

Reparenting My Inner Child

whose only plea is,

“Love me, protect me, hear me, hug me, and heal me.”



Central Coast ACA Intergroup

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Please provide comments and feedback to the Central Coast ACA Intergroup.

Please use in meetings, with a Sponsor, or with a therapist. This work should only be done with responsible support as you delve into what may be traumatic and/or abusive memories.

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Acknowledgments

Just as Adult Children of Alcoholics recognizes its 12-Step roots in Alcoholics Anonymous, ACA recovery reaps the benefits of advances made in the therapeutic community. Recovery techniques presented here are based on the work of many individuals. We appreciate their efforts that provide the pathway for us to become happy, joyous, and free from dysfunction.

Dysfunctional Families – Claudia Black in [It Will Never Happen to Me](#) explored the interplay in alcoholic families (1981). [John Bradshaw on: The Family](#) (1986) explored the dynamic in dysfunctional family systems.

Emotional Foundations – We know that children who grow up in dysfunctional homes do not complete healthy emotional development. To complete the stages of development that were interrupted, we grieve the abuse and/or trauma if we have memories or the issue of the life stage if we do not.

Identity Development – In dysfunctional families the children choose or are forced to choose to survive abuse by becoming abusers or becoming victims. These children have no coherent sense of self, no clear identity, having mimicked or accepted the behavior of the perpetrators and/or their victims to survive. In recovery we explore what our core values are and systematically align our thoughts, words, and behaviors with them.

Becoming a Loving Parent to Our Inner Children – Carl Jung explored the notion of a child within us in [Memories, Dreams, Reflections](#) (1962). Eric Berne in [Games People Play](#) (1964) laid out his theory of Transactional Analysis between the various parts of the human psyche – the parent, the adult, and the child. Claude Steiner described the dysfunctional life scripts we adopt to survive in [Scripts People Live](#) (1974).

Lucia Capacchione used the idea of reparenting the Inner Child in her art therapy work in 1976 that she explained in her book, [Recovery of Your Inner Child](#) (1991).

Charles Whitfield detailed Inner Child recovery in his book, [Healing the Child Within: Discovery and Recovery for Adult Children of Dysfunctional Families](#) (1987).

Listing Traumatic Experiences – We loosely borrowed the idea to chronologically list abuse and trauma experienced in childhood from Peggy Pace, who wrote, [Lifespan Integration: Connecting Ego States through Time](#) (2003). We included joyful events and milestones as well.

Grief Work – In her book [On Death and Dying](#), Elizabeth Kubler-Ross developed a model of five stages of grief. Since then, the therapeutic community has embraced grieving as the way to recover. Grieving is the central factor in completing life stages.

Life Stages – We expanded on Erik Erikson’s psychosocial model of human development from an observational model about life stages discussed in [Identity and the Lifecycle](#) (1959). We use his observations to complete each life stage to grow up emotionally.

Disconnections between Core Beliefs, Thinking, Speaking, and Behavior – Alcoholics Anonymous uses the term “stinkin’ thinkin’” to describe confusion in beliefs, thoughts, words, and actions. Eric Berne, in [Games People Play](#) (1964), described this phenomenon as the “critical parent.” Francine Shapiro, in her method to reprogram information in brain cells, Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) (1988), focuses on removing false, negative beliefs and replacing them with true, positive beliefs. In ACA recovery we rethink what our true values are and rid ourselves of the false beliefs we adopted in moments of life-threatening abuse and trauma in our efforts to survive. We seek to align our true beliefs with our thoughts, words, and behavior.

Thanks - We give thanks to our Higher Power. We thank Tony A. and the Al-Anon teens who became too old for Alateen and continued to pursue the connection between their lives growing up in alcoholic homes and their dysfunction. We thank our program fellows whose shared wisdom allowed us to create this workbook and the WSO Literature Committee that inspired us to improve the original manuscript.

Introduction

Adult Children of Alcoholics is a spiritual program based on action coming from love. Our Inner Children are those precious beings inside who survived childhood without parents who could provide a stable, nurturing, and consistent environment. In ACA recovery we have an ever-present connection to our Inner Children who are the embodiment within us of our Higher Power. The Steps give us the framework and discipline for recovery. In ACA we learn that the solution to dysfunction is to become our own Loving Parents. As our own Loving Parents, we reach out to our Inner Children because we are the adults. We review the past from our perspective as adults and provide the fragmented children inside us with ways to develop:

- A relationship with our adult selves
- A solid foundation for natural emotional growth
- A complete identity
- A process for grieving to resolve the neglect, abandonment, abuse, and trauma we suffered as children that stunted our emotional growth
- A plan to complete the life stages we did not complete.

To do this, we use ACA tools which includes the emotional support of our ACA family. This support will allow us to build healthy, happy, and functional adult lives in ACA meetings that emphasize reparenting.

A. Our Own Loving Parent Meetings

In our meetings, we present a focus question. We share our experience, strength, and hope on that topic. We read passages in the workbook to reinforce the concept of the chapter and work through exercises about the topic. We read through activities we can do in the ensuing week to work on that aspect of recovery. Following that, we briefly share what we have done this past week for our Inner Children.

B. Workbook with Open Sharing Meetings

In Workbook with Open Sharing Meetings, we spend 20 minutes opening the meeting with the ACA Serenity Prayer, readings, announcements, 7th Tradition, and welcoming newcomers. About forty minutes are allocated to using the workbook. The remainder of the time is devoted to open sharing on any topic. We conclude with the reading of the ACA Promises followed by the recitation of the ACA Serenity Prayer. We included a meeting format at the back of the workbook for the 1.5-hour meeting.

C. Workbook-Only Meetings

Participants in an ACA group may choose to form a separate meeting to concentrate on reparenting their Inner Children. Workbook-Only Meetings last for about an hour. Participants typically start and end with the ACA Serenity Prayer and use the workbook.

Our Inner Child and Inner Children

When we experience loss, abandonment, abuse, or trauma without emotional support from parents or caretakers, we fragment emotionally. At the extreme end, we split into separate personalities (multiple personality disorder). More often, some of us shatter emotionally into multiple Inner Children, while others psychologically separate into one Inner Child. In this workbook we do not make the distinction between Inner Child and Inner Children. Instead, we use the term “Inner Child” to avoid constantly writing “Inner Child(ren).” We do, however, use the term “Inner Children” as the plural form of “Inner Child” throughout this workbook.

Exercises are Self-Assessment Inventories and Educational Tools; *then* the Recovery Work Begins

In this workbook we focus attention on a topic and provide exercises that guide the recovery work. The exercises are designed to provide focus on specific recovery activities. These are mini self-inventories for information. Recovery largely depends on doing the work listed in “Things You Can Do in Recovery This Week” between meetings and sharing insights about the work with Sponsors, program friends, and participants at meetings during open sharing.