



Growing Up in an Alcoholic Family

How to Break the Cycle
By Rebecca Sebek

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Introduction

Dear Reader,

If you're reading this eBook you either grew up in an alcoholic, dysfunctional family or know someone who did. The only way to move forward in life is to break the cycle! It takes courage to move away from what you know – congratulations to you for having that courage.

All of the ideas written within these pages originated because of a passion to help others who grew up in alcoholic, dysfunctional family. More importantly, I'm writing this eBook so my niece and nephew and other children do not suffer from being born into a family with a history of alcoholism.

As an adult, life can be confusing because you grew up in chaos and now you are responsible for your life. How do you have a normal, happy life when you were surrounded by misery for the formative years of your life? Well, you no longer HAVE TO “buy into” dysfunction and a limited mind set. You have the POWER to change! I am here to provide you with direction, ideas, and suggestions that are more useful and experience based on my childhood, adulthood, and transformation. I will coach you through the process. But, you will be the judge of that.

I am here to provide you with guidance, ideas, and will coach you through the process of breaking the cycle. But, do not take my word for it. Draw your own conclusions and continue to move forward in your life!

Rebecca Sebek

CHAPTER 1



GROWING UP WITH ALCOHOLISM You Are Not Your Family

Growing up in an alcoholic family sucks! That's a very bold statement to make, but it's true. How many adult children of alcoholics feel that it was fantastic to grow up within an alcoholic family? Most ACOAs will agree that growing up in a very dysfunctional home was horrible. You don't have a normal childhood. You may or may not have been able to have sleepovers or have friends over at all. What child wouldn't want to have their friends over the house? Unfortunately, you probably didn't get to experience this aspect of your childhood.

Being from an alcoholic family can be very embarrassing and shameful for many people. It's not as if your father is a doctor or lawyer. You couldn't tell anyone that your father is a drunk because the "family" doesn't discuss those things with outsiders. It's like being a part of the mob!

When you're in an alcoholic family, it's all about the alcoholic. Your feelings don't matter. It's about keeping mom or dad happy so they don't go off in a drunken rage. You go from a 7-year old child to an adult over night. No, it's not fair. It's the reason why many adult children of alcoholics stumble through life with a ton of baggage. Most did not have the childhood they were supposed to have. Instead, they had to "tiptoe" around dad who was "drunker than a skunk" in order not to piss him off! No one should not have to live like this.

You may be from an alcoholic family, but you have the power to break the cycle. Refuse to become an alcoholic, refuse to live in Mediocrityville, and refuse to be a **victim** of your circumstance. You can rise above it!

" Instead, they had to "tiptoe" around dad who was "drunker than a skunk" in order not to piss him off! This is no way for a child to live."

CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP WITH ALCOHOLISM You Are Not Your Family



As mentioned on the previous page, many adult children of alcoholics grow up to be victims. They blame their childhood, society, and others for the problems in their life. Does this sound like you? Being a victim means that you give your power away to others. You give your power away to your mom or dad, whoever is the alcoholic in your family when you continue to blame them for your life. It's time to take your power back!

Many adult children of alcoholics become alcoholics. The experts believe that children who grow up with alcoholism have a 90% chance of becoming an alcoholic. The good news is that you can choose NOT to become an alcoholic. After all, why would you want to be one? You experienced first hand what it's like to be around an alcoholic. Do you really want that for your life? What about your children? Do you want them to go through what you went through? Being around an alcoholic is no fun. It's a lot of responsibility, heartache, frustration, and aggravation.

"Most people will not admit they have an addiction. Alcoholism is an addiction and disease at the same time."

You may feel that you can't be around your alcoholic family members. This is all right and normal. You do not have to subject yourself to another's behavior. True, your family members may not appreciate it when you don't show up for the holidays, but they'll get over it. Your sanity is on the line!

Most people will not admit they have an addiction. Alcoholism is an addiction and a disease at the same time. If your dad is an alcoholic, you better tread lightly around the topic of AA. Many alcoholics take offense if you suggest they need help. They believe they do not have a drinking problem or have no reason to stop. It's admirable that you'd like to help "save" your dad, but the only person you can save is you!

CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP WITH ALCOHOLISM You Are Not Your Family

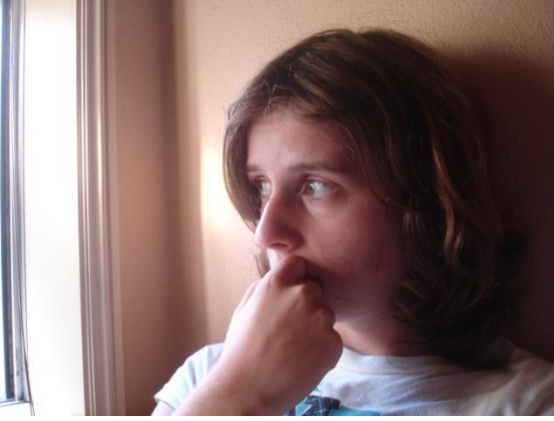


Adult children of alcoholics, you are not your family! Say it out loud, "...I am not my family!" Because you had a rocky start in life doesn't mean your adulthood has to be filled with trials and tribulations. You have **free will** to choose how to live your life. You can either allow your childhood to make you a victor or victim. You can be transformed by this world or be of this world. The choice is yours.

