Victim Roles Wheel, under deception, appeasement. As I realize this, I acknowledge to myself that I have kept my commitments to this person, in the agreed time frame. They have not kept their word to me (though there may be an explanation), but my worry is that they might be offended!*

*I refer to the Serenity Prayer and ask: Is this a situation I can change (and just need to muster some courage)? Or is this a situation I cannot change (and, thus, need to exercise acceptance)? (If I had felt confused, enraged or helpless, I would have taken a prayer break until my Higher Power granted me wisdom.)*

*After a little reflection, I decide that it is my lack of courage to investigate about the money that is holding me a prisoner on the Victim Roles Wheel. The lie I'm telling myself appears to be something like, "Their needs are more important than mine are," which locates me somewhere on the "only you are real" quadrant of the Victim Roles Wheel, centered either in (self-) deception or dependence.*

*To give myself courage, I consider the statements on the Freedom Wheel, particularly the statement that replaces appeasement with feeling my power. Realistically I consider how I have performed as agreed and when I am calm, I make the call.*

*My client responds that they mailed the check, but they would like me to stop by and estimate some more work if I am available. In this case, the truth and action of "Courage to change the things I can" shifted me to living from the Victim Roles to a Freedom Wheel experience.*

I don't always get the result I hoped for when I'm operating from the Freedom Wheel. Sometimes it's an even better outcome. But my chances are certainly greater from the Freedom Wheel perspective; plus, I always feel good about myself. I have my sense of integrity because I have been honest with myself and another person.

If I had felt *manipulated* in my communication with my employer, *assertive* spokes on the Freedom Wheel would have been appropriate, but I might have shared these at a meeting, in maintaining my own serenity, and asked my HP's guidance before risking being direct at the job.

Examining this incident from the perspective of my recovery, I notice that the incident elicits childhood reactions. A flashback reaction occurred, where I experienced feeling "powerless" (*Step 1*) when I originally faced the issue of requesting prompt payment. Glimpses of memories—images and feelings—flashed before me as I moved through this experience. They took me back to the period of my life between the ages of 10 and 15 when I often felt exploited or taken advantage of by family members and others where work or money were concerned. I resolve to look over this period of my life, in working Step Four, reviewing and exploring the Victim Roles I assumed as a child that have "tagged" along with me into adulthood.

**Space for Notes:**

## Assessing Shared Responsibility

**Dr. Candice D<sup>35</sup>**, who shared this exercise with us, pointed out that many Adult Children are inclined to think in terms of black or white when it comes to assessing responsibility, e.g., "It's *my* fault," or "It's *your* fault." Blaming, name-calling-, or lying and concealing may be normal styles of assessing responsibility **in** much that we experience today, **but** these certainly are not healthy methods.

This exercise is a way to take an honest look at conflict or stress situations, taking into account, holistically, factors of self, others and situations as they arise. Use this exercise with the Recovery Wheels to see how *denial* and *honesty* are factors. With this approach, guilt and fear tend to subside and real problem solving becomes a greater possibility.

1. What is the problem, difficulty or aborted effort to be assessed? (Be as specific as possible and don't use name-calling or blaming in defining the problem.)
2. How did the situation contribute to the problem? (Consider factors such as: being jobless, being evicted, experiencing illness, abusing substances, etc.)
3. How did others contribute? (Specify people involved: work, family, etc.)
4. How did I contribute? (Consider self-criticism, self-examination, habits, weaknesses, etc.)
5. How have I handled similar issues in the past? (Notice any improvement and difference of perspective.)
6. How can I handle it now, to my best advantage? (Be realistic and fair to yourself!)

### Guidelines to Be Considered as A Basis for Justice and Fairness in Relationships

1. Remember to ask for 100 percent of what you want in your relationships.
2. Don't do anything you really don 't want to do.
3. Don't do more than 50 percent of the work (as you see it) in your relationships, be it physical, emotional, financial, sexual or spiritual.

### Space for Notes:

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Candice D., clinical psychologist, is an active member of 12-Step programs and an Adult Child.

# CREATIVE ACTION ROUTINES<sup>36</sup>

## Practicing “Walk the Talk”: Another Recovery Tool

**“Clear boundaries aren’t something you just order online and then put on like a new set of joggers. No, not until you’ve *gotten into them, stretched your arms and legs, looked into a mirror and actually run around the track a few times, do you really fit, really own them as yours!*”**

In recovery, taking action is a testimony to progress. Seeing ourselves and our experiences alter for the better, finding ourselves able to succeed in terms of our own values and feeling ourselves truly free of limitations that had kept us back from life are the rewards of our willingness to becoming our own loving parents.

Taking action is about willingness. Beginning with the first steps out of denial, willingness is motivation and remains a reliable "reality check". This reality check asks, "Are we willing to act on new information, to let the new behavior replace the old and to accept ourselves as healthy and whole human beings?"

In terms of the 12 Steps, willingness to change is the core of Step Six where we ask ourselves, *"What no longer serves me? Am I willing to let it go, to make a real change in how I live, one day at a time?"*

Willingness is an inner readiness that comes before change; it is an enthusiastic, hopeful feeling. Adult Children may have this desire and enthusiasm to change inside, but often feel stifled or clumsy when it comes to actually taking the risk to reaching out (or to be seen).

