

## Study Group Guide: Working Through *The Loving Parent Guidebook*

If you'd like to meet with other adult children to work through *The Loving Parent Guidebook*, consider forming or joining a small study group. Using this guide is essential for group safety and personal support. Please take what you like and leave the rest.

*The Loving Parent Guidebook* subcommittee recommends prospective study group members read this document together, as well as:

- Review and discuss the guidebook Preface, especially “When to Begin *The Loving Parent Guidebook*” and “Finding Your Own Pace.”
- Discuss how much Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Family program experience the group would like members to have. It's recommended that all participants will have attended at least six consecutive ACA meetings and have begun to develop an ACA support network. Other guidelines groups might consider include but aren't limited to any of the following:
  - A minimum of three months or some other mutually agreed upon length of weekly ACA meeting attendance.
  - Having worked through the *Twelve Steps of Adult Children Steps Workbook*.
  - Having worked up to and through Step 5 with a fellow traveler (sponsor, co-sponsor, or study group).
- Review and Discuss *Appendix A: Doubts, Misgivings, and False Loyalty*. Prospective members might find it helpful to review Chapters 4, 10, and 13 independently to help them prepare for study group attendance. These stand-alone chapters help members build skills that support participation in groups.

These recommendations can provide a shared understanding of guidelines and commitments, supporting group safety and creating more clarity from the beginning.

### What Is a Study Group?

Study groups can be small to mid sized groups that meet on a regular basis to work through *ACA literature*. Like regular ACA meetings, the groups follow ACA principles and The Twelve Traditions. However, they are not usually registered on the ACA World Services Organization website where they would be open to the general public. Instead, these groups might choose to close to new members after the first several meetings to support emotional safety and build trust. Study groups are considered a supplement, and not a replacement, for regular ACA meeting attendance.

Members typically agree to set aside an hour or more each week of their own time to journal on reflections, exercises, and worksheets found in the guidebook.

Some groups use timed shares for reflection questions and exercises. Others keep membership small to allow for more sharing time and don't time shares.

### Practicing Reparenting Principles in Study Groups

Study groups give us an opportunity to practice healthier ways of being and release outdated coping behaviors. Whenever possible, it can be helpful to have an ACA network



outside the group to support you for reparenting purposes, as well as to discuss issues and feelings that arise. It's important to keep each study group a safe place to practice these new ways of being.

The Big Red Book states that the traits we developed to cope with dysfunction in childhood “cause us to recreate our family of origin in our adult relationships.” This can occur anywhere, and study groups are no exception. Working with ACA literature can bring up buried memories and triggers. We might find ourselves or others playing out a familiar family role or responding from our wounded inner child, inner teenager, or inner critical parent. While these patterns can be challenging to navigate, we can learn to work through them in healthy ways. Group members can review *Appendix G: Working with Reparenting Challenges* and read any relevant sections together when needed.

Practicing the reparenting check-in at the beginning of each group can strengthen our ability to tend to the wounded parts of ourselves that get triggered. Study groups can also be a great practice ground for setting and maintaining internal and external boundaries. We are all adult children whose childhood needs were not consistently met. We can invite our loving parent into the driver's seat and support our inner children not to take a group member's behavior personally. For support in setting healthy boundaries, refer to *Chapter 13: Setting Internal Boundaries: An Expression of Unconditional Love*.

We might be in different places in our recovery. We can practice living into our inner loving parent by allowing everyone to be where they are in any given moment. Some of us might have more experience addressing conflict in healthy ways, and some of us might be new to learning those skills. Some of us might have the outside support of a therapist, fellow traveler (sponsor, cosponsor or others in our ACA support network), and others might not. The guidance and exercises in *The Loving Parent Guidebook* help us live into our inner loving parent.

When issues arise, members are encouraged to address them together openly, honestly, and directly, in the spirit of the group's safety guidelines, adhering to ACA Twelve Traditions and using gentleness, humor, love, and respect.

### **Setting Up a Study Group**

Formats for study groups can vary widely and can be held in person, by telephone, or online. The use of a script is strongly recommended to provide structure and create safety for the group. You'll find a sample study group meeting script in Appendix I. New materials are also periodically added to the [LPG Bonus Resources page](#).

Members can take turns to facilitate (or co-facilitate) each meeting, just as a chair does in a regular ACA meeting. Group members can facilitate for a set period, a set number of chapters, or volunteer at the start of each group meeting. Facilitating can mean reading from a script, keeping track of where the group left off, and closing the meeting on time. Group members can also share these tasks, if preferred.

### **Duration**

We estimate it will take 12 to 15 months to complete *The Loving Parent Guidebook*, if the group meets weekly for 60-90 minutes. However, some groups may take two or more years.



Discussing time commitments up front can help clarify individual needs and intentions as the group forms.

Groups might consider approaching the guidebook in phases to allow people to join who can commit for different lengths of time. For example, groups might form with the intention of working through Part 1, which might take 10 to 15 weeks to complete. At the end of Part 1, some group members might choose to leave the group, and others might continue together.

Because we are learning to become our own loving parents, it is helpful to approach working through the guidebook in a caring and gentle way. The guidebook suggests doing this by supporting one's challenge zone,<sup>1</sup> which includes adopting a gentle pace and taking breaks as needed. Respecting the pace of our inner family members, as well as the inner family members of others, creates safety; the pace will vary for each of us. Members can review *Appendix G: Working with Reparenting Challenges* for support when needed.

### ***Group Size***

Group members determine together what size group will work best. Most groups range from 4 to 12 members. Newly formed study groups sometimes stay open for the first few weeks, allowing more members to join before they mutually agree when to close. It is not unusual for the group size to decrease over time.

