

# ACA Readings

## **The Laundry List – 14 Traits of an Adult Child of an Alcoholic or Dysfunctional Family**

~ Tony A., 1978 (Note: *The Laundry List* serves as the basis for *The Problem* statement.)

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened of 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 we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. 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 own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became 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 childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (Denial).
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 never there emotionally for us.
13. 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.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

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## **25 Questions: Am I an Adult Child?** (ACA Red Book, pp. 18-20)

These questions offer insight into some ways children are affected by growing up in many kinds of dysfunctional households including but not limited to environments with problem drinking or drug use, dysfunctional food or sex issues, workaholicism, mental illness, hypochondriaism, ritualistic beliefs, harsh punishment, extreme secretiveness, ultra-religiosity, militarism, sadism, neglect, abuse, perfectionism, or shaming where expectations are often too high and praise is tied to accomplishment rather than given freely.

1. Do you recall anyone drinking or taking drugs or being involved in some other behavior that you now believe could be dysfunctional?
  2. Did you avoid bringing friends to your home because of drinking or some other dysfunctional behavior in the home?
  3. Did one of your parents make excuses for the other parent's drinking or other behaviors?
  4. Did your parents focus on each other (or something else) so much that they seemed to ignore you?
  5. Did your parents or relatives argue constantly?
  6. Were you drawn into arguments or disagreements and asked to choose sides with one relative against another?
  7. Did you try to protect your brothers or sisters against drinking or other behavior in the family?
  8. As an adult, do you feel immature, like you are a child inside?
  9. As an adult, do you believe you are treated like a child when you interact with your parents? Are you continuing to live out a childhood role with your parents?
  10. Do you believe that it is your responsibility to take care of your parent's feelings or worries? Do other relatives look to you to solve their problems?
  11. Do you fear authority figures and angry people?
  12. Do you constantly seek approval or praise but have difficulty accepting a compliment when one comes your way?
  13. Do you see most forms of criticism as a personal attack?
  14. Do you ever over-commit yourself and then feel angry when others do not appreciate what you do?
  15. Do you think you are responsible for the way another person feels or behaves?
  16. Do you have difficulty identifying feelings?
  17. Do you focus outside yourself for love or security?
  18. Do you involve yourself in the problems of others? Do you feel more alive when there is a crisis?
  19. Do you equate sex with intimacy?
  20. Do you confuse love and pity?
  21. Have you found yourself in a relationship with a compulsive or dangerous person and wonder how you got there?
  22. Do you judge yourself without mercy and guess at what is normal?
  23. Do you behave one way in public and another way at home?
  24. Do you think your parents had a problem with drinking or taking drugs?
  25. Do you think you were affected by the drinking or other dysfunctional behavior of your parents or family?
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## **Characteristics of Adult Children of Alcoholics**

