



Adult Children of Alcoholics

By Janet G. Woititz

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In the 1980's, Janet Woititz broke new ground in our understanding of what it is to be an Adult Child of an Alcoholic. In this updated edition of her bestseller she re-examines the movement and its inclusion of Adult Children from various dysfunctional family backgrounds who share the same characteristics. After decades of working with ACoAs she shares the recovery hints that she has found to work. Read Adult Children of Alcoholics to see where the journey began and for ideas on where to go from here.

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Janet Woititz was the author of *Adult Children of Alcoholics*, which was on the New York Times bestseller list for over a year. She wrote several other books, including *Lifeskills for Adult Children*; *The Self-Sabotage Syndrome*; *The Struggle for Intimacy*; *Marriage on the Rocks*; *Healing Your Sexual Self* and many others. Woititz was the director and founder of the Institute for Counseling and Training in West Caldwell, New Jersey.

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from Chapter 5

Recovery Hints

It is important to be clear what recovery means for adult children. Alcoholism is a disease. People recovering from alcoholism are recovering from a disease. The medical model is accepted by all responsible folks working in alcoholism treatment.

Being the child of an alcoholic is not a disease. It is a fact of your history. Because of the nature of this illness and the family response to it, certain things occur that influence your self-feelings, attitudes and behaviors in ways that cause you pain and concern. The object of AcoA recovery is to overcome those aspects of your history that cause you difficulty today and to learn a better way.

To the degree that none of us have ideal childhoods and to the degree that even an ideal childhood may be a cause for some concern, we are all recovering to some extent or other, in some way or other. Because there are so many alcoholic families and because we have been fortunate in being able to study them, it is possible to describe in general terms what happens to children who grow up in that environment.

To the degree that other families have similar dynamics, individuals who have grown up in other dysfunctional systems identify with and recover in very much the same way.

Recovery Hints for Adult Children

All folks in AcoA recovery need to learn the Al-Anon principle of detachment regardless of whether or not they are recovering from addiction or are living with an addict. Until you do this, you can go no further. Detachment is the key. Because of the inconsistent nature of the nurture a child receives in an alcohol family system and the child's hunger for nurture, many of you are still joined to your parents at the emotional hip. Even if you are no longer with them, you continue to seek their approval and are strongly influenced by their attitudes and behaviors. You will need to learn to separate yourself from them in a way that will not add to your stress. This is one of the primary goals of the Al-Anon program.

What you learn about yourself as you are growing up because a part of who you are and how you feel about yourself. No one can change that but you. Your parents, even if they recover and treat you differently, cannot fix what makes you feel bad about yourself. You may start a new and healthy relationship with them in the present but no amount of amends on their part will fix the past. That is why dwelling on their part in your ongoing pain will not get you through it or past it. Your present difficulties are your problem. To put the focus outside yourself is to delay your recovery.

Emotions that have been held down for years and years will come to surface. That is why it is suggested that if you are recovering from an addiction, you need to focus on that first so that you will not be tempted to relieve those feelings in destructive ways. You will go through a number of powerful emotions in your recovery. It is part of the process.

Not everyone goes through the stages of the process in the same sequence, and many of you may block some of those feelings. There is no "right" way. I just tell you about the process because those feelings may surface without your conscious direction and frighten you. And they will resurface many times with each new discovery. The recovery process is different for different folks. Only you can determine the way that will work best for you.

Your immediate response to reading this book may be:

Joy. Going through the process eventually will allow you to experience a freedom that you have never felt before. When you are an adult you can be the child you were unable to be when you were a child.

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