On feeling levels, the concept "we are what we do" is a key and affects self-concept in subtle but pervasive ways. If, for example, we were abused or intimidated children in dysfunctional families, we probably learned to survive by cringing, rebelling, lying or sneaking; it is likely that we internalized self-loathing and shame toward ourselves, in addition to learning some self-defeating behaviors.

We gain insight as we come out of denial. Lasting recovery becomes a reality as we are able to risk acting on this new information and to internalize a new feeling experience of who we really are. We are able to stand tall, negotiate, speak and act out of integrity. We develop effective new behaviors and also gain the great blessing that comes from feeling ourselves free of behaviors which we, ourselves, rejected all along.

Inner shame we had internalized as victims in alcoholic or dysfunctional homes, is released

<sup>36</sup> This section, “Creative Action Routines,” is used with permission, reprinted from *With Gentleness, Humor, Love & Respect* (HCI 1989.) by Kathleen S. and Jewell E., updated by Kathleen S. April 2020.

by action. These actions are our own and we can respect them. Step Nine of the 12 Steps operates to release us as we are able to act from our hearts.

Creative Action Routines are a collection of dramatic techniques designed to provide structure and support for bringing concepts, feelings and behaviors into *the reality of experience*. These routines create a context in which it is *safe to take risks*. For Adult Children, this is especially important. As we become able to take these risks, we experience overcoming the *fear-tapes* of being ridiculed, being victimized, self-negating, appearing silly or stupid, appearing better than or less than others, or not being perfect.

Our previous concepts and behavior patterns remain embedded in our physical bodies, imprinted by our past physical experiences. Some Adult Children may be more or less unaware of their bodies as a result of these experiences—unable to *feel*, physically or emotionally.

Through practicing these routines, we allow more nurturing concepts to replace parts of our actual experience in a safe setting. Examples are the concepts of "*Don't talk*", "*Don't trust*" or "*Don't feel*" from Claudia Black's *It Will Never Happen to Me* (1983). Many Adult Children internalized these messages and they became our survival mechanisms. We have memories, both physically and mentally, which prove why these are true statements (or were) based on past (childhood) experience.

From the point of view of recovery, how many memories and physical experiences do we have that give us a physical experience of the opposite messages, "*It's okay to talk*", "*It's okay to trust*" or "*It's okay to feel*"?

If we were to take a true/false quiz that had these statements on it, we might answer that these are true statements today. We may intellectually believe these statements are true, and we may support others in actually doing them. But when it comes time in our own lives to talk, trust and feel, can we do it?

Creative Action Routines provide a structured way to create opportunity and a safe place to let some new concepts integrate into experience. As we experience ourselves behaving differently, expressing feelings long denied or repressed or releasing grief, recovery concepts cease to be mere abstractions. We begin to believe in ourselves and to own our identities as Adult Children in recovery, no longer prisoners of a painful past.

For Adult Children, these Creative Action Routines may seem like the hardest part of recovery, because *loss of control* is an aspect of *letting the healing occur*. At personal levels this is a part of the risk involved in real change. Change is risky. Being honest is risky. Living free of old ruts is risky.

Reparenting ourselves in recovery involves giving ourselves the structure and the support we need to take these risks and to meet life on life's terms. Creative Action can help to develop the habits of courage and self-acceptance that Step 12 implies are necessary to . . . "*Carry the message . . . and to practice these principles in all our affairs.*"

## Developing A Creative Action Routine<sup>37</sup>

### Outline for Structured Play

#### Concept

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- Get in touch (memory or imagination) with the behavior or experience to be represented.
- If it is a past experience, decide if you want to play it as it actually was or want to change the outcome.
- If it is a future event you are anticipating, you may choose to play it with the outcome of your worst fears or with your desired ideal outcome.

#### Casting

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- Decide who is going to be in this scene as "characters".
- What is your relationship to the people in this scene?
- What is their relationship to each other?

#### Plot

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- Share the basic structure/ action or plot format with the coparticipants and make yourself an outline.
- What's the story?
- What's the desired outcome?

#### Development

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- What are the specifics (time of day, location, lights?)
- What props do you need?
- Create dialogue: What do you want the characters to do, say or respond? Are there any *key words* or *phrases* you want said? **Note:** The language is always present tense, as if the scene *is taking place now*, including scenes from the past or future. Play people who have

<sup>37</sup> Jewell E., an AlAnon/ACA member and co-founder of the Humboldt ACA IG contributed these techniques and how to structure them. She is an actor/director experienced in cinema and live performance as well as Women's Issues Counselor and program administrator.

died as if they are alive or still have a voice in the present.

- Block out the action (beginning -middle-end). Where do people stand? Do they enter, leave?
- Recording
- Decide how you will record the information you learn.
- Use tape or video.
- Have someone take notes.
- Play the Scene
- Pay close attention to emotions, thoughts, memories, body language and sensations as you go.
- You are free to freeze the action at any point in order to record your responses as they are happening.

### **Read or review feedback**

### **Incorporate Feedback**

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- Revise and replay the scene until you feel satisfied with your part. Revise the script to include any of the following:
  - New understandings and insights
  - Body sensations as signals
  - Freeing up action or creativity
  - Different dialogue, actions or outcome
- 

## **Example Process: Working Alone with A Mirror**

### **Concept**

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- Examine a future event, such as anxiety in anticipation of a job interview.

