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## About the ACA ComLINE

The ACA *ComLine* is published quarterly by Adult Children of Alcoholics® World Service Organization, with one free report of the Annual Business Conference (ABC). The *ComLine* is intended as a communication line from WSO to the fellowship of ACA around the world, and as a forum for the fellowship to share recovery. The *ComLine* slogan is “*Experience, Strength, and Hope.*” The opinions expressed are those of the individuals writing the articles and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the ACA fellowship or WSO.

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# Why We Need to Talk About Predatory Behavior

*by APB Working Group*

This special issue of the *ComLine* focuses on Addressing Predatory Behavior (APB). In *Webster's Dictionary*, the word *predator*, is defined as “one who injures or exploits others for personal gain.”

Newcomers come into the rooms of ACA seeking healing from childhood experiences of being victimized. Some act out this trauma by becoming victimizers themselves. As a result of their childhood dysfunction, perpetrators learn early to detect and take advantage of those who have not yet learned to trust their gut instincts or set healthy boundaries. This is what we are calling predatory behavior in the context of this issue.

A common thread winding through accounts of such experiences seems to be that victims either naively remain silent or are manipulated to do so. In some cases, they are told it is inappropriate to violate the perpetrator's anonymity because of ACA Traditions. Not infrequently, this is supported with claims of fellowship authority, by virtue of longevity or service accomplishments.

Today we are shining a light on predatory behavior in ACA. In 2018, the Addressing Predatory Behavior Working Group was formed and asked for member shares via *The Traveler* and the *ComLine*. The contributions we received include accounts of members being targeted for sex or romance, professional business solicitation, and even 12th Step service.

Tradition 1  
Our common welfare  
should come first.  
Personal recovery  
depends on ACA unity.

Many of us have mistakenly believed that the problem of dealing with such experiences should be resolved at the personal level. However, we are beginning to understand that it is no longer appropriate to ignore or normalize the perpetrator's behavior while blaming or re-victimizing their target. The Traditions teach us it is our joint responsibility to ensure the common welfare of our fellowship and

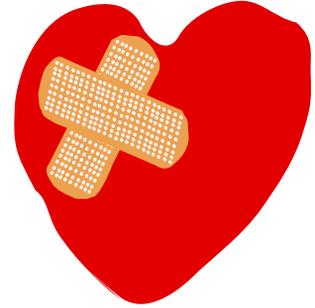
to keep meetings safe and recovery-oriented.

Our primary goal in presenting this focused issue of the *ComLine* is to break the iron-fisted rule of *don't talk – don't trust – don't feel*, and to speak up about what is happening to us. As you will see, the impact of predatory behavior is of universal concern.

We learn in recovery that talking about the problem alone is not enough – there are solutions available to us.

Our secondary goal is therefore to offer suggestions and identify resources that can support both individual members and ACA meetings in this process. On the last few pages of this issue, you

will hopefully find some tools and possible solutions that are helpful to you.



## We Don't Know What Safety Feels Like

by Kadri L.

The idea that there might be a connection between lack of safety and emotional intoxication came to me one night late at work. It brought to mind something I heard in my home group – someone was very upset over what the ACA Yellow Workbook says about safety and emotional sobriety: “people are not emotionally sober when they have unsafe relationships.” (Yellow Workbook, p. G/IX)

According to the ACA Yellow Workbook, “emotional intoxication” is “also known as para-alcoholism – which represents the mannerisms and behaviors we developed living with an alcoholic or dysfunctional parent.”

Emotional intoxication “can be characterized by obsession and unhealthy dependence,” which can be “expressed by compulsion” and “even without drugs and alcohol, we can be

‘drunk’ with fear, excitement, or pain and/or with arguing, gossip, or self-imposed isolation.”

To me, this means that the environment we grew up in – our “dysfunctional household” – was generally unsafe, and we therefore all lack a sense of security. The BRB has several things to say about safety and emotional intoxication. For example, it states that “children raised in troubled families need protection and safety like all children, but they are raised by people who are absent, neglectful, or the cause of stress and pain itself” (BRB, p. xxii) or that “without help, we cannot recognize serenity or true safety” (BRB, p. 16). It also explains why it is so: “as our homes were never consistently safe or settled, we have no true reference point for these states of being” (BRB, pp. 16-17) and “without ACA, we can view emotionally healthy people as boring or confusing” (BRB, p. 17).

Furthermore, the BRB goes on to explain that for adult children “rigid control equates to safety” (BRB, p. 41). The adult child, who has not grown beyond his or her victim or victimizer roles (BRB, p. 349), tries to gain the upper hand and keep the group under his or her control by “checking out” newcomers. Newcomers may bring change into the “safe” atmosphere of the group setting.

