



## **GRIEF**

### **Adult Children of Alcoholics, A.C.O.A.**

Children who grew up in alcoholic families (or other dysfunctional homes) faces loss and thus grief. The loss is of their childhood. Childhood is a time when children from functioning families learn certain things about life.

Life is okay.  
I am okay.  
I can discover my needs.  
I can have wants, and have them met.  
I have a positive impact on the world.  
Change is possible.  
There are shades of gray, not just black and white.  
There are more than two solutions to any problem.  
Problems can be discussed.  
Other people are there for your support, and you for theirs.  
I can listen to criticism.  
I can confront others without destroying them.

Children from alcoholic families also learn certain things about life.

Life is to be gotten through because usually it hurts.  
If I were okay, my parents would have stopped drinking.  
I have no needs or wishes – other people have them and I can either ignore them or solve them.  
Change is too hard even to think about.  
There are only two solutions to any problem, both bad.  
Everything is either black or white.  
Problems are to be ignored through compulsive behavior. They will either go away, or I can create a crisis so they will get worse.

In order to recover from the effects of parental alcoholism, children of alcoholics must grieve the loss of their childhoods. They were never loved unconditionally, and they never will get unconditional love from their parents.

The second loss that recovering adult children of alcoholics must grieve is the loss of the compulsions that they used to get through life without feeling.

The third loss that they must grieve is the loss of the roles they took on to survive in a chaotic family. Sharon Wegscheider calls them Hero, Lost Child, Scapegoat, and Mascot. Claudia Black calls them Responsible One, Adjuster, Placator, and Acting Out Child.



Whatever role the adult child took on, stops working. It never really worked. The role was a way to avoid growing up and all the realities that growing up forces on people.

Grief is prerequisite to healing. As long as anything, (compulsions, roles, etc.) works, as long as unconditional love is still expected from parents, surrender to a Higher Power remains impossible.