### **Casting**

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- I will do this scene by myself playing two roles, my projected self and the projected employer.

## Plot

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- I've applied for a job and have been called for an interview. The prospective employer's name is Alex Butler. I have no clues as to what he's actually looking for in this position. I do meet the requirements, at least on paper.
- My desired outcome is to become aware of what I experience in this particular set of circumstances, to better understand myself. I'm not sure if I *want* the job or not.

## Development

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- The scene takes place in Alex Butler 's office in the morning. A large mirror faces a chair where I will sit and observe my whole body. I wear appropriate business clothes. I will be facing Mr. Butler in my imagination. I will introduce myself, shake hands and sit opposite the employer as he describes the specifications of the job. He will ask me questions about my resume. I will respond. Then I will ask him my questions about the job. He will respond. I will thank him and leave.

## Recording

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- I will tape record myself speaking into the mirror<sup>38</sup>.

## Play the Scene

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- I begin the scene by verbalizing for the recording my body sensations, thoughts or feelings I'm having before I enter the room.

*(Recording: "I feel scared. My hands are sweating and I'm rubbing them together. My heart is pounding. I feel like running away. I keep holding my breath. He's probably not going to want me.")*

- I enter, introduce myself and sit down.

*(Recording: "My appearance as far as attire looks pretty good. I look tense. My legs are crossed very tightly, and the pressure on my knees hurts. My hands are clenched together. My eyes look fearful. My body is slightly turned away in a protective position. I keep looking away toward the floor on the right, then back again. I look like someone who's waiting to be eaten alive!")*

- I imagine that he is describing the job to me. It is a job that interests me, and I feel I would enjoy it. I feel certain I could do the job well.

<sup>38</sup> This example was written in 1988. Now, it could be done on a PC or using a device to record for later playback.

*(Recording: "My body is relaxing, a little less tense now. I've uncrossed my legs. I am letting out a deep breath. I'm looking at Mr. Butler as he speaks.")*

- He asks me if I have any questions.

*(Recording ... "I've forgotten them! I have them written down. Here. I feel afraid to ask questions, like I might be imposing or offensive. My throat is tight. I feel like coughing or choking.")*

- I read the questions I've prepared. I listen to his responses, thank him and leave.

*(Recording . . . "I'm glad that's over! I feel like taking a shower or a hot bath. I don't think I did well. I'm not sure I want the job. I'm hungry.")*

### **Incorporate Feedback**

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- I notice that I defeat myself before I even start with the thoughts I have before I enter the office. I'm not surprised at how tense I looked. It's interesting to be aware of so many body sensations. I wonder if being hungry is a way I find relief from stressful situations?
- I decide to play this scene a few times more in different ways:
- Play it *straight through* and afterwards record my memories, thoughts, sensations, etc.
- Play it through *silently*, watching my body, playing with different body postures and noticing any difference in my emotions, thoughts or body sensations.
- Play it through as I did silently, except this time I keep repeating out loud through the whole scene, "I am a very valuable human being!"
- Play it through as if I'm interviewing *him* as a prospective employer for my valuable skills, which are in high demand.
- My goal is to explore alternatives and to experience myself acting freely in this situation.

This example can be restructured as a Role-Playing Exercise, with a *co-participant playing the part of the employer*. *When working with others, it's a good plan to switch roles, letting your co-participant play your part as you play the part of the employer*. Role Playing is a good way to gain skills in telling the truth and communicating effectively in a variety of situations that may feel threatening or risky. Job interviews, dates or assertive behavior with friends or family members are all good concepts for a script.

# INTRODUCING HUMOR

The sharing of joy and laughter is a universal experience of identification and acceptance, dissolving the facades that tend to separate us from ourselves and each other. The ability to laugh is unique to the human species - a spiritual gift.

Physiologically, laughter stimulates internal organs, increases adrenaline and heart rate (similar to exercise), may release endorphins (the body's natural pain killer) and has an overall effect of relaxation or stress reduction. Some medical doctors and therapists are recommending laughing 15 minutes per day as part of fitness programs. Studies of shame (self-loathing) have shown that the ability to laugh at oneself produces profound healthy relief and dispels shame. Not only does laughter offer us all these benefits, it's also *fun!* Adult Children may have learned survival mechanisms that abused humor in dysfunctional families. Some may have learned to function as family or social clowns, using humor to mask true feelings or to deflect violence. Others may have retreated and lost touch with their sense of humor or their ability to play. Humor at the expense of another is very hostile to witness or to experience, and those who have been the object of ridicule may have sad, painful associations to heal.

Of course, we are not suggesting that you use humor to mask your true feelings or to ridicule others. Instead we suggest getting in touch with the gleeful squeal of enjoyment. For example, observe the explosive laughter of a child who sees an adult making a funny face or (2) opens a package for the first time, engaging in wonderment of all the textures, sounds and movements of tearing wrapping paper. Humor can be learned, restored, explored and expanded. Humor can be *practiced*, as an aspect of reparenting our Inner Child, opening up new opportunities to experience and to share joy. Each of us has a certain uniqueness to our sense of humor, and this is an aspect of a healthy identity. Restoring our innate ability to have fun, to laugh and to be amused is an essential aspect of recovery.