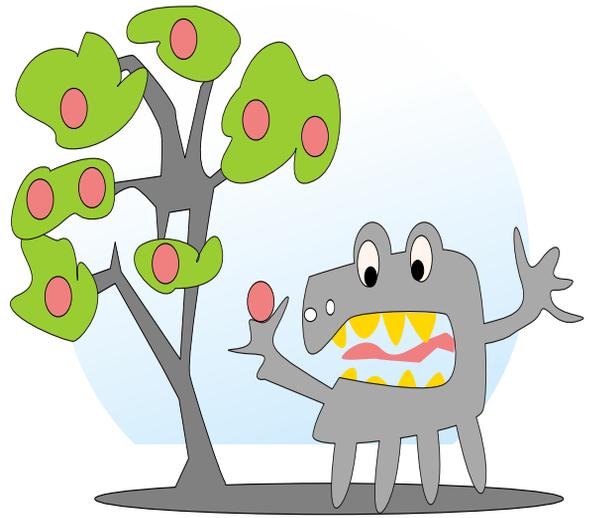
By behaving in such a manner, the “adult child” is recreating, consciously or

### Laundry List Trait 13

Alcoholism is a family disease; and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.

unconsciously, the circumstances of their childhood and is taking on the dysfunctional family role.

ACA meetings should be safe places. Attempts to meet one's own needs by manipulating others are unacceptable. Such behavior violates the safety of the meeting and drives away members. In our childhood home "control meant a sense of safety and predictability." (BRB, p.146) We have had enough of that! In order to develop and heal, as adult children, we seek to move beyond our tendencies to control, because this manner of living forces us to "surrender much of our personality and spirit." (BRB, p. 146)



## Many of Us Experienced Sexual Abuse in Childhood

### I Learned That I Could Not Trust Anyone

by Margaret H.

Many years ago, I found ACA and since have begun an amazing journey to self-discovery as well as new skills to handle issues that arise. Today, I will speak about one, predatory behavior from others against me. One deeply engrained issue from my childhood is physical abuse from my brother, and while my parents knew, they never stopped him. This taught me that I could not trust anyone.

#### Laundry List Trait 5

*We live life from the viewpoint of victims and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.*

When I married, I married someone that was just as abusive. It was normal to me. Standing up to men

“  
After all, I had been told numerous times it was my fault that I was treated this way.  
”

that are pushy or inappropriate has always been a struggle for me.

#### Laundry List Trait 7

*We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.*

I go back to my childhood where I had no voice, where I was at fault for whatever was happening, where I had nowhere to go for help, where I avoided and took responsibility for someone else's actions; after all, I had been told numerous times, it was my fault I was treated that

way. This has been extremely difficult for me because men are stronger in my eyes and can really hurt me. I have to be safe, and that could mean ignore it, flee, or anything else.

## I Was More Concerned with Their Feelings than My Own

by Erin D.

I had been primed in childhood for sexual abuse, having been molested by a family member. This mindset led to being raped at 14, sexually and romantically abused by a school teacher and date raped more often than I find helpful to remember.

I believed my body was not my own but that it belonged to whomever feigned kindness. Shamed with the denial of my family by the mere thought that being pretty is what led to my father's advances, these were my experiences in the 1970's. The basic human need to be loved and appreciated were distorted by a culture whose emphasis glorified "sexy."

Coming into recovery I often felt like it was not okay to be direct with others.

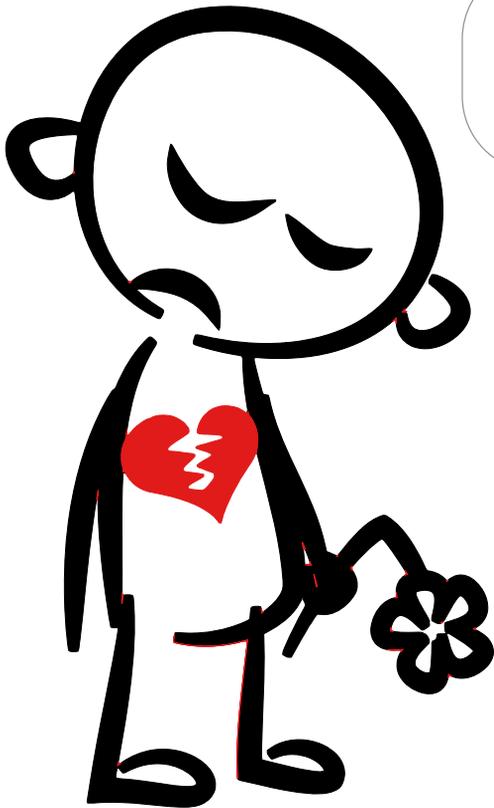
### Laundry List Trait 7

*We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.*

If I confronted something I didn't like in an interaction with someone, I would be making waves or being hurtful. I would be overly concerned with their feelings instead of my own.

I had confused humility with humiliation.

I was told something very helpful that I continue to pass on. People who seek to take advantage of others by continually



“

*I had confused humility with humiliation.*

”

pushing limits are used to being confronted. In fact, they are skilled at deflecting our confrontations.

