

*Maryland State Bar Association's Lawyer Assistance Program
Wellness Tip Sheet*

Growing up in a Dysfunctional Home

Children who grow up with an alcoholic parent, or in a home that is dysfunctional for some other reason (e.g., drugs, gambling), learn adaptive behaviors to better cope with their feelings of abandonment and chaos. The tips below are specific to Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA); however, they are directly applicable to individuals who have grown up in any dysfunctional home, whether it is the result of gambling, drugs, or another type of compulsive behavior.

Without realizing it, as adults these individuals often have a need to feel abandoned, because that was how they were raised and is all they know. They don't know what it is like to have a stable home; therefore, they frequently enter relationships that are not healthy. The ACOA may either become an alcoholic, marry one, or both. They can also tend to gravitate toward other compulsive behaviors, such as gambling, because it feels familiar to them. ACOAs feel like victims and compensate for this by becoming people pleasers, overly responsible, reactors, and trust others instead of themselves.

The following is a list of characteristics compiled by Janet Woititz, the Author of, Adult Children of Alcoholics. You do not necessarily need to display all these characteristics in order to be an ACOA.

1. *Adult children of alcoholics guess at what normal behavior is.*
2. *Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty following a project through from beginning to end.*
3. *Adult children of alcoholics lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.*
4. *Adult children of alcoholics judge themselves without mercy.*
5. *Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty having fun.*
6. *Adult children of alcoholics take themselves very seriously.*
7. *Adult children of alcoholics have difficulty with intimate relationships.*
8. *Adult children of alcoholics overreact to changes over which they have no control.*
9. *Adult children of alcoholics overreact to changes over which they have no control.*
10. *Adult children of alcoholics constantly seek approval and affirmation.*
11. *Adult children of alcoholics usually feel that they are different from other people.*
12. *Adult children of alcoholics are super responsible or super irresponsible.*
13. *Adult children of alcoholics are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved.*
14. *Adult children of alcoholics are impulsive. They tend to lock themselves into a course of action without giving serious consideration to alternative behaviors or possible consequences. This impulsively leads to confusion, self-loathing and loss of control over their environment. In addition, they spend an excessive amount of energy cleaning up the mess.*

If you share any of these characteristics and would like to learn more about how to cope with these issues please contact your Lawyer Assistance Program for free, confidential, assistance at 410-685-7878 x3041 or 800-492-1964 x3041