## Techniques of Humor

All humor includes an element of truth and is funny because of the relationship to what is real in our experience. Using various types of distortion, surprise or comparison are ways humor can be introduced. These techniques can be tried to add humor to Creative Action Routines. Experiment in ways that seem appropriate to you.

### Shifts in Perspective

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- **Spatial:** Alter the dimension of distance or closeness
- **Exaggeration:** Make things, people, emotions, actions or issues appear much larger than life
- **Understatement:** Make things, people, emotions, etc., appear less important than they really are.

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## Description

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- **Detail:** Use careful observation to bring out minute features so that they become prominent
- **Analogy:** Point out the ways things are alike, or may be seen as similar
- **Juxtaposition:** Place things, types of people or environments side by side to exaggerate their differences
- **Personification:** Give voice or other human qualities to inanimate objects or animals

## Mannerisms

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- **Tone of voice:** Reveal or conceal emotions.
- **Pacing, rhythm:** Measure time, rate of speed in speech and movements.
- **Volume:** Sense loudness, softness or silence.
- **Mimicry:** Imitate expression, voice, body language, etc.

## Surprise

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- Change direction.
- Shift character.
- Make sudden movement or stops.
- Improvise actions or dialogue.

# Adding Humor Techniques to Creative Action Routines

## Concept

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- Choose any concept you like.

## Casting

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- Introduce personification or exaggeration to your cast. For example, you may wish to introduce an extraterrestrial who has never witnessed human interaction before.

## Plot

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- Make the plot an extreme case of your worst fears or fondest wishes. Exaggerate or minimize. Do the same thing with the outcome.

## Development

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- Make the whole scene happen in the dark; if embarrassment is an issue, wear a bag over your head and whisper. Do the whole interaction with your back to the person. Perhaps you want to stay in another room and just yell dialogue.
- If you want to communicate with someone you feel never hears you, have the "actor" play that person with his hands over his ears the whole time while you try different ways to get him to listen or hear.
- You may want to have all the characters mimic your body language, or everyone mimic the body language of the speaker. Maybe you want to exaggerate fear or nervousness by talking at triple pace or as s-l-o -w-l-y a-s p -o -s-s -i-b -l-e. Try playing the scene silently, while exaggerating movements and emotions. Have all the characters "freeze" at a certain point in the scene while you describe in minute detail all the things you have been thinking and not saying.
- Work through the remaining Steps using improvisation and surprise to vary the revised scripts. Take risks. Have fun!

**SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:**



## The Cold Hotdog Syndrome: Reparenting With Humor (Creative Action Routines)

Here's a Jewell E. Workshop:

*When I began to focus on my own needs in recovery, I found I didn't know what my needs were. I had to start somewhere so I decided to focus on the basics: food, clothing and shelter.*

*I had clothes and shelter, and I had food, but I noticed that if there was no one else in front of me who was hungry, I had a hard time eating. I literally could not bring myself to make something to eat. Opening a can of soup and heating it up on the stove was too hard. After all, I might have to add water and stir. This was definitely too much. I began to look at this behavior pattern as probably a good place to start in my reparenting program.*

*I began observing myself. I noticed that if I were hungry and alone, I would go to the refrigerator and pull out a cold hotdog and just stand there and eat it, while gazing into the nearly empty refrigerator and looking at the things I didn't feel like fixing for myself. A cold hotdog or two became my lunch and dinner on some days.*

*I decided to take this information out of context and see what happened. I imagined that a friend called and said, "Hi! I'm in the neighborhood and want to stop by and see you. And by the way, I'm really hungry. Do you have anything to eat?"*

*Now, if this were really happening, I'm sure that I could get creative and fix something substantial. I would even be concerned about it being a balanced meal. I probably would race to the store, if need be, to make sure that my friend had a decent meal.*

*I again ran through this sequence in my mind, only this time to get a different perspective, I decided to treat my friend just the way I treat myself. I imagined my friend visiting and saying, "Oh, by the way, I'm really hungry. Do you have anything I could eat?"*

*I then visualized myself opening the refrigerator, pulling out a cold hotdog, handing it to her with no bun, no nothing and saying, "Sure. Here you go!"*

*When I took this issue of mine and developed it in this context, it became funny because of the element of surprise. Who would expect someone to offer a guest a cold hotdog right from the fridge?*

*This approach also exaggerates the behavior so that it becomes clearer to me how I am treating myself, in contrast to how I treat others. I had also managed to "lighten up" the issue for myself by laughing about it (instead of judging myself). From this lighter perspective, it was easy to see a way to creatively change my behavior. I decided to treat myself more like a guest!*

*As a reparenting exercise, I now began pretending that there was a small child seated at my table saying, "I'm hungry! Will you fix me something to eat?"*

*I would and I encouraged myself to go ahead with pretending it was for someone else for as long as I needed to. This seemed to make it okay for me to go to the trouble of preparing a meal. When I sat down to eat, I thanked myself for the food I had prepared. Both parts of me (the Child that needed to eat and the Adult who fixed the food) seem happier - and better fed!*

*It really didn't take many times of pretending I was fixing food for someone else before I was able to prepare food for myself. I've begun eating in a way that feels good to me, most of the time. This is how I personally beat the dreaded Cold Hotdog Syndrome.*

*One additional benefit that unexpectedly came of this process was an ability to look at how I'd learned to deny myself good food and care in my childhood dysfunctional home. My family had often been very poor, and as the older girl, I would have to prepare the food and really make it stretch. These sorts of memories can be very painful and difficult for me to see; but, with this lighter outlook, I can add this information to my Fourth Step inventory.*

## The Cold Hotdog Syndrome Exercises

Check the basics—food, clothing and shelter—in your own life, and notice if there are areas of your own needs where you hand yourself a cold hotdog instead of the care you'd expect to give a friend who is your guest. How do you feel about these *cold hotdog areas*, when you think about them without attempting to introduce humor?