*(Adapted from Adult Children of Alcoholics, by Janet G. Woititz, Ed.D., 1987.)*

- 1) We guess at what normal behavior is. Because of our environment, we had no role models for normalcy, so we acted the way we saw other people act, people we thought were normal, and continued this performance into our adult lives.
- 2) We have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end; we procrastinate. Procrastination in the usual sense is the result of laziness. Adult children of alcoholics have never been taught how to solve a problem in systematic, manageable amounts. It was always all or nothing. Consequently, we don't have adult life skills.
- 3) We lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth. Lies, specifically lies of denial, were used to benefit the alcoholics and para alcoholics of our homes.
- 4) We judge ourselves without mercy. Since there is no way for us to meet the unattainable standards of perfection we have internalized from childhood, we are always falling short of the mark we have set for ourselves. If we are responsible for some positive outcome we dismiss it by saying, "Oh, that was easy," and so on. This is often confused with humility but is actually poor self-esteem. We should keep our poor self-esteem in mind when taking the Fourth and Fifth steps.
- 5) We have difficulty having fun. For most of us having fun was just a childhood fantasy. We were always imprisoned by the anger and hostility of alcoholism, even if physically removed from the alcoholic, the disease was already part of us.
- 6) We take ourselves very seriously. The normal spontaneity of childhood was squashed so many years ago by the pressure to be adult. Living with one or more addicts forced us to be on guard constantly. Seriousness was the only option. Now we can't have fun.
- 7) We have difficulty with intimate relationships. For most of us the only reference of intimate relationships was that of our parents. Our inconsistent parent child relationships caused us to feel an overwhelming fear of abandonment. We are left too inexperienced and fearful to let ourselves get close to anyone.
- 8) We overreact to changes over which we have no control. As young children the addict's life was inflicted on us as part of our environment. Our only recourse was to try to take control totally. Now any change which we are unaware of or have no control over leaves us feeling desperate and vulnerable.
- 9) We constantly seek approval and affirmation. The love we received as children was very erratic. The affirmations we didn't get on a day to day basis as children, we interpreted as negative, leaving us with low self-images. If someone likes us, gives us affirmation and accepts us, we usually judge them worthless. Our low self-images thrive on this.
- 10) Because of our secretive childhood sufferings, we thought that things were always better in the "house next door." NOBODY could possibly feel the same way as we did. Therefore, we felt unique, not a part of the group, and always looking in through an imaginary barrier.
- 11) We are super responsible or super irresponsible. So much of our lives are all or nothing when trying to please our parents we did more and more and more; some of us realized early in our childhood, that there simply was no pleasing them, so we did nothing. We people please until we burn out for two basic reasons; one, because we don't have a realistic sense of our own capabilities or, two because if we say NO, we're afraid someone might find out how inadequate we feel and no longer like us.

12) We are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved. Since starting a relationship is so difficult and frightening, when we do so we expect it to be permanent. This loyalty is usually caused by fear of abandonment. At home we always “hung in there” enabling the addict and denying the disease.

13) We are impulsive. As children our impulsivity was usually denied or covered up by our parents. We seldom suffered the consequences for impulsivity, leaving us with no deterrent, and we allow our impulsive behavior to continue in our adult lives.

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### **The Problem** (*Adapted from The Laundry List*)

Many of us found that we had several characteristics in common as a result of being brought up in an alcoholic or other dysfunctional household. We had come to feel isolated, and uneasy with other people, 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 (or practiced other addictive behavior) ourselves, or married them, or both. Failing that, we found other compulsive personalities, such as a workaholic, to fulfill our sick need for abandonment.

We lived life from the standpoint of victims. Having an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, we preferred to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. We 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 on to a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally. Yet, we kept choosing insecure relationships because they matched our childhood relationship with alcoholic or dysfunctional parents.

These symptoms of the family disease of alcoholism or other dysfunction made us ‘co-victims’, those who take on the characteristics of the disease 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.

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### **The Solution**

The solution is to become your own loving parent.

As ACA becomes a safe place for you, you will find freedom to express all the hurts and fears that you have kept inside and to free yourself from the shame and blame that are carry-overs 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 love and accept 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.

This process allows us to see our biological parents as the instruments of our existence. Our actual parent is a Higher Power whom some of us choose to call God. Although we had alcoholic or dysfunctional parents, our Higher Power gave us the Twelve Steps of Recovery.

This is the action and work that heals us: we use the Steps; we use the meetings; we use the telephone. We share our experience, strength, and hope with each other. We learn to restructure our sick thinking one day at a time. When we release our parents from responsibility for our actions today, we become free to make healthful decisions as actors, not reactors. We progress from hurting, to healing, to helping. We awaken to a sense of wholeness we never knew was possible.

By attending these meetings on a regular basis, you will come to see parental alcoholism or family dysfunction for what it is: a disease that infected you as a child and continues to affect you as an adult. You will learn to keep the focus on yourself in the here and now. You will take responsibility for your own life and supply your own parenting.

You will not do this alone. Look around you and you will see others who know how you feel. We love and encourage you no matter what. We ask you accept us just as we accept you.

This is a spiritual program based on action coming from love. We are sure that as the love grows inside you, you will see beautiful changes in all your relationships, especially with your Higher Power, yourself, and your parents.