Growing up with alcoholism does not have to ruin your life. You can choose, right now, to live a life that makes you abundant in all areas of your life. You may decide to move to another state that is over 2,000 miles away from your family and friends. Sometimes it's necessary to begin a fresh start somewhere else. If this is too scary for you, perhaps you can move to another city within your state. Do what you must to get away from the toxic environment that seems to have a hold on you. **A word of caution:** you take yourself with you wherever you go. Moving to a new location will benefit you only *if* you work on yourself from the inside. You may want to invest in self-help books, classes, or therapy to help you work through your childhood.

Have compassion for yourself and your alcoholic family. Unless someone breaks the cycle it will manifest itself from generation to generation. You can be the one to break the alcoholic, dysfunctional cycle of your family. Think about the young members of your family such as nieces and nephews. How can you make the family better for them? You can be an example and show them that you are not your family and growing up with alcoholism does not have to control your life!

"Think about the young members of your family such as nieces and nephews. How can you make the family better for them?"



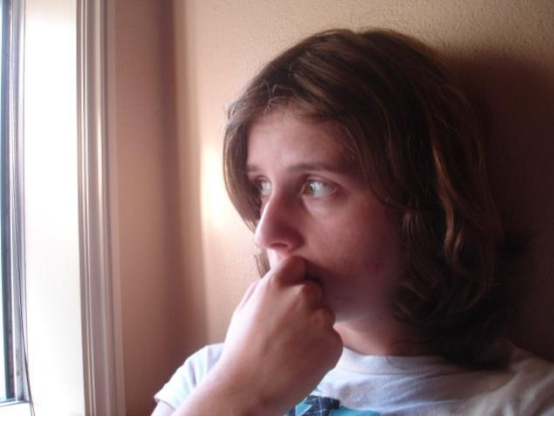
ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS Characteristics of ACOAs

Growing up, adult children of alcoholics learned survival skills such as don't talk, don't trust, and don't feel. It raises the question, "...will a person outgrow the effects of growing up as the child of an alcoholic? The answer is yes, but it's not an easy road to walk. It takes commitment and dedication to work on yourself from the inside out. This means facing any and all "inner demons" that still linger within you.

"Will a person outgrow the effects of growing up as the child of an alcoholic? The answer is yes, but it's not an easy road to walk. It takes commitment and dedication to work on yourself from the inside out."

Adults who survived a childhood with an alcoholic environment may continue to experience issues unless they recognize that it's time for them to become "clean and sober" from their childhood. Adult children of alcoholics need to accept and have compassion for the fact their parent's alcohol abuse negatively impacted not only their childhood, but also their adult years.

Remember that blaming your mom or dad will not solve anything. However, it does not mean their actions were appropriate. Realize that your alcoholic parent had an addiction and disease that consumed them. They succumbed to the power of the alcohol and could not see how it was affecting you. They did not realize their behavior and actions would affect you for the rest of your life. You can work through your pain and let your childhood go. You do not have to wallow in the past.



ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

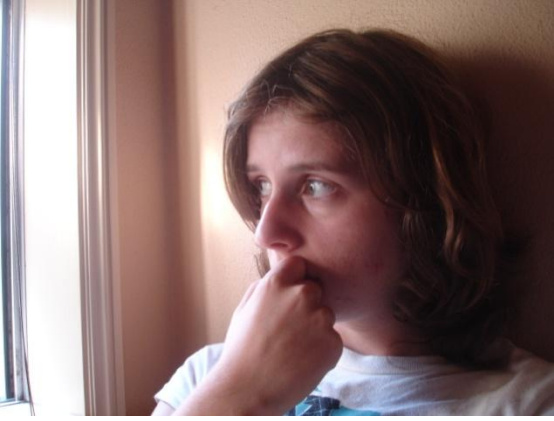
Characteristics of ACOAs

Unfortunately, many adult children of alcoholics continue to support and adhere by the “don’t talk” rule. This is very unhealthy. You cannot heal yourself or the past if you bottle up all of your feelings. Some will admit they lived in dysfunctional home, but state that it doesn’t affect them. This is rarely true. Dr. Timmen L. Cermak, who wrote the book, “A Primer on Adult Children of Alcoholics” lists 16 characteristics that adult children of alcoholics have. These characteristics are as follows:

“Dr. Timmen L. Cermak, author of “A Primer on Adult Children of Alcoholics,” identified 16 characteristics that adult children of alcoholics have.”

