

McConnell, P. (1986). A Workbook for Healing Adult Children of Alcoholics. Harper & Row.

OVERVIEW

According to the book, "Research indicates that over twenty-two million adult Americans grew up in homes where one parent, or both, were alcoholics." This work identifies defense mechanisms that children develop for survival. Often, these defenses are so well developed that they carry over into adulthood, stifling growth and keeping one from achieving full life potential. In addition, the book studies family systems, accomplishments, denial, fear, guilt, early beliefs, role embellishments, sabotage and self-fulfilling prophecies, truth and responsibility, healing of illusions, healing of injustice, healing of control, healing of loss, to forgive is to heal, and empowerment.

The following include results of overdeveloped defense mechanisms. An adult child of an alcoholic may exhibit any combination of the characteristics:

- * Fear of abandonment.
- * Distrust.
- * Mood swings.
- * Bulimia, anorexia, overeating.
- * Lying.
- * Dependency.
- * Violent behavior.
- * Excessive over- or under-reaction.
- * Critical judging.
- * Need to control.
- * Compulsive behavior.
- * Intimacy difficulties.
- * Intenseness.
- * Low self esteem.
- * Alcoholism.
- * Excitement addiction.
- * Casual sex or sexual disorders.
- * Excessive over- or under-responsibility.
- * Impulsiveness.

- * Inability to relax.
- * Need for approval.

Adult and adolescent children of alcoholics need the following to recover from their childhood situation:

- * Identification of problem behaviors.
- * Commitment to change.
- * Life in a healthy family environment where parents acknowledge and encourage accomplishment.
- * Removal from the chaotic alcoholic environment where little is safe and controllable, where Mom and Dad cannot be trusted.
- * Predictable daily life. "Painful feelings should not be repressed nor emotions parceled out with suspicion and adapted to the situation."
- * Acknowledgement of the past. "Adult children remain trapped in childhood perceptions that contribute to present dysfunction and distress."

At the end of each chapter, exercises focus the reader on healing the issue discussed. These exercises are excellent for an affected person. Still, that individual may want to work through the exercises with a spiritual director or positive caregiver.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do kids you know experience excessive thoughts of "I can't do anything right," "I don't finish things," "I can't think straight," or "I can't trust anyone but myself"?
2. How can youth leaders identify adolescent children of alcoholics/dysfunctional families and help them to make changes in the way they deal with issues at home?
3. How can one facilitate adolescent children as they identify defense mechanisms and adapt their behavior?
4. How can a youth worker facilitate empowerment of these children?
5. We know that to forgive is to heal but how should they be helped to deal with forgiveness, especially in an actively abusive home?

IMPLICATIONS

1. Common feelings of adolescent children of alcoholics and dysfunctional homes are guilt, fear, anger, emptiness, loneliness, helplessness, hopelessness, depression, sadness, worthlessness, wariness, and a sense of being different.
2. Adolescent children of alcoholics and dysfunctional homes need to be identified so they may be treated appropriately.

3. Adult children and adolescents of alcoholics need help identifying the issues and finding healthy ways of dealing with them. They need to know that childhood defense mechanisms carried over into adulthood are inappropriate and destructive.

4. Forgiveness is a painful issue with these individuals, prevents healing and recovery. Pride and revenge also inhibit recovery. They need to know that refusal to resolve these issues can be more painful than resolving them.

5. These kids need to be affirmed, encouraged, and acknowledged in all that they do. They do not receive it from home or from their parents and, therefore, lack those needs. Youth leaders need to be aware of this in order to serve them effectively.

6. Older children of alcoholics need to identify childhood wounds and begin their journey of physical, mental, and spiritual healing.

7. Youth workers need to support these individuals unconditionally. It is essential to be compassionate and loving to them. This is a situation no one should face alone.

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