

ACA - The Hard Truths

We were born perfect, and if fortunate, came to see and feel unconditional love in the arms and eyes of a caring mother and father, family, extended family, friends, culture and society. Unfortunately, and all too often as ACA's, we came to suffer from chronic generational dysfunction through denial, fear, abuse, shame, abandonment, and loss. Our disease and self became invisible. We come to feel damaged and broken, less than others and unworthy, surviving life but not enjoying it.

Wounded Child

Due to family and other dysfunctional persons and situations, our "wonder child" was forced into hiding to avoid the pain and suffering of being neglected or attacked and abused when vulnerable, sensitive, and authentic. A "wounded child" arose and took over. This disconnection from ourselves, others, and inevitably our Higher Power, create a spiritual and psychic split that often lead to an empty and lonely life of fear and despair.

This led to a "hole in our soul" we have desperately tried to fill in many dysfunctional and addictive ways. If we rebelled, the negative reaction and energy may have increased dramatically to again force us into submission. As children we yearned for love, healthy control and safety, but instead learned excessive control, self dependence, and co-dependence.

Those not overtly abused may have been neglected physically, emotionally, spiritually, and other ways. Neglect is also abuse, often manifested by withholding the praise and cherishing necessary to feel loved, valued, and safe. Silence is used to hurt, demonize and deny. Dysfunction in youth leads to addictive work, sex, spending, eating, drinking, drugging, relationships, and other problems.

We came to know dependency (addiction), depression, panic disorder, post traumatic stress disorder, dissociation, codependency, obsession, and compulsion intimately. We often fear authority figures, judge ourselves and others harshly, confuse love and pity, and hook up with other addictive and sick personalities. Some have obvious and oppressive depression, addiction, and other issues. The sad fact is we are doomed to repeat this hopeless dysfunctional cycle until we access and embrace our truth through recovery, therapy, community, and friends.

We came to believe we were responsible for the unhappiness and problems of our parents, family, and others. We mistook control and manipulation for a relationship. We often became bullies, perpetrators, and persecutors dominating, controlling, and abusing others to somehow even the score in our sick and twisted thinking. We needed help, honesty, and acceptance, but instead received neglect abuse, falsity, denial and disapproval.

We have shut down our connection to our past as well as our bodies and feelings. This is manifested through the inner child as the pain and suffering are too much for us to bear. To avoid this pain we run and hide from our inner child or push down it and it lock away. We may have been avoiding our inner child for decades. This situation is particularly harmful to us as our inner child holds the emotional, physical, and spiritual side, from the heart, and not the head. Our inner child is our heart, and our connection to something even deeper at our center, our very essence,

Higher Power.

We can think about God all day long but nothing matches a felt experience. Without the inner child, we won't truly and deeply experience God's love and life. We must go through the inner child, from the head, to heart, to

center. Inner child also is the reservoir of the pain, hurt, and suffering we carry. We go to the inner child and then together take it to Higher Power for healing and transformation.

We often were labeled with roles in the family or society as the problem or bad boy or girl, lost child, scapegoat, loser, shy one, sickly one, fat one, clown, and so on. Other children were labeled as the star, super student, prince or princess, athlete, little man or woman (who didn't get to be a kid), and so on. Like so many other aspects of our youth, we took these on as our identity and often exaggerated and furthered the role play in the eyes of ourselves and others throughout our lives.

Inner Parent

Unspoken and rigid rules of "don't talk, don't trust, don't feel and don't look, don't listen, don't heal," came into being and were strictly enforced silently or overtly. The abuses and dysfunctions of our youth were often so common that we thought them to be normal and okay. The abuse was internalized as we unconsciously created an inner abuser and critic, ever ready and willing to chime in to criticize, belittle, and berate from within.

This can become a default, or set point that we go back to instinctively, automatically until we believe it to be our true self. The mask of negativity seems to become our face, and our bodies clothed in protective bandages and armor head to toe. Unconsciously adopted character defects, defenses, roles, and survival traits continue to be problematic throughout our lives.

Where did we run to when things got scary? to our home? But what if home was lifeless or hell itself? Most often our family of origin is the source of our dysfunction, but even brief encounters with others can leave life-long secret scars. We were forced to adopt defenses and coping behaviors to feel safe and have some measure of control. Common ACA family types are: alcoholic, mentally ill, hypochondriacs, ritualistic, harsh, secretive, ultra religious, militaristic, sadistic, sexually inappropriate or abusive, perfectionist, shaming, conditional praise, divorced, and addictive.

The abuse may have been physical, emotional, sexual, spiritual, financial, verbal and non verbal. The signs are addiction, codependency, phobias, despair, worry, inferiority, anxiety and panic. It is a generational disease, as we took on guilt and blame from generations past. This realization helps us forgive ourselves and others that handed down the problems they were given. The hitting, threats, and indifference leave hidden but deep scars.

False Self

We felt bewildered and bereft fulfilling these inauthentic illusory roles, living out our lives through a false self. These roles became an entity unto themselves and took on a life of their own. Again the mask seemed to become our true face. Others did the same so that many exchanges were in fact one false role interacting with another. No wonder our relationships became mired in problems.

Higher Power

Our inner child is our heart, and our connection to something even deeper at our center, our very essence, Higher Power. We can think about God all day long but nothing matches a felt experience. Without the inner child, we won't truly and deeply experience God's love and life. We must go through the inner child, from the head, to heart, to center. Inner child also is the reservoir of the pain, hurt, and suffering we carry. We go to the inner child and then together take it to Higher Power for healing and transformation.