1. Fear of losing control.
2. Fear of feelings.
3. Overdeveloped sense of responsibility.
4. Guilty feelings.
5. Inability to relax, let go, and have fun.
6. Harsh, even fierce, self-criticism.
7. Denial.
8. Difficulty with intimate relationships.
9. Living life as a victim.
10. Compulsive behavior.
11. Tendency to confuse love with pity.
12. Fear of abandonment.
13. Tendency to view issues as black or white.
14. Tendency towards physical complaints.
15. Suffering from delayed grief.
16. Tendency to react rather than act.

How many of these characteristics do you identify with right now? You may have all or some of the characteristics. Don’t panic – there’s hope!



ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS **Characteristics of ACOAs**

You may have all of the characteristics and there's nothing shameful in that. The list of characteristics are descriptions and not indictments. You may see the characteristics as liabilities or deficits. When you begin the healing process, you will see the characteristics as assets.

Adult children of alcoholics can break the cycle of dysfunction and destruction caused by growing up with alcoholism so their children, nieces, and nephews will not have the same experience or same problems and pain.

Many non-ACOA's find that the characteristics fit them as well. Living with emotionally absent or abusive parents doesn't just occur in alcoholic homes. Trauma manifests in other forms. Alcoholic families are only one form the problem can take. You could have grown up within a family that had drug, food, or gambling addiction; sexual abuse, or some other trauma.

When you identify the characteristics that you have, you can begin to change your life. Accept that the characteristics are the result of the environment you grew up in when you were a child. There was nothing you could do because you were powerless. It's time to take your power back and face your past so your present and future will be happier and prosperous.

"You may see the characteristics as liabilities or deficits. When you begin the healing process, you will see the characteristics as assets."



GETTING STARTED

Looking in the Mirror

Adult children of alcoholics refuse to admit their alcoholic upbringing affected them. They live in denial and claim they don't have issues from growing up with alcoholism. Just like their alcoholic parent(s), they refuse to admit they have a problem. In order to move forward with your life, you must look in the mirror and acknowledge that it's time to take responsibility for your life.

Looking in the mirror is never fun because the person staring back at is the one who is responsible for your life. You are an adult child of an alcoholic. The "keyword" is adult. Your childhood is over and now you're an adult. The physical bruises have healed, but what about the emotional and mental scars that are deep within your mind? How do you begin to heal that which is buried deep inside of you? You look in the mirror and admit that it's time to release the past, the hold it has on you, and that you're responsible for creating the life you desire.

Admitting that you may need some sort of therapy takes courage. Many people believe that counseling or psychotherapy is for flakes. This is so untrue. Countless numbers of people receive some sort of therapy at some point in their life. There's nothing wrong with it. Our world would be a better place if people dealt with their issues before they get married and have kids or "hookup" with someone and have kids.

Cultivate a mind, body, and spirit that is whole because it will set yourself free from your alcoholic upbringing. Facing yourself in the mirror is the first step, take it!

"The "keyword" is adult. Your childhood is over and now you're an adult. The physical bruises have healed, but what about the emotional and mental scars that are deep within your mind?"



GETTING STARTED

Looking in the Mirror

There's hope for adult children of alcoholics. When you look in the mirror, you'll see an adult, but there's a wounded child within you that is crying out in pain. Relieve the pain of your inner child through self-help books, support groups, therapy, counseling, coaching, and psychotherapy. The sooner you begin to heal the better.

Heed this warning: you may experience an emotional rollercoaster as feelings begin to emerge. One minute you may cry uncontrollably and the next minute you'll be full of rage and anger. Make sure you have a healthy outlet for dealing with your emotions. Go for a walk or run. Take a kickboxing class or go hiking. Paint, draw, or write. Attend yoga classes to stretch your body so you can release all of your feelings. Learn how to meditate. Deep breathing techniques will help you to center yourself and focus your thoughts.

“Relieve the pain of your inner child through self-help books, support groups, therapy, counseling, coaching, and psychotherapy. The sooner you begin to heal the better.”

Alanon or adult children of alcoholic meetings along with therapy can help you to heal your past, present, and future. You will not be alone in your pain; you can learn to move beyond the dysfunction you experienced as a child. You cannot put a price on your mental health – it's priceless. Seek options to become healthy today to enrich your life and the lives of others tomorrow...

The abuse, neglect, and abandonment you suffered as a child needs to be reconciled in order for you to have a truly blessed life. If not, you will continue to repeat the same mistakes. Remember: the only thing that changes are the players and circumstances, the theme of your story is still the same!



GETTING STARTED

Looking in the Mirror

Once you face yourself in the mirror there's no turning back. It will be a journey of a lifetime. It will not always be easy, but it will make you a stronger person in more ways than you could ever imagine.

Only share your decision to face yourself in the mirror with those you can absolutely trust. You may find that others will not be receptive to your "cleansing" and could shun or belittle you and your decision. Do not give these people a second thought. They are not supportive because they are insecure about their feelings and could not fathom sharing them with others, not even family or friends. You will find plenty of people to support you in your journey. "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." – Buddhist proverb

"When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." – Buddhist proverb

"Only share your decision to face yourself in the mirror with those you can absolutely trust. You may find that others will not be receptive to your "cleansing" and could shun or belittle you and your decision."

