

“The concept of Adult Child came from the Alateens who began the Hope for Adult Children of Alcoholics meeting. The original members of our fellowship, who were over eighteen years old, were adults; but as children they grew up in alcoholic homes.

Adult Child also means that when confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood.”

ACA History – an interview with Tony A., 1992

Adult Children of Alcoholics uses the words of fellowship co-founder Tony A. as a foundation to define the Adult Child personality. An Adult Child is someone who responds to adult situations with self-doubt, self-blame, or a sense of being wrong or inferior, all learned from stages of childhood. Without help, we unknowingly operate with ineffective thoughts and judgments as adults. The regression can be subtle, but it is there, sabotaging our decisions and relationships.

The following questions can help you decide if alcoholism or other family dysfunction existed in your family. If your parents did not drink, your grandparents may have drank and passed on the disease of family dysfunction to your parents. If alcohol or drugs were not a problem, your home may have been chaotic, unsafe, and lacking nurture like many alcoholic homes.

These 25 questions offer an insight into some ways children are affected by growing up with a problem drinker even years after leaving the home. The questions also apply to adults growing up in homes where food, sex, workaholism, or ultra-religious abuse occurred. Many foster children – who are now adults – also relate to these questions.

- 1. Do you recall anyone drinking or taking drugs or being involved in some other behavior that you now believe could be dysfunctional?**
- 2. Did you avoid bringing friends to your home because of drinking or some other dysfunctional behavior in the home?**
- 3. Did one of your parents make excuses for the other parent’s drinking or other behaviors?**
- 4. Did your parents focus on each other so much that they seemed to ignore you?**
- 5. Did your parents or relatives argue constantly?**
- 6. Were you drawn into arguments or disagreements and asked to choose sides with one relative against another?**
- 7. Did you try to protect your brothers or sisters against drinking or other behavior in the family?**
- 8. As an adult, do you feel immature? Do you feel like you are a child inside?**
- 9. As an adult, do you believe you are treated like a child when you interact with your parents? Are you continuing to live out a childhood role with the parents?**
- 10. Do you believe that it is your responsibility to take care of your parents’ feelings or worries? Do other relatives look to you to solve their problems?**
- 11. Do you fear authority figures and angry people?**
- 12. Do you constantly seek approval or praise but have difficulty accepting a compliment when one comes your way?**
- 13. Do you see most forms of criticism as a personal attack?**
- 14. Do you over-commit yourself and then feel angry when others do not appreciate what you do?**
- 15. Do you think you are responsible for the way another person feels or behaves?**
- 16. Do you have difficulty identifying feelings?**
- 17. Do you focus outside yourself for love or security?**
- 18. Do you involve yourself in the problems of others? Do you feel more alive when there is a crisis?**
- 19. Do you equate sex with intimacy?**
- 20. Do you confuse love and pity?**
- 21. Have you found yourself in a relationship with a compulsive or dangerous person and wonder how you got there?**
- 22. Do you judge yourself without mercy and guess at what is normal?**
- 23. Do you behave one way in public and another way at home?**
- 24. Do you think your parents had a problem with drinking or taking drugs?**
- 25. Do you think you were affected by the drinking or other dysfunctional behavior of your parents or family?**

(Questions from the ACA Fellowship Text, pp. 18-20)

If you answered “yes” to three or more of these questions, you may be suffering from the effects of growing up in an alcoholic or other dysfunctional family. We welcome you to attend an ACA meeting in your area to learn more.

Adult Children of Alcoholics is an anonymous Twelve Step and Twelve Tradition fellowship. Our meetings offer a safe environment for adult children to share their common experiences. By attending meetings regularly and by sharing about our lives, we gradually change our thinking and behavior. By working the ACA program, we find another way to live.

You can find a worldwide list of ACA meetings, including telephone and online meetings at:

www.adultchildren.org

THE LAUNDRY LIST

1. We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2. We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3. We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4. We either become alcoholics, marry them or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life from the viewpoint of victims, and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6. We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, and it is easier for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves; this enables us not to look too closely at our own faults, etc.
7. We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to “love” people we can “pity” and “rescue.”
10. We have “stuffed” our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (Denial).
11. We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12. We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings, which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of that disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

Tony A., 1978



In addition to alcoholic and addicted families, there are at least five other family types that can produce Adult Children:

- **Homes with mental illness in the parent(s).**
- **Homes with hypochondriac parent(s).**
- **Homes with ritualistic beliefs, harsh punishment, and extreme secretiveness, often with ultra-religious, militaristic, or sadistic overtones. Some of these homes expose children to battery and other forms of criminal abuse.**
- **Homes with covert or actual sexual abuse, including incest and inappropriate touching or dress by the parent(s).**
- **Perfectionistic, shaming homes in which expectations are often too high and praise is typically tied to an accomplishment rather than given freely.**

25 Questions: Am I an Adult Child?



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Dysfunctional Families

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