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## **The 12-Steps Adapted to ACA**

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

## **Co-founder Tony A.'s 12-Steps for ACA**

*(From the book *The Laundry List* by Tony A. with Dan F.)*

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of living with alcoholism and that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. We came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could bring us clarity.
3. We made a decision to practice self-love and to trust a Higher Power of our understanding.
4. We made a searching and blameless inventory of our parents because, in essence, we had become them.
5. We admitted to our Higher Power, to ourselves and to another human being the exact nature of our childhood abandonment.
6. We were entirely ready to begin the healing process with the aid of our Higher Power.
7. We humbly asked our Higher Power to help us with our healing process.
8. We became willing to open ourselves to receive the unconditional love of our Higher Power.
9. We became willing to accept our own unconditional love by understanding that our Higher Power loves us unconditionally.
10. We continued to take personal inventory and to love and approve of ourselves.
11. We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with our Higher Power, praying only for knowledge of its will for us and the power to carry it out.
12. We have had a spiritual awakening as a result of taking these steps, and we continue to love ourselves and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

**Another much adapted victim based version, the source of which is unknown.**

In A.A. the Steps are primarily “offender based” and intended to deal only with recovery from addiction. In ACA, though we may also have our own “offender” issues to deal with, we are primarily oriented to recovery from “victim” issues, and towards taking responsibility for our own lives, so that we do not remain as victims.

1. We accepted our powerlessness over the dynamics of our “family of origin” and the unhealthy tools, roles, and adaptive behaviors which helped us to survive as children, but which have made our adult lives unmanageable.
2. We came to believe in our own innate goodness and worth, by virtue of the “Indwelling Spirit” or “Higher Power” within each of us, as expressed in our individual consciousness, and that this Power could restore us to functionality.
3. We made a decision to claim our own “Inner Spirit” or “Higher Power” and, with It, our freedom to love and accept ourselves unconditionally from this moment forward.
4. We made a searching and fearless objective inventory of our lives (either on our own, through therapy, or both), observing all those areas where we had been victimized, owning our feeling about them, but also giving

up our guilt over situations in which we were clearly innocent victims such as was the case when we were children.

5. We admitted to ourselves, to our “Higher Power”, and to someone whom we could trust to be supportive (such as a therapist or special friend) the exact nature of our dysfunctions, including the harm we have caused others, as well as the feelings and opinions we have had about ourselves or other issues which may have inhibited our spiritual growth.

6. We embraced our anger, hurt, shame, and our fears, and allowed ourselves to finally “feel” the pain and suffering which both we and others have denied us until now, so that we could finally be free of it.

7. We allowed ourselves to experience and express the feelings we had been suppressing, and we grieved our losses, so that we could heal them and move forward, rather than continuing to deny or to rationalize the abuse we had suffered.

8. We made a list of all persons, institutions, and/or belief systems that have harmed us (either physically, mentally, emotionally, sexually, and/or spiritually), as well as those whom we have harmed in turn, and we became willing to either forgive or to make amends as each incident warranted.

9. We made direct amends to those we had harmed, and forgave either directly, or in our hearts, those who had harmed us except when to do so would injure them or others. We began with ourselves!

10. We continued to monitor our own attitudes, behavior patterns and feelings, watching for anything we may have overlooked, or any old patterns we may be slipping back into, and if necessary, we repeated the aforementioned steps.

11. We sought through prayer and meditation and/or inner reflection to improve our conscious awareness of our spiritual nature, and to live in harmony with the universe and/or our Higher Power, and to express outwardly the true beauty and wonder of our unique and incomparable self, the one we were intended to be.

12. Having substantially healed our own lives through acceptance and nurturing of our Inner Spirit or Inner Child, and through our dedication to practicing these principles in all our affairs, we then tried to carry our message of hope and recovery to other Adult Children.

