

ACA Recovery

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. Yet even those blessed with the best of childhoods must eventually face pain, failure, sickness, old age, and death. Unfortunately, and all too often, 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.

This situation has become more prevalent as modern life has complicated our lives and added stressors. A main cause is the loss of parents and siblings due to the high rate of divorce. Remarriage often brings much the same situation as step parents and siblings can be difficult even in the best of scenarios. The frequency of job changes and moving homes also contributes significantly to our problems. Smaller families also puts more pressure on individuals as there are simply less people available to help.

As children cannot accurately assess danger and threats until their reasoning matures starting at six and not fully until the late teens, protection, guidance, and nurturing are very important for all kids. This safety problem at times starts early as the cost of living forces parents back to work earlier than is prudent. The high costs of daycare also forces many parents to put children into risky daycare situations with poor quality centers, relatives, or others who are not up to the task, at times even (secretly) neglectful and abusive in many ways.

Poor or nonexistent parenting exhibits in many ways. For example, rites of passage. As children pass through life stages the changes need to be addressed and processed properly for kids to learn to deal with them. Graduations, puberty, deaths, marriages, holidays, divorces, and other significant life events need to be acknowledged to understand the feelings and thoughts that arise. Significant world events such as wars, genocide, disasters, and shootings need to be discussed as well. Maturation naturally includes passing through important stages of development as evidenced by Erik Erikson.

Birth order plays a part as parents have less skills and experience with early children and often less time and energy for later children. Earlier children may have more difficulties as parents struggle to curtail and control behaviors that are actually normal due to their lack of knowledge and training. As more kids arrive parents must spread their time between them, often passing on parental duties to older children even less well equipped to deal with them than they were.

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 as ACA children were unseen and unheard. 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 unless we find help and healing. Yet as the readings tell us, "this is a description, not an indictment," we can change!

In the right environment we felt confident and secure, able to explore and experience our bodies, ideas, and the world with enthusiasm and wonder. Unfortunately, due to family and other dysfunctional

persons and situations, our "wonder child" and "True Self" were often forced into hiding to avoid the pain and suffering of being neglected or attacked and abused when vulnerable, sensitive, and authentic. A "wounded child" and "false self" arise and take 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.

Harsh, critical, negative parenting often came under the disguise of loving care as we are criticized and made to feel inferior and defective as a way to spur us on and submit to parents and others expectations of what we should do and be. 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. Often the victim ends up apologizing for abuses they have received. Lack of interest and attention is abuse as well, in a word; indifference. Dysfunction in youth leads to addictive work, sex, spending, eating, drinking, drugging, and relationships unless we find and embrace our recovery.

Many parents tried to make their children an accessory while seeking fulfill an idealistic image of the perfect home and family. These children inherited stressful perfectionism as they tried to avoid rejection and abandonment, and feared ever making a mistake. Some of these children came to believe they were always wrong or never good enough. Many of these kids didn't felt they could relax enough to play and have fun. Oppressive fear led to oppressive control. The manipulation and enabling we took on to have control over our lives attracted ever more sick people, situations and circumstances in an attempt to recreate and repair the people and problems of our family of origin.

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. Many compensate or hide them very well. 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 lived lives of quiet desperation, often in fear of people, finances, bosses, police, health, disasters, and failure. We felt unsafe and unloved, ashamed and abandoned.

We may develop secondary addictions to deal with the pain, such as eating, shopping, or sleeping. The misery may even feel like a high at times as the pain becomes intense, especially if we over-identify with our dysfunction gleefully telling and retelling our victim story. We come into recovery "the walking wounded," as invisible bandages cover us head to toe and our hearts had become like a clenched fist hard as stone or steel.

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 lock it 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.

The inner child is also our connection to the love and joy we so desperately need to deal with the difficulties of life to really live. This is obvious on the playground, as childhood exuberance has kids smiling, laughing, and screaming with delight one moment, then crying when they get hurt the next, and again laughing and playing a minute later. They live in the moment, and in the fullest and richest way. We can too as adults, if we once again make this vital connection.

Another aspect of this physical and psychic split is that if we are cut off from our past, bodies, and inner child, we are also cut off from our truth. It is as if the truth wells up in our body and lungs, but is cut off at the neck, so doesn't make it to our mouth and out to the world to tell our truth. Owning our past, our bodies, and inner child helps us own our truth as well, and to express it assertively in healthy ways.

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 say "In codependency we have learned to survive life, in recovery we are learning to live life." Here we come to understand how the dysfunction and abuses have left us the walking wounded, sometimes barely hanging on to life and sanity. Through all of the healing paths and work we gather strength and health to once again live the full, rich, and magnificent life God intended for us and we know is true within us through our True Self.