ACA makes no apologies that: "It is a spiritual program based on action coming from love." The reason is, the false self cannot relate to, know, or experience Higher Power. Only True Self and in particular inner child can -

from the heart. Counseling, medication, and behavior modification can only go so far, Higher Power makes all the difference in the end. God's will, not ours, as we "let go and let God." Early on the Alcoholics Anonymous program found that those with a spiritual focus were twice as likely to stay sober.

Conclusion

The emphasis on family dynamics, and looking at family of origin patterns through inner child, parent, and self are emphasized in the ACA program and an essential key to our recovery. This means looking where fears, misperceptions, and distorted thinking came from and caused isolation, victimhood, low self esteem, and judging ourselves and others harshly and mercilessly.

Our wounded and false self may have been "driving the bus" for most of our lives, but we can move our learned character defects, defenses, and survival traits out of the driver's seat to put our Higher Power there, as we become worthy co-pilots.

We had become experts at coping and dysfunction to deal with difficult people and situations, now we can become experts at healing and thriving through Higher Power, wonder child, loving inner parent, and our True Self. We have been sick and twisted on one hand, but the perfect self and basic goodness was always there buried deep within.

Through the meetings, the steps, and other program work, we relearn trust and how to be honest about our wants and needs. We come to recognize raging, intellectualizing, exaggerating, superiority and inferiority as the emotional addictions they are. Realizing and admitting "It did happen to me" is the first step. We can't read, reason, or think our way to wholeness and oneness in isolation, it takes years of community, commitment, and work.

Through learning and working the steps, we move from "hurting, to healing, to helping". Another way of distilling the twelve steps is: 1. We "give up" to Higher Power as we practice surrender and acceptance. 2. We "speak up," as we identify and list our defects, defenses, and survival traits as well as honor and celebrate gifts, skills, strengths and abilities. 3. We "clean up," as we admit our defects and defenses to ourselves, our Higher Power, and others in the amends process. 4. We "follow up," as we continue to practice these principles in all our affairs. 5. We "step up," as we serve others in the spirit and practice of all the steps to guide us through our daily lives passively by example and actively through "the five S's," shares, service, the steps (and step studies), sponsors/sponsoring, and support (ourselves and others).

Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel and don't look, don't listen, don't heal rules we learned growing up crushed the very spirit that allows us to thrive. We now learn to break these rules to at last talk, trust, and feel, look, listen, and heal so that we may at last mend our broken and wounded souls and live the full, vibrant, and healthy life we all deserve and are found in the ACA promises.

We go through three stages of recovery: first, we stabilize our addictions and other problematic behaviors by surrendering to Higher Power. Second, we realize our true selves and grieve our losses, hurts, and trauma with Higher Powers help. Lastly, we refine our relationship with Higher Power, ourselves, and others from a spiritual perspective. We move from control and conflict to the patience and persistence that help us heal. Naming our feelings and issues is cathartic. Just identifying and acknowledging is a big step in healing.

We find we can often endure intense pain, suffering, and loneliness in our recovery because we had them in our youth. We seek wholeness as we incorporate the light and dark in our past, our selves, and our lives now. We find there is value in it all, the good and bad.

We have been dissociating from our feelings through denial, repression, projection rationalization, addictions, fear and excitement. Living with fear and doubt we didn't have a chance to learn strength and confidence. But although we didn't choose the home of our youth, we can now choose how we will live. We can now create a positive home and environment that allows the security, confidence, and self esteem we didn't get growing up.

As we grow in recovery, we go from bad years, down to bad months, to bad weeks, to bad days or moments. We will still have slips, and we may still fall, but not as fast, and not as far. We have learned to dust ourselves off, get back up again, and get on with life. We go from merely surviving to actually thriving. We refuse to let bad moments ruin our day, week, year, or life.

From our dysfunction we have found how to be fully functioning, from our disease we have learned healing and well being, and from our insanity we have found physical, mental, and emotional sanity and sobriety. We can now enjoy a full range of great happiness and joys, as well as deep sadness and sorrows like never before, but don't let ourselves be carried away by them or turn bitter and ugly.

By finding and loving our inner child, we heal our shattered selves to become whole again and gain the serenity we have prayed for. Don't forget, inner kids want to have fun! It is time for your inner child to laugh and play through games, drawing with chalk, pencils, or crayons, flying kites, swimming, playing games and with toys, sports, nature, dancing, singing, friendships, and many other ways. Remember to keep your loving inner parent near and ready to kiss, hug, squeeze, nurture, guide, cherish, soothe, affirm, comfort, support, and love.

Find your True Self that is the combination of all of the aspects of yourself as a happy, healthy, whole, and complete person. Most of all, find a loving Higher Power through journaling, prayer, meditation and other ways that stands ready to care for you and help you live the wonderful, amazing, and awesome life you truly deserve.

We at last find the freedom, trust, and support that creates a sense of aliveness, transformation, and thriving. We are home now! It is time to own our truth, grieve our losses, and be accountable. Recovery is not fast, easy, or painless as tears, anger, and sadness are normal and natural. We can't do it alone, but we *can* do it together. We can validate ourselves and find our self worth. We can be honest, open, and kind with ourselves and others.

Like a small seed that has grown to a tall and strong tree, then comes to bloom in flower and fruit, we too become ready to manifest our brightest and best selves. And like an egg that becomes a ravenous caterpillar, then undergoes an amazing transformation and emerge from its cocoon as a beautiful butterfly, we too become ready to fly free to find beauty and taste the sweet nectars of life. "It works if you work it, and you're worth it"!

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