

# Adult Children of Alcoholics

People have often asked about the term “adult children.” It all began with Alcoholics Anonymous. When AA was founded in the 1930s, it was discovered that more people were affected by the alcoholic’s addiction than just the alcoholic. This realization led to the creation of Al-Anon and Alateen in 1950, which is for families, friends, and young children of alcoholics. In 1978, a group of Alateens was formed in New York City. However, the people in this group were in their 20s and no longer teenagers. They evolved into a group of young adults, and wanted something different from Alateens. A man named Tony A. joined the group. Tony was in his 50s but had similar issues, as he was brought up in a violent alcoholic home. Tony became the primary founder of Adult Children of Alcoholics that was created for adults who grew up in alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional families. These people were adults physically, but often behaved more like children emotionally. They had held onto childhood issues, never having help to grow into mature adults. This group has been called both ACA and it’s earlier acronym ACoA. Today, ACA has over 600 groups around the world, each committed to stopping the generational behavior that develops in dysfunctional families. Many people develop addictions to cover up the effects of having been brought up in a dysfunctional family. Through no fault of their own, they become “adults” often behaving in ways more similar to children.

Tony A created *The Laundry List*, which describes the characteristics of people who grow up in any type of dysfunctional family, including those with an alcoholic. Typically these people:

- become isolated and are afraid of others and authority figures
- become approval seekers and lose their identity in the process
- are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism
- either become alcoholics, marry them or both, or find another compulsive personality to fulfill their abandonment needs
- live life from the viewpoint of *victims*
- feel guilty when they stand up for themselves
- become addicted to excitement and have difficulty having fun
- confuse love and pity
- repress their feelings from their traumatic childhood because it hurts too much
- judge themselves harshly and have low self-esteem
- take life too seriously while constantly seeking approval from others
- have dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment
- become reactors rather than actors and rarely consider alternate options
- confuse intimacy and love with sex
- usually feel different from other people and guess at what is normal
- are either super responsible or super irresponsible
- are extremely loyal even when undeserved
- tend to look for immediate as opposed to deferred gratification
- are overly sensitive

Children from unhealthy families grow into adult life harboring the above characteristics, which causes life-long patterns of dysfunctional behaviors. The ACA movement helps adults learn how to lead lives that are happy and free from the above characteristics. Like the more than 250 different Twelve-Step programs, ACA is based on the steps and principles of Alcoholics Anonymous.

All ACA meetings are open and anyone may attend. As with any 12-Step meeting, anonymity is observed, meaning that it is okay to share what was said, but not who said it or who attended.

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For more information, go to the ACA website: <http://www.adultchildren.org>. Some of the above information comes from the book: *Adult Children; Alcoholic/Dysfunctional Families*, published by the ACA World Service Organization and can be published through their website.