We use a variety of addictions to harm ourselves. Self abandonment flourishes until we eventually collapse spent and bewildered. By not recognizing bottoms we try to fool ourselves and others that "everything is fine." Denial runs rampant as we isolate, manipulate, and act out through our addictions and other self soothing behaviors. Some appear highly functional and successful but lack true intimacy and happiness. We can fake it only so long.

Many ACA's are able to mask their disease and dysfunction very well. Michael Jackson, Robin Williams, and Prince may be such examples. Perhaps as telling they were unable to maintain intimate relationships well enough to help them through, so died alone.

We attempt to cover up hitting bottoms and relapses with addictions and soothing behaviors. This only prolongs our suffering. Problems arise as our mind and subconscious has taken on so much psychic pain the stress spills over into the body to bring fatigue, illness, and disease that demand the rest and healing we need. Even animals know instinctively when they are hurt to find safe shelter to rest and lick their wounds.

We have "learned helplessness," passive aggressiveness (both worth looking up to better understand), all or nothing thinking, rage, and self doubt. We cycle through the victim triangle of victim, abuser, and rescuer (also see "victim triangle" for more information). Incidents, abuses, and abandonments were denied or ignored until we didn't know what was real. Dysfunctional and abusive behavior is overlooked

because we are so used to it we don't realize how sick and twisted it really is. Movies and shows we watch are often filled with these behaviors and situations in the name of entertainment.

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.

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.

We learn roles do not define us. Not the negative or unrealistic roles assigned to us in our youth, nor any roles we may have now or in the future. We may be a husband, mother, manager, teacher, carpenter, dancer, artist, or any other role, but it is not our essential self. We fulfill our roles, but don't let it become rigid or determine our self worth. For example: as parents we nurture, guide, and support our children, but we let them grow and mature without being over protective or controlling. They will suffer and fail at times, as everyone must to live a full and complete life.

Where did we run to when things got scary? to our home? But what if home was lifeless or hell itself? Many sought safety in dangerous streets and alleys, later in bars. 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 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.

We must remember 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. 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.

Surrendering control to a Higher Power or power greater than ourselves, such as our recovery community, is a pivotal and necessary first step. Only then does the focus of our lives move from an over emphasis on others or ourselves shift to surrender and acceptance and a more healthy and balanced approach. This critical first step of recovery is common to all twelve step programs. We all seek the ultimate doctor, counselor, healer, and friend that is a Higher Power or power greater than ourselves.

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.

We came into program focusing on others first, ourselves and our recovery second, and Higher Power last. Through healing we find ways to put Higher Power (or power greater) first, then ourselves and our recovery, then others. We do this because personal salvation must come first, as we won't be much use to anyone else if we are a mess ourselves. Good self care leads to caring for others in a much better fashion.

If we do attempt to help others coming from our wounded and dysfunctional selves we will bring that to our relationships and work to only further the sickness and insanity. We now live "from the inside out," from the deep essence of ourselves that is naturally peaceful, compassionate and wise. We touch into these aspects of ourselves at the deepest center that is our Higher Power and its infinite intelligence, power, and presence.

Forgiveness is another transformative tool that increases dramatically through Higher Powers guidance and influence. If we (or others) could have done better, we would have. We were simply playing out the chronic generational dysfunction handed down. Forgiveness can be very difficult, especially if we think it somehow lets people off the hook for what they have done as if it was okay.

Abuses are not okay, they never were nor will be. The point is to forgive the person, not the behavior and disease. The person has been a puppet to the dysfunction and suffered from the inside out for their actions. Compassion for the suffering of their inner child (and adult) allows us to feel the hurt without being overwhelmed by anger. The battle or fight is with the problems, behaviors, and illness that dysfunction is, not the persons.

We come to realize disease and dysfunction are the problem, not ourselves or others. We must take great care not to personalize it, to make ours or anyone else's identity. It is not personal, permanent, or pervasive (our whole life). Dysfunction can be dealt with and diminished with patience and perseverance. We treat it as a mother would a tired, cranky, or ailing child, with great care and comfort. For example: through healing someone abused as a child may become a champion for child's rights and welfare.

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. Another aspect of a bus is there are two to a seat. Therefore in reference to our recovery, each seat holds a defect or defense, with a strength and virtue next to it. We don't try to get rid of our defects and defenses (kick them off the bus), as they are a part of us as well.