### I became less critical of myself

How this helped me early on was that it allowed me to be less critical of myself and not feel the need to be nice where it was not warranted. Regardless of how they respond, I can set a boundary.

I am not someone to meet their unfulfilled needs.

## All the Subliminal Sexual Stuff Going on at Home Filled Me with Shame

by Paul Z.

I come from the other side – I was the predator.

I've been in ACA for two years. Recovery, God, and other factors have helped me change immensely.

### The Other Laundry List Trait 5

We live life from the standpoint of a victimizer, and are attracted to people we can manipulate and control in our important relationships.

As we all do, I learned behavior, core beliefs, and coping mechanisms in childhood. I was the baby of the family and by the time I came along my parents were tired. We've all heard the expression "be seen, not heard" – I felt I wasn't supposed to be seen or heard.

My dad was emotionally, verbally and physically abusive towards us all except my youngest sister. I never saw any hint of sexual abuse, but as I got older, I remember my dad would go into my mom's room, 15 minutes later she would come out, slam the door, go into the bathroom and slam that door also. Years later, my oldest sister told me he raped her. My dad never sexually abused me, but he did make me feel uncomfortable.

Elementary school was a safe place for me, considering the abuse going on at home. When I got to middle school though, I lost my sense of safety. I started being bullied. Besides the subliminal sexual stuff going on at home, this is where it really got bad. I wanted to be a normal teenager and date, but my self-esteem was shot. Girls I liked wouldn't want anything to do with me and guys would instigate my ineptitude.

“

*I wanted to be a normal teenager and date, but my self-esteem was shot.*

”

## I Seek ACA's Respite

by Anonymous

I want no threat  
I'm not at my best yet  
Might I owe a debt?



I have needs  
that were not met  
I'm hoping for  
a safety net  
Truly want a re-set  
Tired of the regret  
Looking for  
the sweetness of peace  
Not more upset



I'm much more  
than a silhouette  
My hands shake,  
my palms wet  
Wish I'd known  
you would pursue me  
from the outset  
It's time again for words  
I don't know yet  
Another choice  
might be the best bet  
Just ... exit?



I'm sad now  
and feel ashamed  
Can I get help with it?  
I seek ACA's respite.



# What Happens at Meetings

## Just Being Friendly to a Newcomer?

by Margaret H.

I was fairly new to ACA and after a meeting, a man began waiting around for me to catch me as I walked out. I would delay as long as possible. I did not know how else to handle it. I started parking as close to the door as I could, but at times, parking was so limited that I was not able to. One day, I was leaving when he abruptly comes up to me and says, "Let me walk you to your car." I did not know what to say. I was not given an option. I mumbled: "Okay." I was parked behind the building. He walked alongside me and talked. I froze and just walked until we arrived at my car. I kept my keys positioned just right in my hand, in case I needed to defend myself. I opened my car door and left quickly.

I thought, I will have to quit coming to this group because I did not want to deal with that again. He eventually quit coming and I was able to breathe a sigh of relief.

I realize now that at the time, I didn't know I could ask for help from the group. I did not trust anyone. I also thought I was overreacting. I felt badly, taking it to mean I did something wrong.

### Laundry List Trait 7

*We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.*

I now know that I did nothing wrong. I realize that I can say "No I don't want you to walk me to my car." I can ask someone safe to walk me to my car if a situation like this occurs again and can take this situation to someone in the group.

## I Almost Quit

by Homa T.

As a newcomer, I was approached by a man about 15 years my senior who was indirectly letting me know he was interested in me romantically. I overlooked his behavior and shared at the meeting that I was married, hoping to set a boundary. He continued his flirtations. He would indirectly ask me out, and I continued to set boundaries gently. I finally told him I don't like flirtations, and he can either be a friend or older brother in ACA. He responded, "I can't help myself when I see a pretty woman."

His response disturbed me, I was very stressed to attend the next meeting for fear of having to interact with him. He apologized to me at the meeting,

“*I was disturbed by his refusal to acknowledge the boundary I was setting.*”

but I kept my guard up. This made him angry, so I avoided attending meetings for a couple of months. I became isolated during this time, which almost took me to the brink of quitting ACA. The help of my sponsor and another member encouraged me to go back. I was able to overcome my fear and attend regularly again.

At this time, I contacted the treasurer and secretary of the meeting (a couple in a long-term relationship) and explained my experience.

I requested they read the 13th step policy in the BRB at the beginning of each meeting. But I was ignored because I didn't attend the business meeting to request this and ask for a vote in person.

My efforts to monitor and avoid this person made this meeting an unsafe place for me. I'm grateful for my sponsor who helped me work through every situation, so I can continue working my program.

### Promise 11

*With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors.*

I believe that it is time, if not past due, to face and address the predatory behaviors directly and fellowship-wide.

## I Learned to Set Boundaries

by Trish M.

I'm glad to have read that predatory behavior is being recognized. It's scary for me to go to new meetings, because I realized I was being abused within the program in the early months. A man reached out to me at my first meeting. As time went on and I talked to other women in the program, it became clear some of the things he had said to me were very inappropriate.