Adult children of alcoholics learn how to ask for help. You will learn whom you can trust with your struggle. Realize that you have every right to speak up for yourself, talk about the issues that plague your life, and seek freedom from your mind and the characteristics that are holding you back in life.

For those with children, learn about child development and do not parent based on how you were parented! Take parent education classes, learn to relate to your children and be a positive influence in their lives. Visit your library and read books that will help you understand and overcome your disruptive childhood. Recognize that you're a survivor of an alcoholic childhood, but you now have the chance to thrive. Seize the opportunity to look yourself in the mirror and accept your life as it is right now. Embrace your power and begin your healing and transformational journey today!

CHAPTER 4

BEGINNING YOUR JOURNEY Taking the First Step is the Hardest

You'll face some "bumps" along the way, but it will be worth it. "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." – Confucius

Being a child of an alcoholic can be embarrassing. You don't dare tell people about your family or invite them to meet your family. There's always a fear that your alcoholic dad will get stone cold drunk, fall down, or get aggravated to the point of picking a fight. This is no way to live your life.

When you're ready, you will make the decision to heal the damage that was caused by growing up within an alcoholic family. It may not happen overnight, but you will eventually make great strides in changing your life which begins with your thoughts and beliefs. If you believe that you cannot change your life then you will not. Focusing on the fact that your mother abandoned you as a child will only bring more abandonment issues into your life. It's time to focus and choose thoughts that will create the reality your desire.

Taking the first step is always the hardest part. You'll have many thoughts run through your mind such as "I'm fine, I don't need help. I can be my own therapist and do not require outside help. Growing up wasn't that bad. What will others think of me?" The good news is this: what others think of you is none of your business and people are waiting to help you if you ask for it. Problem solved. You have no more excuses **not** to begin healing your life.

"A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." – Confucius



BEGINNING YOUR JOURNEY

Taking the First Step is the Hardest

“The third step is to find a good therapist who can help you peel back the layers of your childhood. Over the years the layers multiply without you ever knowing it.”

Note: For those who have made breakthroughs in your lives, you may consider working with a life coach. A life coach will help you to keep moving forward on your path without looking backward at your past. They are concerned with the present.

The third step is to find a good therapist who can help you peel back the layers of your childhood. Over the years the layers multiply without you ever knowing it. This is why you may have gained 100 lbs. You carry the extra weight as baggage from your childhood or as a way to protect yourself from getting hurt. Working with a therapist can help you get to the “root” of the issues within your life. Only then will you be able to see the destructive patterns that play out in your life. You will be able to destroy them once and for all. You will be able to deal with situations in a healthy, constructive manner.

When you live within an alcoholic family, you learn quickly how to cover up or “mask” your feelings. You are a natural born actor or actress who knows how to smile no matter the situation. You may have learned to express your anger in unhealthy ways by mirroring what your parents did; shouting, kicking, screaming, punching walls, hitting each other, or breaking stuff. The **fourth step** is to find an outlet for your emotions. Paint, draw, dance, sing, design, journal, workout, or hit a pillow. It’s all right to express anger and other emotions, just do it in a safe and healthy way.

Finally, join a group for adult children of alcoholics. They are out there if you take the time to look for them. You can physically attend meetings, attend via SKYPE, or phone. Test the groups out and find one that is right for you. Sharing your story will help others just as their stories will help you. With the help of people, you can turn your life around in an instant!



F E A R

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

FEAR: THE OTHER FOUR LETTER WORD

What Are You Afraid of in Your Life?

Many adult children of alcoholics are used to fear. It's a familiar friend that has been with you since your childhood. How could you ever say goodbye to fear? It's simple. Remember what FDR said: "The only thing you have to fear is fear itself." This is such a true statement. So often fear is created within the mind and it manifests as something you do not want in your life such as argumentative relationships, critical friends, or financial despair.

Some adult children of alcoholics were "latch-key" kids. You were forced to grow up quickly and were taught not to be afraid. You had to figure out your feelings on your own and the best that you could do was use your mind. You were used to being alone and taking care of yourself. As an adult, you have the power to understand why you choose to be alone or that you fear being alone. You either feel comfortable being alone because you were used to it when you were a kid or you fear the company of others because you think they'll just abandon you.

As an adult, you may have justified being a latch-key kid by saying it "toughened" you up to handle the real world. You may have trouble developing friendships or intimate relationships because trust has been broken. "Trust has been broken and there is a fear to depend upon anyone else. A fear of feeling let down and rejected the way you did as kid when no one was around" -- Licia Ginne, MFT. You can override the fear of being alone or the company of others. Take it one step at a time.

"Remember what FDR said: "The only thing you have to fear is fear itself."

"So often fear is created within the mind and it manifests as something you do not want in your life such as argumentative relationships, critical friends, or financial despair."



FEAR

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

FEAR: THE OTHER FOUR LETTER WORD

What Are You Afraid of in Your Life?

