

ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS Characteristics

Adult Children of Alcoholics...

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

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...

1. We become isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We become approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relations.
6. 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.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We become addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to "love" people we can "pity" and "rescue".
10. We have stuffed our feelings from our traumatic childhood's and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much.
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. 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

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.

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. 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 re-parent ourselves with gentleness, humor, love and respect.

In order to change, adult children of alcoholics cannot use history as an excuse for continuing our behaviors. We have no regrets for what might have been, for our experiences have shaped our talents as well as our defects of character. It is our responsibility to discover these talents, to build

our self-esteem and to repair any damage done. We will allow ourselves to feel our feelings, to accept them, and learn to express them appropriately. When we have begun those tasks, we will try to let go of our past and get on with the business of life.

ENABLING

Enabling is defined as reacting to a person in such a way to shield him or her from experiencing the full impact of the harmful consequences of behavior. Enabling behavior differs from helping in that it permits or allows the person to be irresponsible.

- PROTECTION from natural consequences of behavior.
- KEEPING SECRETS about behavior from others in order to keep peace.
- MAKING EXCUSES for the behavior. (School, friends, legal authorities, work, family members.)
- BAILING OUT of trouble. (Debts, fixing tickets, paying lawyers, providing jobs.)
- BLAMING OTHERS for dependent persons behavior. (Friends, teachers, employers, family, self.)
- SEEING THE PROBLEM AS THE RESULT OF SOMETHING ELSE. (Shyness, adolescence, loneliness, child, broken home.)
- AVOIDING the chemically dependent person in order to keep peace. (Out-of-sight, out-of-mind.)
- GIVING MONEY THAT IS UNDESERVED/UNEARNED.
- ATTEMPTING TO CONTROL. (Planning activities, choosing friends, getting jobs.)
- MAKING THREATS that have no follow through or consistency.
- TAKING CARE OF the chemically dependent person. (Doing what he/she should be expected to for themselves.)

COMPLIANCE PATTERNS

- I assume responsibility for others feelings and behaviors.
- I feel guilty about others feelings and behaviors.
- I have difficulty identifying what I am feeling.
- I have difficulty expressing feelings.
- I am afraid of my anger, yet sometimes erupt in a rage.
- I worry how others may respond to my feelings, opinions, and behavior.
- I have difficulty making decisions.
- I am afraid of being hurt and/or rejected by others.
- I minimize, alter or deny how I truly feel.

- I am very sensitive to how others are feeling and feel the same.
- I am afraid to express differing opinions or feeling.
- I value others opinions and feelings more than my own.
- I put other people's needs and desires before mine.
- I am embarrassed to receive recognition and praise, or gifts.
- I judge everything I think, say, or do harshly, as never "good enough."
- I am perfectionistic.
- I am extremely loyal, remaining in harmful situations too long.
- I do not ask others to meet my needs or desires.
- I do not perceive myself as a lovable and worthwhile person.
- I compromise my own values and integrity to avoid rejection or others anger.

Roles

Adjuster

Placater

Acting Out Child

Responsible One

Homework: Who am I verses how other see me

Stage 1: Identifying Self as helpless victim

Stage 2: Denial of problem and responsibility for it

Stage 3: Acceptance of responsibility for having a bad habit

Stage 4: Decision to act responsibly in the face of the problem

Stage 5: Making new choices to avoid the problem all together