It was very hard to deal with, but I put my recovery first and kept coming back. I set boundaries with this man not to communicate with me and he no longer came to that meeting.

### Promise 9

*Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.*

I did see him one other time at a different meeting. It's scary for me to go to new meetings because I fear he may be there. I wish I could tell everyone, but I fear that they may not believe me, or it would be considered gossip. I wished that I knew of these things coming into the program. In closing, I just want to say I'm so glad to know it is becoming a topic for discussion. I hope that others new to the program can benefit from this.

## Our Boundaries Were Repeatedly Ignored

by Margaret H.

I received warnings as well as hearing in our meeting that our phone list was only to be used for ACA related issues and not for anything else.

Tradition 5  
Each group has but one  
primary purpose –  
to carry its message  
to the adult child  
who still suffers

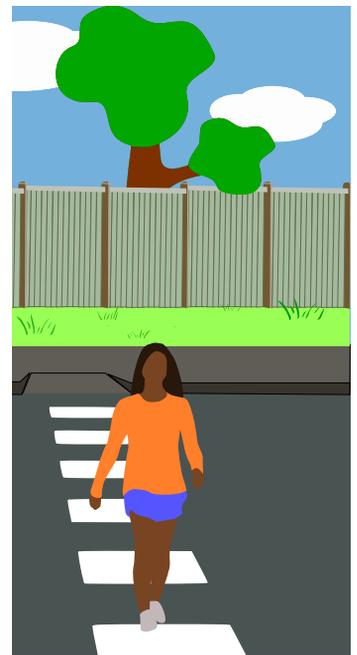
The message was that someone was taking the phone list and calling or texting women. A woman in the group had come to me explaining how a male member tricked her into going to eat under the guise of a fellowship activity including many members. It turned out to be just my friend and this man.

When she was giving him the cold shoulder, he started coming up to me, would get my hand and place it between his. When he was saying hello or saying good bye, he would take my hand. I tried to avoid him, but he would position himself in places where avoiding him was not possible. I felt trapped!

One day, I was having a very difficult time with another predator outside the rooms and I shared about it during the meeting. I was experiencing PTSD. I was shaking, crying, just trying to deal with things and talking to a fellow traveler with my back to the room. I felt someone step behind me, touching my elbow. When I turned, I saw it was him, and before I could do anything, he had my hand again. I froze. My friend recognized what was going on and when he turned to get her hand, as well, she said "no" and shook her head. He seemed

confused and walked away. She did what I did not (yet) have the strength to do.

I have not seen that man again in the meetings, but not long after, he found me on Facebook and sent me a friend request. Of course, I blocked him. I had already said no to his friend request a few months earlier.



## This Isn't a Problem of Just Men Being Perpetrators

by Paul Z.

I found a book called *Emotions Anonymous* and fell in love with it. I couldn't wait to get to my first meeting. I called, and they said the closest meeting was 1½ hours away. I saw an ad for ACA and that has changed my life.

My first meeting I got there early and asked a woman if she wanted me to do anything. She said, "you can pass out these books." Most people would think that's insignificant, but for me it wasn't. Every other group I've gone to were cliquish or would say, "that's okay."

This isn't a problem of just men being perpetrators. When I first started ACA, a woman approached me. I told her I was abusive towards women in the past and didn't want to get into a relationship. She said, "I know you would never hurt

me." It was only our third conversation. My initial thought was, "I'm getting laid tonight...."

Very difficult to say no to, but I did. If I didn't say no, I'd probably be back in trouble, because that's what an unhealthy relationship can do. Through ACA I've learned how to treat women with respect and talk about any issues I'm feeling or dealing with. I still struggle at times but don't act out as severely as I used to.

### Promise 11

With help from our ACA support group,  
we will slowly release  
our dysfunctional behaviors.

I have come so far, and I hope the people who read this and have their own struggles have the courage to talk about it and hope for a better future. I still have hope for even more, and so should you!

## But Wait – It's Not Just Sexual...

### Pushing Products on a Newcomer

by Anonymous

Having under a year in ACA, I'd like to share my experience of less obvious predatory behavior.

A self-described "long-time" member used every opportunity to press her small business products and services on me.

#### Tradition 6

*An ACA group ought never endorse, finance, or lend the ACA name to any related facility or outside enterprise, lest problems of money, property, and prestige divert us from our primary purpose.*

It wasn't immediately obvious to me what was going on. Surely this highly experienced member, doing so much service, so warmly inviting me even to dine at her home, couldn't possibly be out of line.

My responses, such as "I don't pay that kind of money for those items, I just don't have the budget" didn't seem to sink in.

I didn't have the courage to say "please stop selling your products and services to me. It is unwelcome." I dreaded her presence at every meeting.

Being new in 12 Step and ACA, armed only with what I'd learned about 13th stepping from AA literature, all I was able to do was dodge and hope one day it would stop.

