



celebrate
recovery

Welcome Home

Adult Children of the Chemically Addicted (ACA)

PROBLEM

Man 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 — will 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 alcoholic 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.

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.