- Look over the Introducing Humor section and try some of the suggestions. Pretend you have a job as writer for a stand-up comedian and are using this basic need as a way to put together a really great script. Or, pretend you're writing about *somebody else* who has these funny ways of taking care of herself. Do what it takes to "lighten up" and to stop judging for a while!
- Share your script with a trusted individual or group. Is it okay for *them* to laugh? Is

it okay for *you* to laugh? (*Step Five*)

- As your own loving parent experiment with treating yourself like a guest and notice how and if it works for you. It's perfectly okay to go on giving yourself cold hotdogs if you like. It's entirely up to you! (*Steps Nine and Six*)

After some time has elapsed, come back to your script and other notes on this process and notice any insights from your childhood experiences that influenced you.

Notice any feelings *under* the humor, associated with these past experiences. Is there sadness, anger or shame? Note these insights and feelings in your Fourth Step, if you hadn't observed them before.

**Space for Notes:**

## A Reflection Exercise: Adapting A Creative Action Routine

A big part of recovery is seeing yourself and allowing others to see you. Use this exercise as a *physical* way to do some Fourth or Tenth Step inventories and allow your sharing to be a form of Fifth Step with a trusted friend or sponsor.

### Follow these steps:

- Stand facing a partner, with about four feet between you, so that there is enough room for each to move comfortably, without bumping into things. One person agrees to be the *leader*, the other, the *follower*, to begin this process.
- The leader stands naturally. The follower takes a few minutes to study the leader; then she or he attempts to *duplicate exactly* everything about the leader, using her or his own body as though it were a mirror (in *reflection*).
- As the leader, watch carefully. What do you notice about yourself in what is being reflected? If you think the follower is not quite accurate, give her or him feedback. Because it's not easy to mimic exactly, take all the time you need to develop communication and feedback between the players in this Exercise. Often the leader's body language or postures she or he hadn't been aware of previously become revealed in this friend's reflection.
- Try saying a few things about yourself or changing your position, while the follower moves to reflect you. Continue for about five minutes.
- Then trade roles. Try acting out a *feeling* while being reflected. Reflect each other's *walk* or other behaviors. Make sure you allow time for feedback from each other. Give yourself feedback, too. See this as a Step 10 inventory.
- Make Notes Which Include:
  - *What you saw*
  - *Emotions you felt*
    - *What thoughts you had*
    - *What memories you experienced*
    - *Your body sensations*

**SPACE FOR YOUR NOTES & CREATIVITY:**

## Healing Recreation (Exercise in Loving, Caring for & Respecting the Inner Child)

*Action* is the key to anchoring real change in Recovery! These next two Exercises are provided by two ACA founding members who share their special expertise and professional training with us, geared to be used without “frills” by fellow travelers in their recovery journey.

Our thanks for this exercise go to Dave L. MA, MSW<sup>39</sup>, who describes himself as "an Adult Child learning to reparent himself by utilizing recreation."

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"Learning to reparent ourselves with gentleness, humor and love can take place in all areas of our lives Recreation, the adult word for play, can be a good place to begin reparenting because it allows us to contact the Inner Child through play. By learning to play in ways that demonstrate love, care and respect for the Inner Child, we begin to supply our own reparenting and begin to take responsibility for our own life. In fact, the recognition of need for recreation is a crucial step in taking care of the Inner Child. This step helps relieve us of compulsive behavior, such as workaholism.

"Having been raised in an alcoholic and workaholic family, I had little or no understanding of the need and benefits of recreation. As part of my own recovery process, I began to explore integrating regular recreation into my life. Initially, I approached recreation in the compulsive way that I had learned to approach life. Gradually, I learned to treat myself with loving kindness and to recreate in noncompulsive ways. Learning to take responsibility for my life, becoming an actor rather than a reactor and letting go of the addiction to excitement, were some of the benefits of my new approach. I found that backpacking as a form of recreation was a metaphor for becoming a responsible actor in my own life

"Listening to the Inner Child was what brought me to backpacking. As I overcame the effects of denial, good and bad memories of my childhood began to come into consciousness. I recalled the sense of wholeness, JOY and safety that I had as a child when I hiked and explored the fields, forests and streams where we lived. I sensed that those feelings of wholeness, JOY and safety could return in my life if I gave that Inner Child the opportunity to re-experience nature in that fashion. I also experienced my feelings of being unable to take care of myself, helpless, defenseless and afraid of the dark. Accepting the validity of both sets of feelings was the first step in reparenting the Inner Child.

<sup>39</sup> Dave L., at the time he shared this exercise with us, was the Independent Study Coordinator for a large Junior College in California. He's also been known to describe himself as "an over-educated back-woods logger who needed ACA to make sense out of ten years of college." Dave serves on NPO Boards and Service Steering Committees.