It is not the suffering that leads to emotional illness but rather the fact that the child is forbidden by the parents to experience and articulate this suffering, the pain felt at being wounded. It is not the trauma itself that is the source of illness but the unconscious, repressed, hopeless despair over not being allowed to give expression to what one has suffered, and the fact that one is not allowed to show, and is unable to experience feelings of anger, rage, humiliation, despair, helplessness, sadness and grief. Pain over the frustration one has suffered is nothing to be ashamed of, nor is it harmful. It is a natural human reaction.

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## **The ACA 12-Traditions**

1. Our common welfare should come first, personal recovery depends on ACA unity.

2. For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.

3. The only requirement for membership in ACA is a desire to recover from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional family.
  4. Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or ACA as a whole. We cooperate with all other 12-Step programs.
  5. Each group has but one primary purpose – to carry its message to the adult child who still suffers.
  6. An ACA group ought never endorse, finance or lend the ACA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.
  7. Every ACA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.
  8. Adult Children of Alcoholics should remain forever non-professional, but our service centers may employ special workers.
  9. ACA, as such, ought never be organized, but we may create service boards or committees directly responsible to those they serve.
  10. Adult Children of Alcoholics has no opinion on outside issues; hence the ACA name ought never be drawn into public controversy.
  11. Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, T.V. and films.
  12. Anonymity is the spiritual foundation of all our traditions, ever reminding us to place principles before personalities.
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### **The ACA Promises** *(ACA Red Book, Page 591)*

- We will discover our real identities by loving and accepting ourselves.
- Our self-esteem will increase as we give ourselves approval on a daily basis.
- Fear of authority figures and the need to “people-please” will leave us.
- Our ability to share intimacy will grow inside us.
- As we face our abandonment issues, we will be attracted by strengths and become more tolerant of weaknesses.
- We will enjoy feeling stable, peaceful, and financially secure.
- We will learn how to play and have fun in our lives.
- We will choose to love people who can love and be responsible for themselves.
- Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.
- Fears of failures and success will leave us, as we intuitively make healthier choices.
- With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors.
- Gradually, with our Higher Power’s help, we learn to expect the best and get it.



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## **ACA Bill of Rights**

I have a right to all those good times that I have longed for all these years and didn't get.

I have a right to joy in this life, right here, right now – not just a momentary rush of euphoria but something more substantive.

I have a right to relax and have fun in a nonalcoholic and nondestructive way.

I have a right to actively pursue people, places, and situations that will help me in achieving a good life.

I have the right to say no whenever I feel something is not safe or I am not ready.

I have a right to not participate in either the active or passive “crazy-making” behavior of parents, of siblings, and of others.

I have a right to take calculated risks and to experiment with new strategies.

I have a right to change my tune, my strategy, and my funny equations.

I have a right to “mess up”; to make mistakes, to “blow it”, to disappoint myself, and to fall short of the mark.

I have a right to leave the company of people who deliberately or inadvertently put me down, lay a guilt trip on me, manipulate or humiliate me, including my alcoholic parent, my nonalcoholic parent, or any other member of my family.

I have a right to put an end to conversations with people who make me feel put down and humiliated.

I have a right to all my feelings.

I have a right to trust my feelings, my judgment, my hunches and my intuition.

I have a right to develop myself as a whole person emotionally, spiritually, mentally, physically, and psychologically.

I have a right to express all my feelings in a nondestructive way and at a safe time and place. It is OK for me to feel angry and to express it in responsible ways.

I have the right to say “no” without feeling guilty. I do not have to apologize or give reasons when I say no.

I do not have to feel guilty just because someone else does not like what I do, say, think, or feel.

I do not have to assume full responsibility for making decisions, particularly where others share responsibility for making the decision.

I have the right to say, “I don't understand” without feeling stupid or guilty.

I have the right to say “I don't know”.

I have the right to ask others to do things for me.

I have the right to refuse requests which others make of me.

I have the right to tell others when I think they are manipulating, conning, or treating me unfairly.

I have the right to refuse additional responsibilities without feeling guilty.

I have the right to tell others when I feel annoyed about their behavior.

I do not have to compromise my personal integrity.