### ***Location and Time***

Study groups identify a consistent time and safe location to meet each week. Meeting locations include but aren't limited to nonprofit centers with private meeting spaces such as hospitals, places of worship, 12-Step clubhouses, and online or by telephone.

### ***Leaving a Study Group***

Working in a group might not fit all adult children, or we might begin to feel uncomfortable in a particular group. We might not have enough recovery to know how to set healthy boundaries or have a voice yet. Wanting to leave a group yet not being able to speak up about it can be a painful experience. If we leave without saying anything, we can experience shame. It can be helpful to speak with an experienced ACA member with whom we feel comfortable about any group conflict or lack of safety that arises while upholding anonymity. They can offer perspective and share their experience, strength, and hope, increasing the chance we'll respond to the situation as an actor, rather than reacting to the situation.

Consider talking about any lack of safety or group conflict within the group. Suppose you don't feel comfortable doing so. In that case, it is okay to say something, such as "I need to take care of my inner family at this time and leave the group," or "For reasons I don't wish to discuss, I no longer feel comfortable and need to leave the group."

### ***Unique Suggestions for LPG Study Groups***

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<sup>1</sup> For more on supporting your challenge zone, see *Preface: Finding Your Own Pace* and *Chapter 4: Navigating Our Challenge Zone with Mindfulness of the guidebook*.



Ways to begin each group meeting include:

- With this reminder: “Reparenting can be emotionally triggering. It is your choice to do the exercises, worksheets, reflections, and guided practices or not and engage at whatever level is comfortable for you. Please take care of yourself whenever you need to, which might mean moving your attention elsewhere (sounds or sights) if you feel overwhelmed or begin to shut down. *See Appendix G: Working with Reparenting Challenges* for more suggestions to support you to be in your challenge zone.”
- A short, silent, guided reparenting check-in (1 to 3 minutes) to help each member bring their attention to the present moment and connect with their inner children. *See Appendix I: Sample Meeting Scripts* for a sample script that includes the reparenting check-in.
- Brief sharing in response to a question such as, “When did you remember to reparent since we last met, or when would reparenting have been helpful?”

For guided practices, it’s recommended that groups review *Appendix B: Guided Practice Preparation* ahead of doing their first guided practice together. Groups might consider:

- Having a group member record the script ahead of time and play it back during group so all can take part. At the end, members answer the guidebook reflections in silence and then share their answers. One member could also read the script during group.
- Having each member do the guided practice and answer questions by themselves and then share their answers during group.

A possible way to close each group meeting could include sharing a reparenting intention for the coming week.

### **Supporting Group Safety**

New study groups are encouraged to discuss and agree to safety guidelines and boundaries. Upholding agreements is not something all of us witnessed in our dysfunctional homes, so learning to do so can be an immense support for our recovery and healing. The goal is not to create rigid rules but to put guidelines in place that help build trust.

Keeping the focus on oneself while having empathy and acceptance for others can go a long way toward creating safety without needing many guidelines. For example, when we get triggered, we can take responsibility for our triggers and tend to our feelings rather than blame another group member. *Chapter 10: Feeling Is Healing* has guidance on this issue.

Each group decides what specific guidelines to use. The following sample guidelines can help study groups run smoothly with care and safety for all. Consider revisiting and modifying guidelines over time. Some groups read their guidelines before each group, others at the first few meetings, and then as needed.

- Please arrive on time to be considerate of other group members. Regular attendance



is recommended. Please let at least one other member know if you will not be attending a meeting.

- Please do not attend group under the influence of recreational drugs or alcohol.
- Please turn off and put away electronic devices.
- Please be mindful of allowing all members equal opportunities to share and equal sharing times (using a timer supports this guideline).
- Please respect everyone’s freedom to pass and to share at the level of vulnerability that feels comfortable to them.
- Please do not interrupt other members during their sharing time.
- Please use the words “I, me, and my” vs. “you, us, we,” to share from personal experience and refrain from offering advice.
- When sharing concerns, please speak from the I-position—identify the behavior and how it impacts you, rather than focusing on what you think another person’s intentions are, what you think they’re doing, or what you think is happening for them.
- Please do not cross talk, which means interrupting, referring to, commenting on, praising, comparing, or criticizing, anyone else’s share. Cross talk also includes having side conversations (including sending a chat during an online meeting). Attentively listening to others as they face their pain can often be the greatest support of all. Cross talk might sound like, “To go off of what Pat said,” or “I’m sure Kiran did what they thought they had to, but I could never stop contact with my family,” or “Blake’s share was really beautiful.”
- Please respect the privacy of those who share. What is communicated in the study group stays in the group. It is not for gossip, or public disclosure.
- Please avoid indirect communication (speaking to a group member about a conflict you have with another group member), which can weaken group unity. Consider getting support outside the group while upholding anonymity. Getting support from a neutral source before trying to resolving it with the group/group member can support healthy communication.
- We share responsibility for meeting safety—each of us is free to speak up when a situation doesn’t seem respectful or supportive.
- We take a group conscience for decisions affecting the group. The Twelve Traditions guide us in resolving group issues.

Some of the information in the Big Red Book, page 584, Safety in Meetings, offers ideas on addressing group conflicts that can apply to study groups.

*The Loving Parent Guidebook* is under fellowship review, with a goal of eventual conference approval. We welcome your feedback on using this guide and will be revising it as part of the fellowship review process. Please submit suggestions by using the [Fellowship Review feedback form](#).

