

ACOA: the adult child of the addict (or addictive family system)

This describes a particular experience for someone who grew up in a family of active addiction.

When we describe 'active addiction' please understand that we are not just referring to drug or alcohol addiction, nor just the numerous manifestations of this illness, but to the too often hidden core. Wherever addiction is present the Core Characteristics™ are present in a dysregulated form, so that at best a child receives inconsistent care, and at worst, passive or proactive abuse. All children – all of us – are impacted by our surroundings, and all of us have experienced trauma of some kind or other, but it is the climate within which that trauma happens, the surrounding care, that is so important to consider when trying to understand emotional issues later in life. So minimising your experience by saying that 'no one has a perfect childhood' or that 'worst things can happen' doesn't really help; instead try and listen inwardly to what your body is telling you, with the support of a therapist experienced in supporting someone with ACOA into recovery, so that you can better understand and come to terms with whatever it is that is disturbing you.

Often when a child grows up around overt addiction, or drug and alcohol use, typically they grow up to use in a similar way – if you can't beat em join em – or abstain in a determination not to be like their parents. But sadly both of these responses to an environment of obvious addictive behaviour are still driven, dictated, by that addictive

behaviour. But someone who has grown up in a family of addiction will not necessarily know this is the case, as not all addictive processes are visible, or properly identified. Thus if the addiction is covert, then there is often shame in the individual presenting with emotional difficulties later in life as they simply cannot understand what is wrong. Thus it is vital to keep an open mind when talking over the detail of your family history in the assessment session, as understanding is a significant step towards change.

Sadly, however, the ACOA is one of the silent carriers of addiction through families as usually they are unaware of the depth of impact the childhood around addiction has had on them. The denial in the parent figure that enables them to continue in their avoidant and self-destructive patterns is adopted by the child in order to survive, and breaking through this denial can feel very scary. But it is important, as once the bigger picture is in focus, people find that things slip into place, and somehow their inner tension is relieved.

Exploring the potential of ACOA is a fundamental part of successful addiction treatment process. It's not about blame, it's about taking a proper inventory so you can make sense of where you come from and where you stand.

Treatment of ACOA, the resulting codependence and supporting the family are a significant part of any CHARTER programme.

If you have problems around being ACOA then give us a call, we can help

Call 020 7323 4970

www.charterharleystreet.com