

The Solution: Becoming Your Own Loving Parent

We began our life as the “True Self”. Growing up in a dysfunctional family environment required we develop survival skills that in turn created a False Self. This False Self was carried into adulthood and perpetuated by an internalized Critical Parent or Inner Critic. We reclaim our True Self by reparenting our Inner Child via our Loving Inner Parent with the help and guidance of our Higher Power.

The “Wonder” or “Divine” child of Jung, the “Natural” child of Bradshaw, and the “Inner Child” or “True Self” of ACA; this child is healthy, confident, spontaneous, creative, sensitive, playful, instinctual, trusting, enthusiastic, vulnerable, magical, zestful, in the moment, and fully alive. The Big Red Book defines the True Self as “The original person, being, or force which we truly are.”

As Adult Children we have survived the often horrendous circumstances in our childhood homes. As children ACAs may have been purposefully neglected; physically, emotionally and sexually abused, beaten, starved, shamed, marginalized, and scapegoated or blamed for the sins of the parents. Even if the parents are not alcoholics or drug users, their own parents may have been, and the generational curse is passed down. Our inner child is buried alive. A False Self comes forward to ensure survival. This False Self expresses the traits in The Laundry List, and is at the core of The Problem.

Although we look like adults on the outside, ACAs are still using the codependent survival tools of wounded children in daily life, not having been given the love and security to be emotionally and psychologically healthy functioning adults. The need to resolve our childhood creates a repetition compulsion; an unconscious recreation of the circumstances in which we grew up, and the patterns of behavior we used to survive.

Our “picker” is broken: we are attracted to relationships and situations that mirror our dysfunctional childhood environment. We may be harmed by or cause harm to the people in our life by perpetuating the negativity, shame, anger, rage, resentment, avoidance, isolation, control, judgment, perfectionism or addictions we experienced growing up. Because we are terrified of abandonment, we may tolerate high levels of victimization or abuse and consider it normal, living in chaos and using denial to remain in a dysfunctional “comfort zone”.

Because we have internalized the negative voices or Critical Parent of our youth, we perpetuate the abuse; believing the voice of our inner critic as it judges us harshly and unfairly; undermining our self-worth and leaving us feeling depressed, incompetent, insignificant, empty and alone. The important thing to remember is this critical voice is not our true self.

Becoming your own Loving Parent is at the core of healing from a neglectful childhood, it is also the gateway to the child within. In fact, the BRB recommends developing the Loving Parent prior to accessing our Inner Child as it may be holding on to intense rage, pain, and suffering and so can fuel addictive and destructive thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In addition to the ACA twelve steps, this is the ACA Solution. By reparenting ourselves with gentleness, humor, love, and respect, we find our child within and true connection to a Higher Power. This is the God who does not abandon. Through The Solution, we understand that we can release our biological parents. We can continue to separate from our family in body and mind. This is an important step for us as we develop our own identity that is different than our dysfunctional family role (from ACA Big Red Book chapter 8).

We learn in program to reparent ourselves with the help of our Higher Power by acknowledging and honoring the feelings of our Inner Child and affirming that we have good qualities. We replace this internalized critic with a Loving Parent, reclaiming our True Self with unconditional love and compassion. Wholeness requires the

acceptance and integration of our character defects or survival traits with our healthy and positive character strengths or attributes, so that we have a balanced personality. Whenever we take inventory of our defects, we must inventory our basic strengths and positive attributes as well. With help from our Higher Power we move out of denial through increased awareness of our early experiences.

One way to access and create dialogue between our Higher Power, Loving Parent and Inner Child is meditation and prayer. Another is writing and journaling. We may use the dominant hand to express the Loving Parent and the non dominant hand to express the Inner Child. We may journal, write letters or poetry back and forth, or simply allow our Inner Child to draw, sing and dance to bring to the surface their energies and experiences. You may find these practices will also enhance your spiritual life and conscious contact with a Higher Power.

We are not alone in this journey. For ACAs, Codependents, and others, safe space for our Inner Child is found in meetings, fellowship, supportive friends and family, sponsorship, outreach calls, 12 step study groups, retreats, and formal therapy. We find the strength and support necessary in ACA to heal our wounds, grieve our lost childhood years, and not remain stuck in the past. We learn to create a safe space to nurture our inner child so we can thrive.

In our new life as a whole and complete person, the False Self is dissolved, the Critical Parent is silenced, the Loving Parent is manifested and becomes a constant guide to encourage and affirm us, negotiate wise and fair choices to set and enforce reasonable and healthy boundaries. The True Child again expresses the wonder, joy, enthusiasm, spontaneity and zest for life that is its birthright. This is *our* homecoming, to that still, peaceful, holy place deep within us that never changes or is lost.

I've included a handout on Erik Erikson's study of cultural impact on personality to help pinpoint places where an adult child develops the survival traits we call The Laundry List. Bradshaw draws on Erikson in his book "Homecoming" listed below. Erikson believed that every human being goes through a certain number of stages to reach his or her full development, and that the negotiation of these stages creates our personality. We think of ourselves as optimistic or pessimistic, independent or dependent, emotional or unemotional, adventurous or cautious, leader or follower, aggressive or passive. Many of these traits are inborn, but other character traits such as feeling competent or incompetent, appear to be learned based on the challenges and support we received growing up. The environment in which a child lives is crucial to providing growth, positive self awareness and a healthy identity. Erikson's list of "Ego Development Outcomes" helps outline the polarization that differentiates the characteristics of a Healthy Adult from an Adult Child.

Resources and further reading:

"BRB" or "Big Red Book": Chapter Eight, The Solution: Becoming Your Own Loving Self Parent

"Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child" by John Bradshaw

Recovery of Your Inner Child" by: Lucia Capacchione

"Healing the Child Within" by: Charles Whitefield

Lars G: Essential Disciplines at www.CowboyDharma.com

Victim Triangle: http://www.lynnforrest.com/html/the_faces_of_victim.html

Source for Erikson is Learning: Place Online <http://www.learningplaceonline.com/stages/organize/Erikson.htm>