Many adult children of alcoholics have a fear of allowing their light to shine out into the world because they were not allowed to voice their opinions or talents as a child. The world is missing out on your talents. What if you have the capacity to find the cure for the many diseases that exist in the world? People around the world will die because you didn't feel comfortable or have the courage to speak up and display your talents. This is not meant to put you on a "guilt trip," it's meant to wake you up so you can be the best you can be. Who cares what the naysayers think? Nine times out of ten the naysayers are family and friends stuck in their own story, afraid to venture out of their comfort zone. When you take a risk to walk away from your comfort zone, people can become negative and down right nasty. It's time step out of the shadows and into your spotlight.

"Who cares what the naysayers think? Nine times out of ten the naysayers are family and friends stuck in their own story, afraid to venture out of their comfort zone."

As an adult child of an alcoholic you most likely developed the habit of being a people pleaser so you wouldn't upset mom, dad, or anyone else in the family. Now that you're an adult, you can stop being a people pleaser. It's impossible to please everyone all of the time. Begin by pleasing and putting yourself first. There's nothing wrong with self-care and saying No! You may be fearful that if you say no you'll upset family, friends, co-workers, bosses, etc... Too bad, they'll get over it. You were not put on this planet to take care of everyone else.

What does fear stand for? False Evidence Appearing Real...Face Everything and Recover...These are some acronyms for fear; there are many others.



F E A R

Be afraid. Be very afraid.

FEAR: THE OTHER FOUR LETTER WORD

What Are You Afraid of in Your Life?

Adult children of alcoholics tend to isolate themselves and feel uneasy around other people. Some have issues with authority. For examples:

- * I feel uncomfortable being the center of attention.
- * Standing up for myself makes me feel uneasy. I sometimes lose my voice. I choose isolation rather than joining groups of people.

Having these fears can hold you back in life. You are not living life to the fullest. You live in the shadows of your life, afraid to come out to the world. No one deserves to live like this.

An adult child of an alcoholic may feel intimidated by angry people and personal criticism. You may feel anxious and very sensitive. For example:

- * I don't say what I truly feel, rather what others want me to say.
- * I avoid conflict at all costs.
- * I could not fathom somebody finding a mistake with me or my work.

All of this fear can eat your alive. Even worse, the fear will manifest itself as a disease within your body. It may not show up now, but it could show up later in your life. You can avoid dis-ease and illness by releasing your fears today. After all, your life may depend on it!

"All of this fear can eat your alive. Even worse, the fear will manifest itself as a disease within your body."

CHAPTER 6

FEEL YOUR FEELINGS Don't Stuff Your Feelings

Many adult children of alcoholics learned at a very early age how to stuff their feelings. You didn't dare speak about what was going on at home with anyone, not even a teacher or guidance counselor. Stuffing your emotions was not healthy for you as a child nor is it healthy for you as an adult.

John D. (Jack) Mayer says, "Emotions operate on many levels. They have a physical aspect as well as a psychological aspect. Emotions bridge thought, feeling, and action – they operate in every part of a person, they affect many aspects of a person, and the person affects many aspects of the emotions."

Dr. Maurice Elias says, "Emotions are human beings' warning systems as to what is really going on around them. Emotions are our most reliable indicators of how things are going on in our lives. Emotions help keep us on the right track by making sure that we are led by more than the mental/ intellectual faculties of thought, perception, reason, memory."

As an adult child of an alcoholic you were not shown how to express your emotions or feelings in a healthy way. Instead, you internalized emotions where they would sit and fester until brought to the surface in an unhealthy way such as yelling, screaming, fighting, kicking, hitting, or some other toxic way. This is not the way to express your feelings. There are healthy alternatives such as art therapy or going for a walk!

"Emotions bridge thought, feeling, and action – they operate in every part of a person, they affect many aspects of a person, and the person affects many aspects of the emotions." – John D. (Jack) Mayer

CHAPTER 6

FEEL YOUR FEELINGS Don't Stuff Your Feelings

Why Bother with Emotions

Many people allow their emotions to control them. In fact, most people make purchases based on their emotions. This is why you may suffer “buyers remorse” the next day after a wild day of shopping.

If you allow your emotions to control your thinking, behavior, and actions, you could find yourself in precarious situations. Your emotions affect your physical body as much as your body affects your thinking and feelings.

Dismissing, repressing, or ventilating your emotions can prevent physical illnesses. Science is making strides with research that shows the link between stress and diseases such as cancer, arthritis, and many other chronic illnesses. Fear, anxiety, negativity, frustration, and depression cause chemicals to be released into your body. These chemicals differ from the chemicals released from positive emotions such as happy, content, loved, and accepted.

Belief Systems

Some adult children of alcoholics were raised by an angry mom or dad. They may view anger as bad or something to fear. Your belief system affects how you interpret what you see, feel, and hear. It's time to develop **your own** belief systems instead of the belief systems you grew up with as a child.