I have the right to make mistakes and to be responsible for them.

I have the right to be wrong.

I do not have to be liked, admired, or respected by everyone for everything I do.

I have a right to as much time as I need to experiment with this new information and these new ideas and to initiate changes in my life.

I have a right to sort out the bill of goods my parents sold me; to take the acceptable and dump the unacceptable.

I have a right to a mentally healthy, sane way of existence, though it will deviate in part, or all, from my parents prescribed philosophy of life.

I have a right to carve out my place in this world.

I have a right to follow any of the above rights, to live my life the way I want to, and not wait until my alcoholic parent gets well, gets happy, seeks help, or admits there is a problem.

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## **Effects, Defenses and Recovery from Abuse**

*(Taken from: <http://thelistacagroup.wordpress.com/2010/08/05/effects-of-abuse-and-how-to-get-past-them> and the ACA WSO website)*

### **Notes on Abuse – Effects of Abuse**

1. Low or no self-esteem
2. Often feels responsible and blames self
3. Inability to trust self and others (may trust, but trusts wrong people)
4. Sense of worthlessness
5. Isolation
6. Sense of being helpless
7. Strong denial system
8. Low or no body awareness
9. Numb the pain with drinking, drugging, sexing, eating, etc.
10. Physical and medical symptoms – may be a lot of body complaints

11. Prostitution
12. Suicide – taking anger out on self
13. Sense of emptiness
14. Loss of playfulness and spontaneity
15. Many become abusive

### **Protective Defenses Used to Deal With Abuse**

These defenses interfere with developing relationships on an adult level.

1. Silence
2. Denial – may be believing it's not happening
3. Dissociation – “becoming the spot on the ceiling”
4. Numb feelings
5. Change feelings – from anger to \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Change meaning of abuse – child may be told, “This is good for you”, so child may think “Doesn't this happen to all kids?”
7. Isolation – stay away from home, etc.

### **Recovery from Abuse**

1. Share your story – you don't need to deal with pain alone
2. Believe your story – you have a tendency to discount
3. Establish perpetrator responsibility – recognize it isn't about you
4. Address the addictions used to numb the pain
5. Realize you can deal with the pain without mood altering substances
6. Learn to recognize, then accept, and then communicate feelings
7. Learn to nurture yourself
8. Build self-esteem and positive body image (affirmations)
9. Deal with family of origin – break the code of secrecy – by writing and talking with other people
10. Learn to be playful
11. Learn that now you do have a chance to live, you do have choices – YOU NEED NOT BE A VICTIM
12. Take back your power – act responsibly, set boundaries that feel comfortable, control sexual behavior – you can control who enters your life
13. Remind yourself of your strengths
14. Learn you can say “No”
15. Learn to give and receive criticism
16. Stop abusing others

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### **A Spiritual Dilemma Rather Than a Mental Illness (ACA Red Book, Page 142)**

“ACA (takes a) spiritual approach to the disease of family dysfunction. In ACA, we view our compulsive thinking and dependent behavior as a spiritual dilemma rather than a mental illness. We have no quarrel with science and medicine, which have made great strides in mapping and studying the brain. Such clinical work is of great importance in understanding human behavior and brain functions. We freely use such clinical labels as depression, panic disorder, bipolar, dissociation, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Some ACA members have been diagnosed as multiple personalities and as schizophrenic.

“We do not believe our brains are missing any elements. We start with the premise that we are whole and that we had a normal reaction to an abnormal situation of being raised in a dysfunctional home. Our normal reaction

to protect ourselves has created survival traits, compulsions, and self-harming behaviors, which respond to the ACA Steps and spiritual remedies. We are not minimizing the severity of our situation as adult children. The disease of family dysfunction manifests itself in dependency, addiction, and dissociative personalities. The disease can kill. Every day, adult children commit suicide, die in addiction, or die one day at a time in silent isolation, thinking they are hopeless. In ACA, we believe we were born whole and became fragmented in body, mind, and spirit through abandonment and shame. We need help finding a way to return to our miracle state.”