#### Meditation on Tradition 6

*Higher Power, grant us the wisdom to know [what] will direct group energy away from carrying the message. Guide us away from discussions that are not ACA. Give us the courage to speak clearly and thoughtfully for what we believe honors Tradition 6.*

I knew ACA was the only practical remaining option for me and my emotional disabilities. True to my Laundry List, I hate confronting authority figures.

This dynamic led me to attend only one meeting a week where I would have to interact with her. I also avoided ACA socials, because she attends them. To make up the deficit,

I turned to a virtual ACA meeting. With great relief, I found safe interaction that way.

I had no ACA resource or ACA language to help me confront this person who talks up a storm about the ACA traditions and had been doing this with other members, as well. They didn't appear to complain.

There was no sexual attraction involved. There was the understandable desperation of a small business owner with financial difficulties, where

some of her services were and still are, procured by members of the group.

I felt I was a captive audience having to dodge sales pitches at every ACA meeting and almost every personal interaction.

The same person will police cross talk, mentioning of 'outside issues' from other fellowships, and other violations of the Traditions... But she doesn't realize that she herself is 13th stepping a brand-new member with her business products and services.

## Pushing 12th Step Service on Newcomers

by *Anonymous*

I dislike being controlled or manipulated and am skeptical of any social, religious or professional group that has 'its own language.' As a child, I lived with controlling and manipulative parents who forced me to adopt their beliefs as my truth. As an adult child, I understand their behavior was rooted in fear and a compulsion to control everything. However, I now find it difficult to trust social groups who insist I expressly speak their language and live life only by their program. I fear anything that I perceive steals my autonomy. When I first came to ACA, I feared this was one of those groups so naturally I was suspicious and unsure if I could remain.

### Laundry List Trait 1

*We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.*

After my first meeting a woman (50-ish) came up to me and introduced herself. She explained she is on her 12th step and it's her turn to give back and would I like if she were my sponsor. I did not trust this woman's motivation because her offer was too quick, like she was pouncing on me.

### Tradition 11

*Our public relations policy is based on attraction rather than promotion; we maintain personal anonymity at the level of press, radio, TV, films, and other public media.*

Because I am naturally given to suspicion, I thought her motivation to help me was somehow not 'program-based' but more about her needs.

As I attended more meetings, I observed her approaching other newcomers as well, she had begun

arranging to meet with us one on one before the meetings, even buying a BRB for one. She used an adjoining room for these meetings and at one point jokingly welcomed one of us into her "office."

I also found it odd that she only interacted with newcomers despite knowing the older members who all were very welcoming.

I noticed a competitiveness with another female ACA member. I observed the Laundry List traits in action and didn't think this woman was in control of her own issues and so could not really help me either.

Meditation on Tradition 7  
Higher Power, we are here to do your will. Help us give for the right reasons and the right amount. Help us remember that we have a different life today because of ACA.

I continued to attend ACA for a year and a half now and eventually learned how The Traditions were discussed once a month by the group to discourage this kind of behavior.

As I remained in the program, I recognize this behavior as giving unsolicited advice, while seemingly helpful is promotion not attraction. As a newcomer we need time to know who we feel comfortable with, to make our own choices without being solicited.

Today our group preamble addresses the use of "exploiting someone's vulnerabilities for the purpose of gratifying one's own psychological needs."

# Gentleness Break

## Hug Etiquette – It Is Okay to Have Boundaries

by Doug P.



It's customary in many twelve step programs to give and receive hugs. Hugs can be a manifestation of the healthy love we have for each other within the fellowship. They may also be unwelcome or a transition into physical predatory behavior.

Therefore, we in ACA believe it's important to have a sense of etiquette around them. The following guidelines may help.

“

It's very much okay for the other person to say 'No'.

”

### Agreement and Consent

First and foremost, there must be an agreement and consent to hug. Usually, one person may ask the other something like “Would you care for a hug?” It's very much okay for the other

person to say “No” at this point, and essential if someone does not want to receive a hug.

### Non-verbal Requests

If you know someone well enough, outstretched arms may constitute a non-verbal request for a hug, it's important to get the other person's consent in each instance; just because someone consented before doesn't mean they're always in the mood for a hug.

### Intensity Matters

If the other person stretches their arms definitively, then it's probably safe to assume it's okay but a verbal confirmation is not a bad idea.

And here's where a lot of people may mess things up: the duration of the hug. Intensity matters. Since one person may want “more of a hug” than the other, it's important for the person who wants the hug to stop to let the other person know.

Usually, a simple “thank you” is sufficient for someone to understand: it means “stop, now, immediately.”