How could I assist the Inner Child in alleviating his fears so that he could experience the positive feelings that were just on the other side of the fears: How would a loving, caring, respecting parent assist his child in this process?

The first stage for me was recognition and acceptance of all my feelings, not denying them. The second, was allowing myself the opportunity to experience all of my feelings, in a safe and secure nonjudgmental environment. Gathering information about my chosen form of recreation was the third part in the process for me. Making decisions based on what I had learned was the fourth part, and the fifth was acting based on the feelings, information and decisions.

"Each of the steps is described in greater detail below. As in any Adult Children process, the caveat, 'Take what you want and leave the rest,' is appropriate."

### **Stage I: Identify Potential Recreational Opportunities**

Take some quiet time and recall what positive memories of childhood you may possess. What was most fun for *you*? What brought you joy and happiness? If you cannot remember, talk to someone who knew you when you were young and ask him what brought you joy and provided happiness. Oftentimes, your own memory **will** be stimulated by the discussions. Once you identify an activity that you enjoyed as a child, ask yourself if you could enjoy that activity now. You may remember several things before you find one that feels good for you now. Give yourself an opportunity to experience the positive feelings that you once had about that activity. Examine how you feel about that activity now. Sadness, fear, guilt, anger or other feelings that are often difficult for Adult Children to experience, may arise.

### **Stage II: Experience All Your Feelings About the Activity**

An essential part of Stage II is giving yourself the opportunity to experience all of your feelings about the activity selected by your Inner Child in a nonjudgmental and accepting way. Love yourself for the courage to look, even if what you find doesn't feel good. Experiencing the feelings that do not feel good will release your creativity and provide the motivation to continue this loving and caring activity. Be aware of any self-critical attitudes that may creep into this process and lovingly accept this criticism and let it go. You may want to share these feelings with someone you trust, such as a sponsor or a good friend. If, at this point you feel that the activity you have selected is not appropriate for you, choose another that seems more workable and continue with Stage II.

### **Stage III: Gather Information About the Activity**

Gathering information about your selected activity is Stage III in this healing through recreational exercise. Some ideas regarding the information you need to gather can result from asking yourself, "How would a loving, caring, respectful parent introduce a child to this activity?"

Other questions may include, "Where are you going?" "Who are you going with?" "How are you getting there and returning?" "Do you have the resources necessary to take care of yourself when you arrive, such as money, equipment, knowledge, experience and friends?" "When will you return?" "Have you considered how to deal with unexpected occurrences?"

Many of us received these types of questions in our childhood from parents who were fearful, and we often felt their fear rather than their concern. Others of us had parents who were not concerned at all with these issues. Resistance to answering these questions may arise as a result of this old conditioning. However, remember that you are a loving, caring parent concerned with your Inner Child's safety and his ability to have fun and grow. If you undertake to answer these questions in a spirit of fun and growth, much Joy can be obtained.

### **Stage IV· Make Decisions About the Activity**

Evaluating your answers to the questions in Stage III and making decisions comprises Stage IV. Keeping in mind that you are acting as a loving parent to your Inner Child, decide which activity is best for you, what resources you will need, whether to go alone or with others, what you will need to learn and how you will deal with unexpected occurrences. While evaluating the activity and making decisions, remain open to your feelings about the activity, yourself and the process. Many Adult Children feel bored with this part of the process, often because the excitement of the chaos in the family is not present. Some resist because the process is not spontaneous (another variation of the boredom complaint.) Fear, anxiety, helplessness, excitement, joy and sadness may also result. Allow all these feelings and any others to exist and make a commitment to your Inner Child to complete the process. Avoidance at this point is very common, it reflects the avoidance of loving adult behaviors in the alcoholic family. By examining the feelings that arise, an Adult Child can begin to understand where these feelings originated and make the decision to act in responsible and loving ways to the Inner Child

### **Stage V. Acting**

Acting, doing and participating are involved in the next stage of this healing process. Again, while participating in your chosen recreational activity, maintain a close watch on your feelings. Reevaluate your chosen activity, gather new information about it through participation, reassess your decision (if necessary) and act again. Above all else, love yourself and learn and enjoy from the process.

## Sharing Held Feelings

Definitely a "Keep Coming Back" "It Gets Better" Transaction!

Acknowledgment and thanks go to **Candice D., PhD** for this exercise, which is designed to strengthen the bond of intimacy through facilitating honesty in conflict or critical feedback situations. Conflict-resolution is an *action process*, too! Few Adult Children have expertise in it, but like any other learned activity, we can and do improve and make progress with practice.

In working Steps Eight and Nine, this structured approach to communication may be a big help, especially where old, established patterns of "stuffing" feelings are being challenged. This structure is also a useful Creative Action Routine. It's a practical way to apply the Freedom Wheel's *integrity/assertiveness* spokes in potential conflicts (*Steps Ten and Twelve.*)

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**First, get in touch with how you are feeling. This may not be easy. You may encounter denial mechanisms in yourself that serve to mask, rationalize or minimize your feelings and/ or your value (importance) in the situation or relationship.**

**Example:** In a shared housing arrangement, Inez was bothered by her roommate Barbara's habit of leaving dishes and cups in the common rooms and areas. Inez called what she was feeling bothered because she didn't like to think of herself as being angry. Anger reminded Inez of her parents shouting at each other and even becoming violent. She didn't feel like that (although she sometimes did have a fantasy of throwing all those spaghetti-crusted plates off the deck). Instead of thinking of herself as angry, she masked her feeling by giving it a less specific name. She also may have minimized if she told herself, "At least my bedroom and the garage don't have slimy cups!" or rationalized by thinking, "Other people have different lifestyles, after all." (Either of these last two statements may be true, but they still have nothing to do with how Inez is feeling about her roommate!)