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## **Updated Family Roles** *(From: <http://kathyberman.com/updated-family-roles/>)*

“The following is an update on family roles from ACA (Adult Children of Alcoholics).

**Family Hero** – An achiever, usually (but not always) the oldest child. Often a workaholic who can identify other’s needs and meet them, but is without an understanding of their own needs. This is often a child who uses their success to find a sense of belonging — the one who shows the family is “all right,” but who is unable to feel the benefit of his/her achievements. They feel like a fraud and are subject to depressions which they hide from those around them.

**The Rescuer** – Similar to the Family Hero, -but without the visible success. The Rescuer finds those in needs, lets them move in or marries them or finds a job for them while supply other needs and is very understanding of the frequent betrayals. The rescuer has a deep seated self-hate that drives them to their role as a savior, because they know that anyone not already at the bottom of the barrel would have nothing to do with them. They tend to feel inadequate in their giving and unable to accept help for their own needs.

**The Mascot** – Often a younger child who uses humor or other distracting behavior, such as being exceptional clumsy or always in trouble, to take the focus of the family away from the problems of the family dysfunction. If the parent is violently drunk, the Mascot may take the abuse to “save” the rest of the family, or may be able to crack a joke at the necessary moment to take everyone’s mind off the pain of their reality.

**The Adjuster** – The one who is never bothered by what is happening; there is no reason to be excited because everyone had to lie with family problems. The child never becomes too attached to goal or a desire because they have learned to change their direction at any moment. They float, knowing something is wrong but coping, often successfully, with one chaotic situation after another by surrendering their identity to the needs of the moment.

**The Doormat** – The abused child who survives by lying down and letting others walk all over him/her, rather than risk an unpleasant or dangerous confrontation. This child is very understanding of the need someone else may have to injure him/her, but cannot identify his/her feelings about the abuse in the past or present.

**The Acting out Child or The Rebel** – This child is in action at the slightest provocation, whether as an heroic action to prevent abuse to someone else (by distracting the abuser) or to protect himself/herself with wildness. This is the child who is most visible to the outside world and who may adopt alcoholism, drug addiction or other compulsive behavior early in defiance of the family system.

**The Scapegoat or Family Jerk** – This child takes the blame and shame for the actions of other family members by being the most visibly dysfunctional. This child serves the family by being sick or crazy to allow the other members of the family to ignore their own dysfunction. This is also the child who holds the family together — the family rallies to help the family jerk. He/She learns to remain dysfunctional to continue receiving the little attention available in a dysfunctional home by making the family “okay” by being the focus of all that is “not okay” which all members of the family vaguely sense.

**The Bully** – This child is usually the victim of physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse, who successfully makes the mental transition to stop being the victim by victimizing others. Often the Bully is genuinely remorseful for the pain and suffering caused to others, but will continue inflicting that abuse rather than face his/her own pain.

**The Lost Child** – Often a younger (or the youngest) child, this personality type has learned to stay out of the way, not make his/her wants known and to expect nothing. They avoid feeling by denying that they have feelings. They adopt whatever behavior will allow them to stay invisible within the family, at work, at school or in a relationship. This is the child who can assume whatever personality those around him/her find least threatening.

**The Last Hope** – Similar to the Lost Child, the Last Hope is the caretaker for the family when all other members have become unable to continue their roles. Often the Last Child is raised on comments like “You’ll never hurt me like so-and-so.” These children may work themselves to death trying to do “what’s right” for blood relations or adopted families, no matter what the expense to their own life.”

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### **From Hurting, to Healing, to Helping** ~Rozanne S, 1968

I put my hand in yours, and together we can do, what we could never do alone. No longer is there a sense of hopelessness. No longer must we each depend upon our own unsteady willpower.

We are all together now, reaching out our hands for power and strength greater than our own. And, as we join hands, we find love and understanding beyond our wildest dreams.

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### **ACA Serenity Prayer**

God, grant me the serenity to accept the people I cannot change, the courage to change the one I can, and the wisdom to know that one is me.