

ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

THE PROBLEM: We seem to have several characteristics in common as a result of having been brought up in an alcoholic household.*

- A. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
- B. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
- C. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
- D. We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
- E. We live life from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that weakness in our love, friendships, and career relationships.
- F. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our faults or our responsibility to ourselves.
- G. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
- H. We became addicted to excitement.
- I. We confuse love and pity and tend to “love” people we can “pity” and “rescue.”
- J. 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. This includes our good feelings such as joy and happiness. Our being out of touch with our feelings is one of our basic denials.
- K. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
- L. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold onto a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings. We received this from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
- M. Alcoholism is a family disease and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
- N. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

(over)

THE SOLUTION: By attending Al-Anon meetings on a regular basis, we learn that we can live in a more meaningful manner; we learn to change our attitudes and old patterns and habits, to find serenity, even happiness.

- A. Alcoholism is a three-fold disease: Mental, physical, and spiritual, and our parents were victims of this disease, which ends in insanity and/or death. Learning about and understanding the disease is the beginning of the gift of forgiveness.
- B. We learn the three C's: We didn't cause it, we can't control it, and we can't cure it.
- C. We learn to put the focus on ourselves and to be good to ourselves.
- D. We learn to detach with love and to give ourselves and others tough love.
- E. We use the Al-Anon slogans: "Let Go and Let God", "Easy Does It", "One Day at a Time", "Keep it Simple", "Live and Let Live". Using these slogans help us to lead our day-to-day lives in a new way.
- F. We learn to feel our feelings, to accept them and to express them, and to build our self-esteem.
- G. Through working the steps, we learn to accept the disease, realize that our lives have become unmanageable, and that we are powerless over the disease and the alcoholic. As we become willing to admit our defects and our sick thinking, we are able to change our attitudes and to turn our reactions into actions. By working the program daily and admitting that we are powerless, we come to believe eventually in the spirituality of the program – that there is a Higher Power, God as we understand Her, Him, it. By sharing our experiences, relating to others, welcoming newcomers and serving our group(s), we build self-esteem.
- H. We learn to love ourselves. In this way, we are able to love others in a healthy way.
- I. We have telephone therapy with people we relate to – very helpful at all times, not just when problems arise.
- J. By applying the Serenity Prayer to our daily lives, we begin to change the sick attitudes we acquired in childhood.

*The Laundry List" as known by a N.Y. A.C.O.A. Al-Anon Group

This is a list of 13 characteristics of adult children of alcoholics per Janet Woititz, in her book, *Adult Children of Alcoholics*, 1983: **Adult Children of Alcoholics:**

- guess at what normal behavior is
- have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end
- lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth
- judge themselves without mercy
- have difficulty having fun
- take themselves very seriously
- have difficulty with intimate relationships
- overreact to changes over which they have no control
- constantly seek approval and affirmation
- usually feel that they are different from other people
- are super responsible or super irresponsible
- are extremely loyal even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved
- are impulsive. They tend to lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences. This impulsiveness leads to confusion, self-loathing, & loss of control over their environment. In addition, they spend an excessive amount of energy cleaning up the mess.