**After you have admitted to yourself your feelings in the situation or relationship, ask yourself if you want to share this feeling with the person(s) in question. Many of us have been conditioned to feel compelled to share, without reserving the right and power to ourselves to decide who we will allow into intimacy with us by exposing our feelings and thoughts to them.**

**Example:** Inez may decide she would rather replace Barbara (if Inez is the leaseholder) or move herself. Is it worth working out, from Inez's point of view? This is a question for Inez to answer, taking into account such factors as shared financial responsibilities performance, other fun-time activities and whatever else she chooses to consider.

If you decide you wish to strengthen the bonds of intimacy with the person involved, you may wish to prepare the interaction by asking her if she is willing to receive held feelings you have for her. This is an optional part of this process. If you are feeling something very strongly, you may wish to omit this step and just go on to the next one.

**Example:** Inez decides she wants to work out this issue because she likes a lot about Barbara and enjoys living with her. Inez has not communicated about this matter before and decides to use this step to open this level of communication involving critical feedback. Because Barbara hasn't read this workbook (as far as Inez knows), Inez uses words Barbara can understand, "I have some critical feedback for you, Barbara. Are you in a space to receive it now?"

If the above step is used and the other person is feeling strong enough or has time to receive your held feelings, express them, as clearly and as concretely as possible. Address the behavior the other person and your feeling response. (If the other person isn't willing to receive your held feeling now, make a definite time in the not too distant future when she will be willing, or determine if she is not willing.)

**Example:** "Barbara, when you leave your dishes and cups around the house, I feel angry."

If you feel safe enough to do so, add some information about your own background and history that contributes to your feeling. However, be careful not to minimize, rationalize or mask your honest feeling response to the behavior under discussion. Share information that can aid the other person in seeing your point of view.

**Example:** "I feel angry because I end up picking up after you, and that isn't okay with me. I feel safer and more comfortable in my home when it's not cluttered. Besides, I don't like the smell of dirty dishes!"

You may have a solution to offer. Or you may specifically request that the other person do or cease doing a behavior. If you have a preference, communicate it.

**Example:** "I've gotten this flat basket out of the garage, and I'm going to put it here by the couch. I would like you to agree to put your dishes into it and then carry it into the dishwasher when the basket gets full or before it gets smelly!"

You also have the option to include some strokes for the person, as long as you stick to being honest and aren't losing the focus of communication at issue. If it feels appropriate, you may wish to share some of your good feelings, which may also fall into the category of held feelings.

**Example:** "There's so much about our relationship that I truly value; I want to work this out with you. You're a really responsible roommate when it comes to sharing the phone and the bathroom. You're a cheerful person, too, Barbara, and it's a real pleasure to share time with you!"

**Space for Notes:**



# RECLAIMING ACA'S LEGACY

## Holes in Our History

Why these materials—and others—aren't already part of ACA's "official" literature requires clarifying ACA's evolution as an organization—fearlessly as well as lovingly.

I am including a summary of the misunderstandings that arose within ACA's Service Network during the period 1982 (approximately) to 1991, for those who have an interest in this history. Why do this? Because—although "newcomers" and seasoned members are grateful for the simple fact that we have an ACA World Service Organization—early ACA history isn't fairly—or accurately—represented in *Adult Children of Alcoholics* (ACA's Big Red Book.)

Now that ACA/DF has revived, organizationally, from the near-extinction it suffered in the mid-1990s, our fellowship is strong enough—mature enough—to revisit these matters. We need to do that: People were hurt—driven away—from ACA's fellowship, even from recovery! Did some of them die? Probably. Valuable recovery tools were excluded, ignored, omitted from publication. Did the Service Structure and ACA's program suffer distortions, dysfunctional carry-overs that delayed or shorted-out ACA's healing power and potential for *at least twenty years*? Yes.

Could we have done better?

I'm here to say that I, personally, did as well as I could, for as long as I could, and, yes, here I am, still, bringing good will and sanity, to my last breath, if need be! Is that crazy? No, it is not.

Recovery is voluntary, not something that can be imposed upon the unwilling. Not only is this true of alcoholics, but it is easily as true of "control-addicted" codependents and exploiters. Inability to trust, sad and potentially cruelly unjust as it may often be, is, at bottom, a distrust of a Higher Power's goodness and capacity to prevail. Controllers are terrified that there *isn't a Higher Power* in whose care they can rest. Terror-based dysfunction doesn't, as a general rule, welcome holistic, revolutionary, galvanized change! It fights. It resists. Those of us who came out the "four corners" of the world—from various 12-Step programs, from churches and therapies—to create ACA World Service in the 1980s, didn't, for the most part, come to fight. We came to get well, to create, celebrate, to cooperate, to bring realistic new hope to the world.