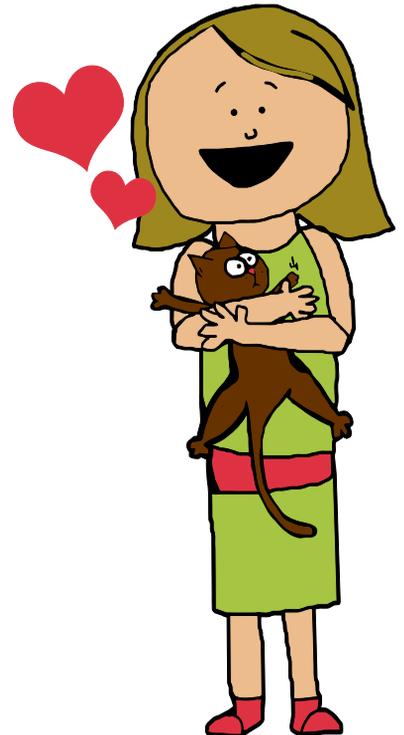
### Just What is a Hug?

A hug is just that; embracing around the shoulder area and nowhere else!

In ACA, we want meetings to be as safe a place as possible for people to work on their recovery, so please discuss these protocols with your group.

What it boils down to is that everyone has respect for each other, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

“  
What it boils down to is that everyone has respect for each other, physically, mentally, and spiritually.  
”



# How The Meeting Can Help – And Does It?

## I Will Not Be Returning to ACA

by Shelley S.

I read the ACA *ComLine*, regarding Predatory Behavior. Understanding that ACA takes the safety of meetings seriously, I talked to my sponsor and printed off the article, in hopes of addressing the group.

The member who was aware of the perpetrator and my experience told me that stalking and sexual assault doesn't break The Traditions. That it wasn't the group's responsibility to hold a safe space, it was up to me to be safe within the group, that I needed to become more empowered.

I was told to go to women's meetings and, repeatedly, to talk to my sponsor – an all too familiar shift of responsibility from the predator to the victim.

I was told that the ACA *ComLine* article I presented wasn't ACA literature, nor was the existence of the Intergroup in the USA that was providing solutions, nor the APB Working Group itself.

The member said I should "take it to Intergroup." I pointed out that things initially come from the groups and a group conscience would have to establish the parameters for safety in the meeting.

I asked if I could attend the next group conscience or business meeting so I could

The Other Laundry List  
Trait 7

We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.

bring my concern to the group but was informed they don't have them, that members call them as they see fit.

By this point I was re-traumatized, not finding the support I assumed was there. I'm proud I managed to state my points clearly, stand my ground and keep the focus on the issue I hoped to bring to the group, though it was not allowed.

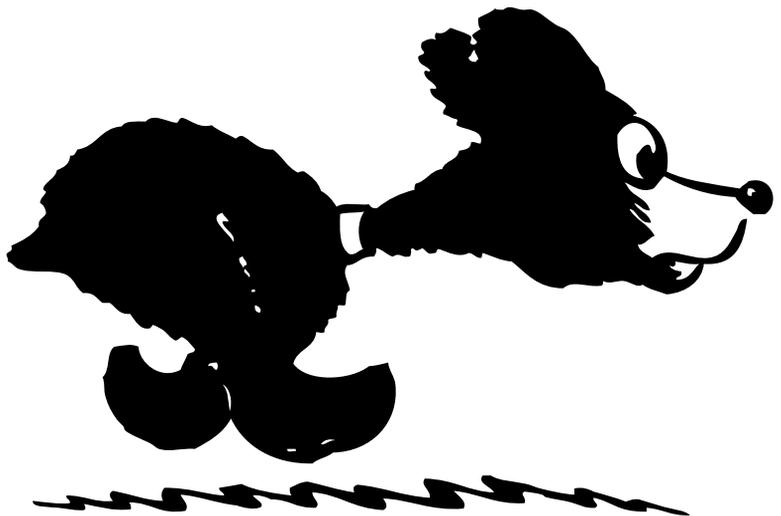
It was alarming that rather than address and pre-empt the behavior with boundaries, the onus was on the victim to do something about it.

## ACA literature speaks to me

ACA literature speaks to me like no other I've read. In my ongoing recovery from trauma, ACA seemed the perfect place for me to work a spiritual solution alongside therapy. Because of this experience, I will not be returning to ACA.

## Tradition 9 Meditation

*Higher Power. May I remember that ACA and its meeting and service structure are different than my family of origin. May I be patient and avoid reaching for the easiest way out when I am confronted with a difficult situation. Help me and my ACA group ask for help in keeping our meetings safe and recovery-oriented. Also help us celebrate the things that we do right.*



## My Group Has Struggled Accepting That There Is a Problem

by Margaret H.

The meeting has to recognize that Predatory Behavior is an issue in the group, and we need to have knowledge on the subject to keep the rooms safe. If meetings do not want to deal with this, what will happen to the people feeling victimized by this behavior? Will they quit?

### Meditation on Tradition 1

*Higher Power, we are your trusted servants seeking to support our ACA group and its primary purpose. Please remind us that the life of our program and our own recovery depends upon our willingness to put the group's welfare above our own will. Help us recognize unity!*

I know a few people, who are no longer coming to meetings and that their phone numbers were being used by the "hand-holding" predator.