“There are beautiful people in similar situations, feeling very much the same things as we. And though we are alone, in a way we are not, and for me there's a comfort in that.”
Anonymous

CHAPTER 6

FEEL YOUR FEELINGS Don't Stuff Your Feelings

You Can Only Change How You Feel

You are the only person who can change what you feel. A brand new car, dress, house, career, or relationship will only distract you. They are not a permanent way to dealing with your feelings. Having financial abundance will not mean that your fears will dissipate. You take your feelings wherever you go.

Feeling Your Feelings

Adult children of alcoholics, you may spend much time speaking about how you feel. Some of you may visit therapists, attend workshops, or tell others how you feel. You talk and talk about your feelings, but you don't feel your feelings. You intellectualize and analyze your feelings without feeling them.

Why are people afraid to feel their feelings? What will happen? Perhaps you're afraid of feeling the pain you stuffed deep down inside of you all of these years. Maybe you're afraid of losing control. What about a fear of feeling loss or failure? Choosing to face your feelings can set you free. You can release the burdens that have been weighing you down.

Life is about what you feel not what you think. Having a strong connection to your emotional life is necessary if you want to live a life filled with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction. Ask yourself, how do you really feel? Be honest, let it all out!

"Fear can eat you alive. Even worse, the fear will manifest itself as a disease within your body."





OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Transforming Your Life is a Process

According to the authors of *The 12 Steps for Adult Children* (1987), “when a farmer works a field, he begins by preparing the soil. The farmer will plow, disc, harrow, fertilize, harrow again, and finally plant seeds. For a period of time the farmer is visibly active in his field. But after he plants, he stops for a while to allow the new seeds to grow. There is nothing he can do except wait and hope for the best” (Authors et al., step six, p.79).

Transforming your life is like working in a field or garden. First, you must clear out the debris and prepare the soil before you plant the seeds. You may have obstacles in your way such as animals, the weather, or faulty equipment that will prevent you from planting your garden or field. You must overcome these obstacles if you desire to harvest your garden or field. Otherwise, you’ll just have an empty garden or field that will eventually erode over time.

Quote: “The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.” – Unknown author

Transforming your life is a process and it will not go smoothly all of the time. Learn to deal with the bumps along the way; do not become discouraged.

“The truth is that our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.” – Unknown author



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Transforming Your Life is a Process

According to the authors of *The 12 Steps for Adult Children* (1987), “we have been plowed and prepared, and now we give God’s (or whatever term you use) power the necessary time to create in us an internal change. This internal change is a growing readiness and willingness to have God remove all of our defects of character. We might, on the surface, think that this is an easy thing, but many of these defects are deep character traits on which we have depended for survival. To release them means letting go of more than just a defect; it means letting go of a way of life” (Authors et al., step six, p.79).

When you begin to transform your life, you may face obstacles such as family, friends, or your own thoughts. Through patience, determination, and perseverance, you will overcome your obstacles.

Adult children of alcoholics, think of *obstacles* as growing pains. You are beginning a new life cycle which means it’s time to make room for it. For example, you could have friends in your life that you realize are not supportive or you discover that you no longer have anything in common. It’s all right to end the friendships, make sure you do it in a way that all parties involved have their dignity. Whether you do it through a phone call or email, be gentle. Tell them where you are in your life and that going out and partying every Friday is no longer serving you. Be honest and allow them to do the same. Who knows, you may inspire them to re-examine their life.

“We might, on the surface, think that this is an easy thing, but many of these defects are deep character traits on which we have depended for survival. To release them means letting go of more than just a defect; it means letting go of a way of life.”



OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Transforming Your Life is a Process

According to the authors of *The 12 Steps for Adult Children* (1987), “a radiant confident person lives in each of us, hidden under a cloud of confusion and uncertainty, distracted by ineffective behavior. If someone asked us if we wanted to be freed from our character defects, we could give only one answer – we are entirely ready to have God remove them from us” (Authors et al., step six, p.84).

Have the willingness to overcome any obstacles that may come your way. Unless you are willing to act, you will not. “Willingness is a state of mind and emotions that propels you into action” (Authors et al., step six, p.85). What actions could you take right now to transform your life? How willing are you to take responsibility for your life, to change it? It’s up to you. The power is within you to change your life, grab hold of it now!

The biggest obstacles may be those that reside in our mind. According to Dr. Wayne Dyer, “...change your thoughts, change your life.” This is easier said than done. Your mind requires daily exercise just like your body. To reprogram your mind requires you to begin thinking new thoughts. Begin simply by saying, “...I am willing to make changes in my life.” Say this everyday. You can add other affirmations that will allow your “higher self” to bring answers to you. These answers will help you “jump over obstacles” with ease. Begin today, not a second to soon.

“Forgive yourself
for your faults
and your
mistakes and
move on.” -- Les
Brown

SAY GOODBYE**Release What Does Not Serve You**

Adult children of alcoholics may struggle with saying goodbye to the old. You'll say goodbye to old friends, old ways of thinking, old ways of feeling, and the old you. Shedding the baggage of your past may not be an easy feat, but it can be done. The key is to allow yourself to grieve. Do not rush the grieving process. In the Western culture, grieving is rushed. You're expected to be back at work when someone close to you dies. Other cultures will take a year or more to grieve. It may seem excessive, but at least they allow themselves the time to process the loss, heal, and move forward with life. You can do the same when you say goodbye to the "old" in your life.

