

Appendix C

12 STEP WORKGROUPS

Introduction to ACA Workgroups

In ACA, we embrace various approaches to doing deeper recovery work with others in the program. Whether our focus is the 12 Steps, reparenting work in the Loving Parent Guidebook, or exploring and healing our adaptive childhood traits in the Laundry Lists Workbook, ACA recognizes that different approaches work well for different people at different times. Historically, in most 12 Step programs, people do concentrated recovery work one-on-one (traditionally using a sponsor/sponsee model). In ACA, adult children have explored alternative approaches to doing intensive recovery work, including being part of small, private workgroups, both in-person and online.

Doing one-on-one work can be challenging for some adult children. Growing up in our dysfunctional home environments, we learned not to talk or feel ... and we learned not to trust. In the absence of trust, many adult children developed a fear of authority in childhood (Traits 1 & 3), a desire to seek approval from those in authority (Trait 2), or reflexive reactions to fight against authority (Other Traits). Some of us tried to protect ourselves by using the power of authority and control against others (Other Traits). Therefore, some adult children can struggle with asking for, receiving, and offering support through one-on-one recovery relationships. ACA workgroups can sometimes help mitigate these dynamics.

However, workgroups can present challenges, too. Laundry Lists Traits behaviors can still arise, and members can trigger one another. While recovery requires us to stretch to try new things and work with discomfort, we need a basic sense of safety to recover. We might realize that a particular group isn't a match or that group work isn't a good fit for us at the time. It's OK to leave groups that don't work for us and find ones that do. Finding a workgroup that fits is a process and can take time.

The workgroup model can be a particularly powerful healing format for adult children. Our original wounding occurred within a dysfunctional family, so it makes sense that we might find profound healing in a small workgroup with members of our ACA family. Communal attunement and consistent connection from a group of trusted others can be transformative in our recovery process. ACA workgroups can provide what the Big Red Book calls "indirect sponsorship," and gradually, we might come to trust and rely on the group conscience for support and guidance. In time, members of our workgroup can form the foundation for our recovery support network ... each a vital source of individual experience, strength, and hope.



Appendix C

12 STEP WORKGROUPS [continued]

Creating / Joining ACA Workgroups

Duration: The ACA workgroup model usually involves working through an entire workbook as a group (12 Steps, Loving Parent Guidebook, Laundry Lists Traits, A New Hope, etc.). This format allows each participant to address all written text, questions, and exercises contained within. Completing a workbook can take anywhere from several months to over a year, depending on the pace. Most groups meet weekly for between one and two hours. Discussing time commitments up-front can help clarify individual needs and intentions as the workgroup is forming. These issues may need to be re-addressed as the group progresses and finds its own pace.

Group Size: Workgroup sizes usually range from between four and twelve members. Participants determine together what size group will work best. Newly forming workgroups sometimes stay open for the first few weeks, allowing new members to join. At some mutually agreed-upon point, the workgroup “closes” to new members. It is not uncommon for some participants to discontinue attending the group for various reasons, decreasing the workgroup size over time.

Location: The group must identify a safe and consistent place to meet each week. Usually, in-person workgroups meet in the home of one of the participants. Alternative locations might include non-profit centers with private meeting spaces such as hospitals, places of worship, or 12 Step clubhouses. Online workgroups will need to identify a platform (such as Zoom, Facebook, Teams, Hangouts, Skype, etc.) and who will have access to and be responsible for starting and hosting meetings. It’s important to develop contingencies if the person hosting the meeting (either in-person or online) can’t make it or doesn’t show.

Format: The process of going through any of the ACA workbooks will involve reading, writing, sharing, and witnessing. Groups may choose to *read* through the large text sections in the workbook together, taking turns and pausing for discussion. Or workgroups may agree to read sections ahead of time on their own and come prepared to discuss. *Writing* can involve answering questions or doing other types of written exercises. It is suggested that participants do the written sections ahead of time on their own. However, most workgroups don’t require anyone to do this type of “homework.” Most groups read sequentially through all questions together, allowing each participant to *share* their responses or pass. Finally, *witnessing* is one of the most important parts of the ACA workgroup healing process. Participants quietly and attentively listen as each member courageously breaks the old rules of family dysfunction: Don’t talk—Don’t trust—Don’t feel.