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. We have been "mismanaging energy" all these years and it is high time to put it to better use and bring out the best in ourselves, others, and the world.

Our defects, defenses, and survival traits can also be thought of as seeds laying dormant in our subconscious until triggered by thoughts and events. We often try to push them back down ("lock them in the basement, closet, or attic") or crowd them out with distractions and addictions. This is "poor circulation," and like poor circulation (think constipation!) in the body, leads to further problems. Again, we must welcome these "guests" and take good care of them.

A saving grace is that again, for every difficult seed, there is a helpful one, also waiting to arise and manifest if we can find the presence of mind to let it. This is where prayer and meditation become of

great benefit. Clarity leads to understanding, wisdom, and healing. We tend to think answers and recovery come from working harder and faster (bigger is better) but through prayer and meditation we find deeper, slower, softer, quieter, kinder, gentler, (less is more) is actually better. We find our Higher Power has answers that go way beyond what we could ever imagine.

Many meetings, step studies, service positions, retreats, and other step work down the road, we come to really know our true selves. When we come to know the self intimately, we can let it go. We must "name it to tame it, train it, and transform it." What is "it?" Our dysfunctional thinking, behaviors and relationships. Only then can we loosen dysfunctions grip on our lives and start to live the awesome and abundant life of our wonder child, loving inner parent, and True Self.

Resilience and acceptance are necessary and admirable but we must not use them to allow abuse in our lives. We deserve better! We are also wise to avoid "the paralysis of (endless) analysis," Yet must "peel the onion" to eventually dismantle and defuse our dysfunctions. Like peeling an onion, it gets thicker and juicier the deeper we go. Also there are more tears, but if we "cook" the onion, it (our dysfunctions) can nourish and add flavor to our lives.

Our accumulated dysfunction comes from our parents, birth order, siblings, extended family, and communities. Too often we have given others the benefit of the doubt and allowed bad behavior. To overcome this in ACA we conduct a blameless inventory of ourselves, our parents, our family, and others. We don't betray our parents, family, or others, rather the disease, disorder, and dysfunction. We own and grieve our losses, and let go of rationalizing, minimizing, and denial. We break from our family script to freedom and choice as actors rather than reactors. Our recovery is a work in progress; "progress, not perfection".

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, it takes years of commitment and work.

Journaling can be very helpful by giving each of our deep "inner selves" an opportunity to speak their mind and heart on paper. This acknowledges the validity of their experiences, whether it was joy or suffering. Even ancestors and descendants can be channeled through journaling as we get in touch with the past and manifest a brighter future. Writing with the non dominant hand is especially effective as it mimics the inexperience and struggle of a child clearly.

"Easy does it" is good advice on the journey as we get in touch with a loving inner parent and Higher Power and give ourselves space and time to breathe, relax, rest, and grow. Part of our dysfunction has been taking things too seriously and forcing things. A light touch with compassion, kindness, and gentleness towards ourselves and others is very helpful. Many ACA's "bookend" difficult situations at work, socially, with family, and otherwise by calling a sponsor, co-sponsor, or ACA "fellow traveler" before and after the encounter.

"One day at a time" gives the same sentiment, as we seek to deal with life in manageable pieces, as we can't possibly handle or fix it all at once however much we want too. Unfortunately, some coming into recovery have significant epiphanies and awareness early on and float away on a "pink cloud" that is often short lived. Please don't let that happen to you, as you a worth a *full* recovery.

Another slogan that clarifies that our situation is that our troubles are not "personal, permanent, or pervasive." Not taking things personal means Our Higher Power is not punishing us for our misgivings (a "getcha God"), rather a loving Higher Power is always forgiving and willing to give us opportunities to set things right. Also other people are often, if not always, reacting to the patterns ingrained in their minds, not to us. We all too often trigger memories and patterns of people from their past, good or bad. These patterns go deep into the unconscious so may reach up to influence us from years or decades past.

"Tomorrow is another day," "it's never too late to have a happy childhood," and other sayings also remind us that things are not set in stone, that although difficult, habits and lives can be changed. We have a Higher power of a million seconds chances. Pervasiveness often comes in when we think our whole life is ruined by single events. Again life is long and wide, there is always time and space to begin again. We can always "reboot" or "push reset".

"First things first" can mean stabilizing addictions and calming our scattered emotions and thinking before moving on to difficult and painful trauma work. First things first also means we are wise to have a good amount of recovery time, support, and training in before delving into very difficult issues as we may uncover powerful issues and emotions we may not yet be able handle. Inner children, in particular, may have been suppressing strong rage, sadness, experienced and issues for decades that may erupt when they feel safe enough to show. we need to have a loving inner parent ready to gently help.

