

## LEARNING TO HEAR THE CHAOS IN THE ADULT CHILD OF ALCOHOLICS

Judith Morton Fraser

The world adult children of alcoholics create will reflect the world of their parents and other authority figures. Without healing interventions the chaos of childhood can continue throughout the life cycle. Even if ACAs believe that they will not carry on with the same destructive patterns, threads of their experiences will remain as obstacles to be overcome.

These threads cause problems in their work environments as well as intimate relationships.

ACAs have many similar issues. I've listed some of them, not to be judgmental, but to point out areas that may be causing difficulty.

The first step in changing a problem of yesterday is to notice it today. The second step is to want to change. The third is to learn new skills. Twelve step meetings offer a safe, free, intelligent program and used in conjunction with therapy can help the ACA create a whole new world. A world filled with clear boundaries as well as life affirming work and personal relationships

Loss of trust in self. Children of alcoholics believe that if they were smart enough, attractive enough, or good enough, family problems would go away and everybody would be happy. Self-blame continues into adulthood. There is a constant struggle to try harder, do more and to blame themselves when anything goes wrong. Blame stops them from working problems through with others by using constructive communication, something that was missing in their family of origin.

Loss of trust in others. The addicted parent couldn't follow through on promises or provide other kinds of consistent behavior. The child felt that no one cared about them and that they were not important enough for someone to care about them. As an adult they isolate themselves, choose friends who are not trustworthy, or set up unreasonable expectations in order to prove that no one cares. It's an unconscious self-fulfilled prophesy. It also reinforces the lack of trust in themselves.

Angry eruptions occur when things go wrong. Addicted parents did not know how to set limits in a constructive way or demonstrate self soothing techniques. Instead they resorted to yelling, hitting, being sarcastic, or abandoning the child emotionally or physically. ACAs continue the behavior they learned.

People pleasing. Often the child tried to second-guess what was expected of them. When they were wrong, they were punished or emotionally abandoned. Expectations often exceeded their age and maturity level. As an adult they continue to try to second guess what is needed. They continue to try to find ways to please even if it is not in their best interests. They lie and punish themselves when things go wrong, often promising to never make the same mistake again.

Blaming others reinforces the loss of trust in themselves and others. ACAs were blamed for their behavior as children rather than educated as to how to get their needs met. They don't know how to express their needs or vulnerabilities in a way that would allow others to respond in a positive way. They express their needs in a way that makes it difficult for others to meet them. They choose the wrong time, wrong place, wrong person to trust, or lump several issues together at one time.

Changing others. The co-alcoholic parent may have been trying to change the addicted spouse rather than focus on changing their own behavior. This can lead to a sense of helplessness. ACAs may find it difficult to focus on personal goals and follow through on completing projects.