Releasing that which does not serve you anymore is a big step. Congratulate yourself for having the courage to break away from the old to allow the new into your life. The season of despair has ended for you. Rejoice for you have made it through the forest of your life!

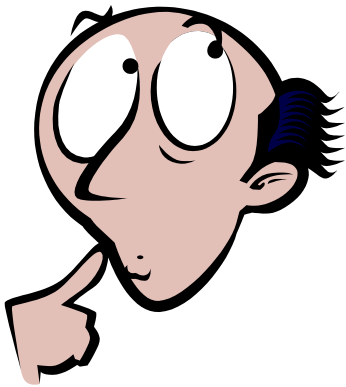
Moving into a new season of your life can be scary. Most people do not like change. It's easier to stay where you are at in your life. You have the choice to stay put or move forward to bigger and brighter days. Choosing to stay stuck in your life will not serve you or others. It will keep you from sharing your talents with the world. You were not meant to live in mediocrity.

Rise above the fear and say goodbye to the old in your life. Look at change from a different perspective, one that is exciting and new instead of one that is based on fear. Releasing that which does not serve you will bring you into the light; you've been in the dark for too long.

"Shedding the baggage of your past may not be an easy feat, but it can be done. The key is to allow yourself to grieve. Do not rush the grieving process."

SAY GOODBYE**Release What Does Not Serve You**

When you release that which does not serve you, it will feel like a burden has been lifted from your shoulders. No longer will you have the past weighing you down. No longer will you have the guilt or shame of being from an alcoholic family. You will be able to see that you were born into an alcoholic family, but that does not mean it's what you are. Your family does not define you as a person. You define yourself – remember that!



“No longer will you have the past weighing you down. No longer will you have the guilt or shame of being from an alcoholic family.”

Clearing out the closet of your life means saying goodbye to old friends. Perhaps your friends are going down a path that will cause you harm and bring destruction to your life. You came from a dysfunctional family, what would make you want to continue with the dysfunction? Let your friends know that you no longer enjoy going bar hopping or feeling sorry for yourself. You could leave the door open for them *if* they choose to “clean up” their act. Otherwise, you could be stuck in a chaotic life forever.

You may realize that being a people pleaser has caused you more harm than good. Release your “inner” people pleaser once and for all. The next time a co-worker asks you to do her work, tell her you are no longer able to take on her work and that it was wrong of you to do so in the past. She can go to your boss if she has a problem. There could be tension between you and your co-worker, but she’ll eventually get over it. Send her lots of love and stay focused on releasing that which does not serve you.

Do whatever you can to stay centered and focused on saying goodbye to the “old ways” in your life. You will find that you feel lighter and have a better outlook on life.

SAY GOODBYE**Release What Does Not Serve You**

The common characteristics (see Chapter 2) of adult children of alcoholics can wreak havoc on your life. You have the power to release these characteristics from your life. It may not happen overnight, but you can gradually choose new characteristics that will serve you in your life. For example, if you have a fear of feelings, you can choose to “feel your feelings” rather than stuff them down. Whenever you feel emotional you can choose to work through it with meditation or deep breath techniques. These are more constructive ways to deal with your emotions.

Whether you have a few or all of the characteristics, you can choose to “release” them from your life. You have the power to say goodbye to the old and hello to the new!

Poem

Avoid the company of embittered souls,
Seek out new ideas and views,
The road to success is yours to choose.

People will be critical of you,
Belittle you behind your back.
Move forward anyway,
Handle them with tact.

Naysayers and critics will follow you,
Every step of the way and say:
“It can’t be done.”

Play with an idea and have some fun.

-- Anonymous

(read the entire poem at <http://www.getinthehotspot.com>)

“The common characteristics (see Chapter 2) of adult children of alcoholics can wreak havoc on your life. You have the power to release these characteristics from your life.”

CHAPTER 9

MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUR LIFE Breaking the Cycle for Good

Adult children of alcoholics can move forward in life by breaking the cycle of alcoholism for good. There's no reason that you have to continue to live a miserable, mediocre life. You have everything inside of you to break out of the dysfunctional rut. You do not have to stay where you are in life. You can choose to step into greatness.

Breaking the cycle for good takes determination, perseverance, and courage. Your family and friends may turn against you. They will not understand your need to become "clean and sober" from your childhood. They may feel betrayed that you no longer communicate with them as you begin your journey to transform your life. You must do what you have to do for your own sanity. If they can't understand that you're trying to change your life for the better, that's their problem and not yours.

To move forward with your life, you may choose to move over 2,000 miles away from your family and friends. They may or may not understand why you'd want to leave and that's all right. You don't have to explain yourself. Say goodbye and don't look back.

