

# **ACA – ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS**

## **COMMON CHARACTERISTICS AMONG ACA**

- Adult children of alcoholics guess at what normal is.
- Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty in following a project through from beginning to end.
- Adult children of alcoholics lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.
- Adult children of alcoholics judge themselves without mercy.
- Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty having fun.
- Adult children of alcoholics take themselves very seriously.
- Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty with intimate relationships.
- Adult children of alcoholics over-react to changes over which they have no control.
- Adult children of alcoholics constantly seek approval and affirmation.
- Adult children of alcoholics feel that they are different from other people.
- Adult children of alcoholics are either super responsible or super irresponsible.
- Adult children of alcoholics are extremely loyal even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved.
- Adult children of alcoholics look for immediate rather than deferred gratification.
- Adult children of alcoholics lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternate behaviors or possible consequences.
- Adult children of alcoholics seek tension and crisis and then complain about the results.
- Adult children of alcoholics avoid conflict or aggravate it; rarely do they deal with it.
- Adult children of alcoholics fear rejection and abandonment, yet are rejecting of others.
- Adult children of alcoholics fear failure, but sabotage their success.
- Adult children of alcoholics fear criticism and judgment, yet criticize and judge others. Adult children of alcoholics manage time poorly and do not set priorities in a way that works well for them.

In order to change, adult children of alcoholics cannot use history as an excuse for continuing their behaviors. They have no regrets for what might have been, for their experiences have shaped their talents as well as their defects of character. It is their responsibility to discover these talents, to build their self-esteem and to repair any damage done. They will allow themselves to feel their feelings, to accept them, and learn to express them appropriately. When they have begun those tasks, they will try to let go of their past and get on with the business of their life.

## **THE PROBLEM**

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

We had come to feel isolated, uneasy with other people, and especially authority figures. To protect ourselves, we became people pleasers, even though we lost our own identities in the process. All the same, we would mistake any personal criticism as a threat.

We either became alcoholics ourselves or married them or both. Failing that, we found another compulsive personality, such as a workaholic, to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We lived life from the standpoint of victims. Having an over-developed sense of responsibility, we preferred to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We somehow got guilt feelings when we stood up for ourselves rather than giving in to others. Thus, we became reactors, rather than actors, letting others take the initiative.

We were dependent personalities --terrified of abandonment--willing to do almost anything to hold onto a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet we kept choosing insecure relationships because they matched our childhood relationship with alcoholic parents.

These symptoms of the family problem of alcoholism made us "co-victims"--those who take on the characteristics of the problem without necessarily ever taking a drink. We learned to keep our feelings down as children and kept them buried as adults. As a result of this conditioning, we confused love with pity, tending to love those we could rescue. Even more self defeating, we became addicted to excitement in all our affairs, preferring constant upset to workable relationships.

This is a description, not an indictment.

## **THE SOLUTION**

The Solution is to become your own loving parent.

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

The healing begins when we risk moving out of isolation. Feelings and buried memories will return. By gradually releasing the burden of unexpressed grief, we slowly move out of the past. We learn to reparent ourselves with gentleness, humor, love and respect.

This process allows us to see our biological parents as the instruments of our existence. Our actual parent is the Higher Power, Jesus Christ. Although we had alcoholic parents, our Higher Power gave us the 8 Principles of Recovery.

This is the action and work that heals us: we use the Steps, we use the meetings and we use the telephone. We share our experience, strength and hope with each other. We learn to restructure our sick thinking one day at a time. When we release our parents from responsibility for our actions today, we become free to make healthful decisions as actors, not reactors. We progress from hurting to healing to helping. We awaken to a sense of wholeness we never knew was possible.

By attending these meetings on a regular basis, you will come to see parental alcoholism for what it is and how it affected you as a child, and continues to affect you as an adult. You will learn to keep the focus on yourself in the here and now. You will take responsibility for your own life and supply your own parenting.

You will not do this alone. Look around you and you will see others who know how you feel. We will love and encourage you no matter what. We ask you to accept us just as we accept you.

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

### **CHARACTERISTICS OF A.C.O.A.'s**

The following are some of the characteristics, agreed upon by one Alanon-Acoa group, that result in problems in our lives.

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