But we were rebuffed—by what? By *dysfunction*:

Organizationally, to be blunt, a couple of mad men<sup>40</sup>—with two or three, maybe six or ten in-again, out-again supporters who had incorporated the *name* “ACA Central Service Board, Inc.”<sup>41</sup>—simply insisted on *owning* the fellowship. *Legally* incorporation is trump, unless someone wants to *fight*, and Adult Children in recovery don’t want to fight. We want to recover, cooperate, etc. So, two or however many the core nucleus on this Board was (and this varied a great deal, lacked a quorum much of the time) just asserted *power*. *Projected* that anyone who objected was “trying to take over” and built that sort of defensiveness into the By-Laws and into the Board, to a large extent, although some, perhaps most Board members simply *went along*, not to make waves—or they left.

How crazy was that? Being active in ACA IWSO was like going to holiday dinners with a dysfunctional family—a family in which all but one or two core members would be “in” one year and “out” the next. Our problem? As a 12-Step program, the *Intergroup leadership* wanted to adhere to the Traditions, not engage attorneys to challenge the LA/SFV Intergroup. It just wasn’t what we were about, organizationally. The Intergroups were frustrated and many of them dissolved during this period, 1991—1992. People who trusted me—trusted my program, my leadership, my intelligence and my commitment to this program and fellowship, including those dozens who also wholeheartedly pitched in to producing the tools for recovery this and the other books contain—felt exposed, disillusioned, profoundly betrayed in some cases, by the harshness and frustration we were subjected to by the poor, struggling ACA Board that incorporated itself and imposed itself on ACA during this period, 1984-1992.

<sup>40</sup>. Marty S., early ACA Board Member authored the ACA Identity Papers while living in Los Angeles. He was the keynote speaker at *all* the ACA’s interim World Service Conferences in 1986 through 1990. Marty left ACA Service in LA and returned to NYC sometime in the 1990s; Marty’s name has been removed in the BRB although it was published in an earlier version, *An ACA Roadmap* (1989 LA/SFV IG.) To see how heavily iWSO has drawn upon trauma therapy models, see Appendix A, “Looking Back in Order to Look Forward,” in *Adult Children of Alcoholics* (the Big Red Book.) Note that the Steps, although mentioned, aren’t *applied* within what are various theories of the root causes of childhood PTSD and trauma that are cited. This is because these ACAs’ experience, if any, with the 12-Steps was probably limited to hearing them read along with the Traditions and other Introductory materials at the beginning of AI-Anon meetings, not actually depending on them as the *primary treatment* for their own personal recovery. Those who haven’t internalized the power of the Steps as *primary treatment* for substance abuse addictive disorders, often remain unwilling to identify their own issues as “addictive” patterns, different only *in kind* to substance abuses.

<sup>41</sup> This same incorporate entity, ACA CSB, Inc., was amended to be “ACA World Service, Inc.” in March 1992—and is the present incorporated entity that owns ACADF at this writing, March 2020. This legal entity established by the approval of “an ACA fellowship group conscience” was never submitted to the approval of the Intergroups or ACA as a whole. It is a legal fiction at best, from the perspective of ACA as a whole. The incorporation documents were “cooked up” by two or three of the proposed Board, then presented as “a decision taken for the good of ACA as a whole,” for the approval a dozen or so meetings in November 1986, all in Southern California, then imposed (as “a done deal”) on ACA.

## What Now?

We can revisit our organization's old decisions, inventory the stage of recovery that motivated the Board's outlook and admit where mistakes were made. We can also note those who have embodied a sane, balanced point of view<sup>42</sup>. That's Tenth Step. Compassion, not punishment; clarity, not rationalization, these are the motivators.

Will ACA/DF undertake this sort of process? Yes. I believe we will. We are real; we have a way of life that matters, that transforms our lives (and thus, our world, our society, our planet.) We can trust recovery to gradually replace dysfunction in all our affairs, including in business matters, corporations, government. But it takes *doing*. In our personal lives and our immediate families, who we are and who we become can be trusted to prevail if we, as individuals, are willing to work for it. We trust our Loving Higher Power isn't powerless!

As a living fellowship—a process which remains on-going and alive—the mistakes that were institutionalized in our fellowship's journey to recovery can be faced squarely and rectified within the ACA World Service Structure. We needn't fight, resist, rationalize! How to cooperate isn't unknown to most of us, but how to *insist that cooperation prevail in organizational leadership* is the survival challenge we face, as a species and as a planet at this time. We trust in this. It is part of "getting well." We will make a real difference in the world we build and pass on to generations yet to come. ACA's gradual progress is as true for us as an organization as it is for us as individuals!

<sup>42</sup> Jack E. worked with the Intergroups and contributed to *Twelve Steps to Freedom* (1989.) Tony A.'s perspective, including his concerns about the risks of trying to apply amends and forgiveness to still-dangerous perpetrators, would have benefitted, had he been put in touch with Kathleen's ACA Writers Group. They had the same publisher, Health Communications, Inc. (HCI), but Tony A.'s *Laundry List* (1991), came out after Kathleen's work, *Healing a Broken Heart, 12-Steps for ACA* (1987) and *With Gentleness, Humor & Love, Tools for Adult Children* (1989) were released. They didn't meet at publisher-sponsored conferences and the Board members who could have put them in touch so misunderstood the cooperative nature of 12-Step fellowship that they "protected" Tony A. from interacting with those who were active in ACA Service when Tony A. was not.