My group has struggled accepting that there is a problem.



- "Why can't you ignore it?" I replied: "The whole reason I am in ACA is to not ignore these behaviors."
- "Why are we going to ruin a person's life by calling them a predator? Then they will be on the sex offender list." Reply: "This is not a sex offenders list; this is keeping the room safe."
- "We have a safe group, so why bring this topic into the room and make people feel uncomfortable?" Reply: "It is not safe for all of us."
- "This has not happened to me, I do not think it is something that is happening."

No changes have been made yet in this group.

### Meditation on Tradition 2

*Higher Power, I understand that your make your voice heard in a group conscience. I ask you to remind me that the life of my program and therefore, my own recovery depends upon my willingness to put the group's welfare above my own will. Where I disagree with the common view of my fellows in service, allow me to state my case honestly and respectfully. Allow me to listen to and consider the views of others. May I state my view and support all group decisions, including the ones I might disagree with. Your will, not mine, be done.*

Those of us who believe there is a problem will continue to push for the changes that are necessary to make our room safe and keep attendees coming.

Tradition 4 Each group is autonomous except in matters affecting other groups or ACA as a whole. We cooperate with all other Twelve-Step programs.

### Tradition 2

*For our group purpose there is but one ultimate authority – a loving God as expressed in our group conscience. Our leaders are but trusted servants, they do not govern.*

I provided information to make them aware of this issue. We added Predatory Behavior to our agenda for our business meeting. I presented safety statements from other groups, suggesting that we could add something like this to our preamble. We have been discussing this issue for months now. The comments were as follows:

- "This does not happen in our group, so we don't need to worry about it." Two of us answered them by saying, "Yes, it does happen. It's happened to us."

## “LION Over There!”

by Clint A.

Many of us come into this program needy, sexually abused and confused – so much so, that things like healthy connection, or being appreciated can be interpreted as an opening for sexuality. While I’m speaking for males here, it may cross all genders.

I was in program fairly solid for five years and still “chasing” women with a year or less to “help” them. I had to learn that everyone has to be their own loving parent. It was challenging for me to grow out of this impulse to save the newcomer. It’s co-dependence, an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and one could say, predatorial in nature. It felt like an addiction!

The use of the phone list for ACA purposes, as part of our preamble, gave me a very clear message; no calling for anything other than recovery! If there was anything in

my mind saying, “I’ll call for recovery” as an excuse to see if she’s interested, I wouldn’t call.

### **We know It When We See It, But What Do We Do About It?**

In my home group, men who were not regular members were singling out newcomer women to talk to after the meeting. A temporary sponsee had one of these men approach her and engage in sex while in her second week in ACA. This happened at a different meeting, but I was forever on the lookout for someone with his first name. When he did show up at my meeting on two occasions, he did the same “talk to female newcomer” thing after the meeting. This was frustrating, because I know what I’d heard about him from a fellow traveler, but what are we supposed to do when we have inside information like this?

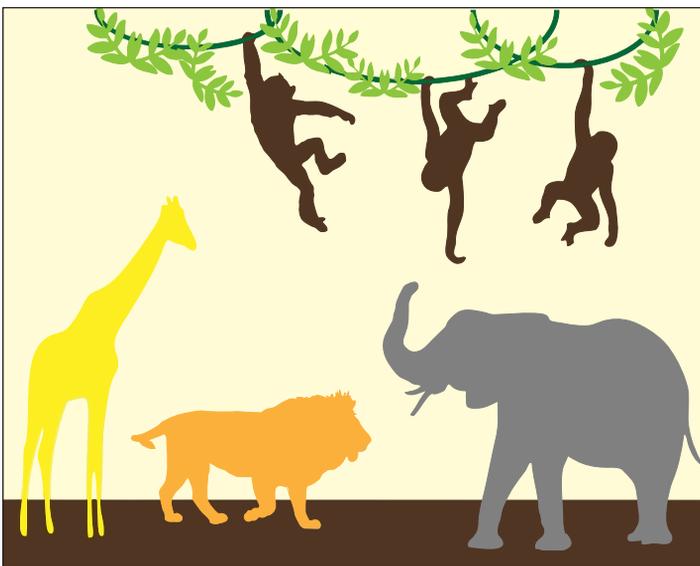
Promise 9  
Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.

Using the predator in the wild analogy, the flock is always on the lookout for the lion in the grass. Once the lion is spotted, the entire group is warned for protection: “LION over there!” Not naming names turns into people whispering, slithering away in fear and nobody saying, “Get that Lion out of here!” Hence, leaving the remaining flock vulnerable.

### **When is it appropriate for other members to step in?**

There are borderline instances of violating a boundary that are not brazen enough for other members to step in. If we step in for every single thing it would be so uncomfortable for everyone, and I believe these are opportunities for the person who feels hurt to practice drawing a boundary in a safe place. However, when this happens to newcomers, they have no idea what the protocol is.