When you decide to break the cycle, you may experience emotions that you never knew you had. The sooner you learn to control your emotions, the better. It's never a good idea to allow your emotions to control you. They can take over your body and turn you into someone you won't recognize. Some techniques you can do are: count to 10, take 10 deep breaths, stretch, or meditate. Calm down and center yourself. Emotional freedom can be yours!

"There's no reason that you have to continue to live a miserable, mediocre life. You have everything inside of you to break out of the dysfunctional rut."

CHAPTER 9

MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUR LIFE Breaking the Cycle for Good

As an adult child of an alcoholic, you probably didn't realize how your mind and emotions were being shaped. The characteristics in chapter 2 will help you change your life. By recognizing the characteristics you have, you'll be able to move past them with some assistance from a counselor or therapists. Attending individual or group therapy sessions will help you realize how growing up with alcoholism really affected you. There's no reason to keep denying that your childhood had no affect on you. It's all right to discover your shortcomings. You are a work in progress.

“By recognizing the characteristics you have, you'll be able to move past them with some assistance from a counselor or therapists. Attending individual or group therapy sessions will help you realize how growing up with alcoholism really affected you.”

When you decide to break the cycle, you take responsibility for your life. It's not easy to look in the mirror and know that you are responsible for your life. You are no longer a child, but your upbringing set you up for obstacles that you could not have foreseen. Unfortunately, you didn't have a “Cosby Show, Brady Bunch, or Leave it to Beaver” family life. Your upbringing was filled with alcoholism and everything that goes with it from abuse to neglect. As an adult, you must pickup the shattered pieces of your childhood and put them back together. It will not be easy. However, if you're up for the challenge and want a better life for you and your family, you'll dig deep to find the strength to pull it off.

Adult children of alcoholics have more of an uphill battle in life when compared to other people. It may seem like you'll never get your life on track, but you will. Through patience and constant effort to work on yourself, a life filled with love instead of disdain will be yours.

CHAPTER 9

MOVING FORWARD WITH YOUR LIFE Breaking the Cycle for Good

All of your hard work will pay off. At first it may seem like the pain and suffering you go through is not worth it, but it is. You were not given a great start to your life, but it doesn't have to end on a sour note. You could live a long, healthy, and fulfilled life even though the memories are locked away in your mind. When you stop replaying your childhood in your head, the memories will begin to fade.

According to the authors of *The 12 Steps for Adult Children* (1987), "our recovery is similar to a garden. Our lives once belonged to the weeds, our self-defeating behavior, but God has helped us plant a garden in our lives, pulled the weeds and caused some wonderful things to grow in their place. We are beginning to see the promise of fruit, the promise of lasting change. In the midst of this new garden, we can also see the return of weeds. They don't die easily. In fact, as long as we live, weeds, our old self-defeating ways, will seek to recapture our lives. We must be vigilant" (Authors et al., step ten, p.117).

As the above paragraph states, "...we can also see the return of weeds." It's very easy to slip into old behaviors and thought patterns. Remember, you are the master of your ship; therefore, you are responsible for maneuvering around the obstacles that come into your life. You will experience "bumps" along the way, but how you handle those "bumps" is entirely up to you. You can slip back into old, self-defeating behaviors or find the strength to deal with them in a more positive manner. It's easy to take the low road; the high road requires you to have faith and trust in a higher power. What road will you take for your life?

"Our recovery is similar to a garden. Our lives once belonged to the weeds, our self-defeating behavior, but God has helped us plant a garden in our lives, pulled the weeds and caused some wonderful things to grow in their place."



WHAT'S NEXT?

Keep Moving Forward in Your Life

According to the authors of *The 12 Steps for Adult Children* (1987), “we need to recognize that nurturing ourselves emotionally and spiritually requires daily vigilance, loving understanding, and patience. Life is never stagnant; it is constantly changing, and each requires adjustment and growth” (Authors et al., step ten, p.120).

Whenever you feel like giving up, take a moment to focus on how far you’ve come in your life. You may feel as if you have not made any real progress, but when you stop and think about it, you’ve probably come farther than you ever imagined. We live in a “results and show me” society. You cannot expect to make huge strides in your life all at once if you’ve been carrying over 20 years of baggage with you! I’m not saying that it cannot be done, but it will take most people time to get from Point A to Point B. Be gentle with yourself and avoid negative self-talk because it can undermine the work you’ve done on yourself.

Personal note: I’ve been on my transformational journey for over two years now. In September 2007, I moved from Ohio to Arizona. It’s been a very, very bumpy transition and sometimes I think I made a mistake by moving to AZ. I opened up “Pandora’s box” when I decided to be the one to break the cycle. Every emotion that I stuffed down came to the surface. I discovered that I was a people pleaser which was a shock to me! It hasn’t been easy, but I feel more comfortable in my skin and with my family. Easy no, rewarding yes!



“We need to recognize that nurturing ourselves emotionally and spiritually requires daily vigilance, loving understanding, and patience.”

Resources

Authors et al. (1987). *The 12 Steps for Adult Children*. WA: RPI Publishing, Inc.

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