We think "It will never happen to me", and "I will be different," but it did happen, and we are doomed to pass on shame, self doubt, and codependency and repeat the cycle unless we do the hard work to become aware of, and heal the wounds of our past. Denial holds our disease together like glue. Secrets, ignored feelings, and chaos live on. Self righteousness, judgment, and pessimism ensue, even from functional parents. It is a "cunning and baffling" disease that can fade or takeover at any time.

Living here and now is fundamental. Through-out our lives we have spent much of our time rethinking our past and worrying about the future. For this reason we say, "think is our drink," as like the alcoholic, we addictively self soothe and medicate by spending too much time in our heads, ignoring our bodies and feelings, and missing the enjoyment and wonder of the present moment. This is step eleven's "prayer and meditation," as we use stillness, peace, and the breathe to move from our heads to our bodies and the present moment.

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).

"I can relate" is our identification with faulty thinking that we can heal or fix our family of origin either with them directly, or with others we attract later in life. We identify with each other instead of practicing denial, isolating, hiding, disconnecting, rescuing, or becoming controlling or overly permissive. We learn to be real, true, and honest.

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 come to realize we are more alike than different, and that we all share a psychic soul rupture that caused us to look outward and elsewhere for love, affirmation, and safety. This is a major issue for many of us. This shared "soul sorrow" allows us to identify with, and have empathy for each other, and all who suffer. If we focus on ourselves and work the steps, we can gradually learn to avoid addictively filling the laundry list "hole in the soul."

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. Also healing is much like cleaning a wound (especially if infected, as so many are). Just like infected and festering physical wounds, it hurts more to clean and dress these psychic wounds than it would to bind up and ignore them, but it is the only way to find full health and healing.

We must also remember that we have often received positive gifts as well; perhaps a good work ethic, humor, kindness, and other valuable life skills. Despite the damage done, parents have made many sacrifices for our benefit. Family members, friends, teachers, and others did what they could to help as well. Gratitude is a powerful healer, we are wise to use it often through gratitude lists and other means.

We consistently "keep coming back" to the meetings, literature, sponsors, and retreats to keep our recovery fresh and ongoing. It is all too easy to miss meetings, step study meetings, and sponsor check ins. This is a good reason to take on meeting service commitments, so as to give us good reasons to make it to every meeting possible.

Until ACA we had a "fix-ation" on our family of origin as we strived endlessly to recreate and at last fix everyone and everything we so wanted to as a child. We do this through people in our lives we attract or are attracted to that mirror early family dynamics. Before recovery and in our early years of recovery when looking for relationships we find our "picker is broken" so attract the people least likely to respond favorably to unconscious desires. For healing we seek full memory of family roles, dynamics, and childhood events, feelings, beliefs, and abuses. We move from troubled and dysfunctional to supportive and loving.

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. Hitting bottoms can manifest physically, emotionally, financially, and spiritually in our relationships with ourselves and others. Relapses can occur as well, but we must not give up, Keep praying and working the program, you are worth it!

In steps four through ten we make a blameless inventory of ourselves, family, and others who contributed to our disease and dysfunction, make every effort to make things right, and continue this process through-out our lives and affairs. This is a very big part of our recovery, much more than can be recounted here. We finally take a good long look at how we came to where we are, where we want to be, and work to get there. This process brings the forgiveness, clarity, and understanding necessary to overcome our problems.

ACA reminds us that for every defect there is a strength, we are not all bad! We may end up with a list of defects and strengths we can refer to on a regular basis to track our progress and slips. Many consider this the most powerful and healing aspect of recovery, don't miss out!

A short five step overview of the amends process is : 1. Recognition, regret, and remorse for past wrongs. 2. Refrain, restrain, refuse, reject, resist, renounce past dysfunctional behaviors and thinking. 3. Resolve, respond, reconcile through performing amends. 4. Restore, repair, renew, recover our relationships with our Higher Power, ourselves, others, and our world. 5. Repeat, reinforce, and rejoice in our recovery and amends regularly.

It can be very difficult to find co-sponsor fellow traveler "study buddies" to meet every week for the weeks or months it may take, but it is more than worth it. Put the word out at meetings over and over or ask safe people until the magic and miracle comes. Some work the steps with a large group, others one on one. Some meet in person, others over the phone or on the internet. There are many step study workbooks to use, also much information on twelve step study in "big books".

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. By finding and loving our inner child, we heal our shattered selves to become whole again and gain the serenity we have prayed for.

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.

And 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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