Safety Guidelines: New workgroups are encouraged to create safety agreements. Some groups write out guidelines; others do not. Topics may include time/duration



Appendix C

12 STEP WORKGROUPS [continued]

commitments to the group, attendance & missing meetings, phone/electronics use, alcohol/drug/food use, crosstalk & fixing, sharing time limits, confidentiality, etc. Safety guidelines can be revisited and adjusted if group member needs change.

Experience & “Expertise”: Having one or more people in a workgroup with previous ACA workgroup experience can be beneficial. However, including a “veteran” participant isn’t always possible, nor is having a more experienced member required (nor sometimes even desired). Anyone in ACA can start a workgroup. There are no workgroup “experts” or “authorities” in ACA.

Questions, Conflict & Authority: ACA workgroups can help ease authority-related Laundry Lists Traits effects for some people. Still, authority issues in group work, just like in one-on-one work, can and do surface. Some adult children seek to make others an authority who will “give them all the answers.” Others reflexively react with hostility if they feel someone is telling them what to do. Some adult children protect themselves by trying to assert control in authoritative ways. When questions and conflicts arise, participants are encouraged to address them together openly, honestly, and directly. Resolving conflict in the spirit of the workgroup’s safety guidelines, adhering to ACA Traditions, and with as much gentleness, patience, love, and respect as possible can be healing and empowering. To support group safety, participants are encouraged to ask ACA fellow travelers outside the workgroup for their experience, strength, and hope in ways that do not breach the workgroup’s confidentiality. Addressing disagreement and conflict can be challenging for adult children. Yet, it can also be an opportunity to deepen one’s growth and recovery process.

For 12 Step Work—Other Laundry List Use: The Other Laundry List Traits were more formally developed after the yellow 12 Step workbook was created. Some workgroups choose to include this information in their 12 Step work. If a group wishes, the Other Laundry List Traits can be referenced whenever the standard Laundry List Traits are presented throughout the ACA 12 Step yellow workbook.

For 12 Step Work—Tony A’s 12 Steps Use: Tony A’s version of the 12 Steps is not in the yellow workbook due to copyright issues. Still, some workgroups choose to include this information in their 12 Step work. A group can decide to introduce and reference Tony A’s version of the 12 Steps when the standard ACA 12 Steps are referenced in the ACA 12 Step yellow workbook, so long as the group does not violate copyright laws.

Additional Workgroup Resources for the Loving Parent Guidebook: Available at <https://adultchildren.org/literature/loving-parent-guidebook/>

Appendix C

12 STEP WORKGROUPS [continued]

ACA WORKGROUP SAMPLE SAFETY GUIDELINES

The following are some sample safety suggestions. Each workgroup determines for itself what guidelines to put in place to support safety. Guidelines can be revisited and modified over time.

- Please arrive on time to be considerate of other group members. Members agree to notify at least one other participant ahead of time if they will not be attending a workgroup meeting. Regular attendance is recommended.*
- Please do not attend workgroup meetings if under the influence of illicit substances or alcohol.
- Please silence (preferably turn off) and put away electronic devices upon arrival to reduce possibilities for distraction and interruption.
- Please be mindful of equitable sharing times, allowing all participants equal opportunities to share. A three-minute-per-share limit (with some exceptions now and then) is recommended.**
- Please respect participants' freedom to pass and share at the level that feels comfortable to them.
- Please do not interrupt other members when they are sharing.
- Please use the words "I, me, and my" to share from your personal experience.
- Please do not "cross talk," which for this group means not referring to, commenting directly on, or judging/criticizing anyone else's sharing. We simply listen and do not offer advice. Attentively listening to others as they face their pain can often be the greatest support of all.
- Please respect the privacy of those who share. What is communicated at our workgroup meeting stays at this meeting.

* Long absences may threaten workgroup safety. Therefore, some groups choose to set specific boundaries around attendance, such as limits on consecutive absences, or the total number of workgroup meetings missed.

** Some groups time participant shares for various lengths of time. Others do not.