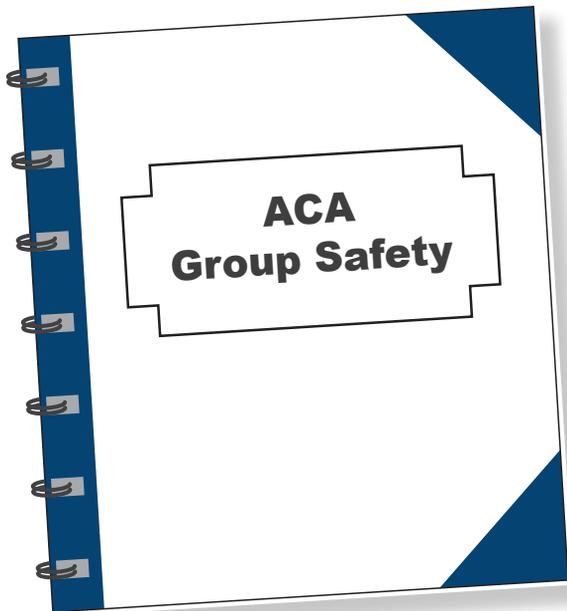
Since I’ve been attending meetings, we have only had to ban one person. In another case, we had to create an elaborate set of rules; these were so elaborate he left, and now we are stuck with rules none of us can follow!



## I Feel Better Equipped Now

by *Anonymous*

My home group has several newcomers weekly. We adopted (through a GC vote) a resource folio that is labeled “ACA Group Safety.” This is kept on the Literature table available to any interested person. Each section reads: Take one.



It's a folio with printouts of information found on the website or published by ACA, some by the APB group. We set up this folio so that we could have easy access to cite a quick point that could be used in the group, rather than trying to make a point in a reactive state, fumbling through the large BRB. Much easier to be an actor than a reactor. Just sharing with the group that the resource is there may act as a soft deterrent. I mention it's there from time to time during my share or in a business meeting. I feel better equipped now to address interpersonal issues that I see or experience that occur just before the meeting, during the meeting and just after the meeting. I can't change people, but I can change my response.

*Note by the APB working group: We reached out to the author of this share to request a copy of the content maintained in the folio described here. The author has agreed, and the resources presented in the folio are now available to all on the APB page <https://aca.wso.org/2019/02/24/group-safety-folio-from-costa-mesa-group-ca-837/>.*

## Outlook

by *the APB Working Group*

These shares speak for themselves. More members who are experiencing predatory behaviors at and around their ACA meetings are beginning to find the courage to speak up about them. At the same time, ACA meetings are beginning to understand that they have both the authority and the responsibility to address these

behaviors at the group conscience level.

We are grateful to hear the Experience, Strength, and Hope members have shared with us in this issue of the *ComLine*. When the APB Working Group reviewed these shares, we noticed that certain Traits of the Laundry List (LL) as well as the Other Laundry List (OLL) play out in

synchrony in any circumstance of predatory behavior, keeping both the victim the perpetrator stuck in a dance of continued dysfunction.

**1. (LL)** *We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.*

**1. (OLL)** *To cover our fear of people and our dread of isolation we tragically become the very authority figures who*

*frighten others and cause them to withdraw.*

**5. (LL)** *We live life from the viewpoint of victims and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.*

**5. (OLL)** *We live life from the standpoint of a victimizer and are attracted to people we can manipulate and control in our important relationships.*

**7. (LL)** *We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.*

**7. (OLL)** *We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.*

When we are acting out the Laundry List Traits, our personal recovery is compromised. When this is not openly addressed at the group conscience level of our meeting, we risk recreating the secrecy of our dysfunctional families in ACA meetings, further compromising recovery. As we become more aware of this dynamic, we can break the silence and turn our focus back onto our recovery as Tradition 5 suggests!

The ACA Solution promises us that “as ACA becomes a safe place for you, you will

#### Tradition 5

Each group has but one primary purpose, to carry its message to the adult child who still suffers.



find freedom to express all the hurts and fears you have kept inside and to free yourself from the shame and blame that are carryovers from the past.” To bring this promise to life, we must openly address uncomfortable issues that have the power to distract us, to retraumatize us, or even to scare us away.

The APB working group maintains a page about **Addressing Predatory Behavior** on the ACA World Service website (<https://acawso.org/category/apb/>) where we present resources as they are developed. One such resource was recently developed by the National Capital Area ACA Intergroup. It provides guidelines that both mem-

bers and meetings can use for **Addressing Inappropriate Behaviors** (<https://acawso.org/2018/07/27/addressing-inappropriate-behaviors/>).

Another helpful resource is our collection of **Examples of Group Safety Statements** already adopted by various ACA meetings (<https://acawso.org/2018/11/12/examples-of-group-safety-statements/>).

We suggest you visit these pages and see if something resonates with you. As we say in our meetings, take what you like and leave the rest! And if you have any further questions or comments about this topic, please e-mail us at [apb@acawso.org](mailto:apb@acawso.org).



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