The Problem[4] (2024)

Whether we grew up in households with alcoholic or drug-addicted parents or were conditioned later in life by crisis, if we've accepted insecurity or neglect as "normal," we may have several characteristics in common:

We had come to feel isolated, stuck behind masks we wear to protect ourselves or to placate other people.

Over time, we may have lost our identities because we focus on real or imagined obligations to others, or to work, or to a cause or belief that demands we sacrifice our needs and desires to it.

We are ill at ease around other people—especially authority figures. We feel that our lives are beyond our control, and even when we're in charge, we can't relax. We are afraid our plans, hopes and efforts may be dashed by forces we can neither influence nor escape.

If we aren't caught up in crisis today, we can't feel confident or secure. We fear the future and we feel watchful, tense, suspicious and defensive. We distrust others and ourselves.

To avoid our feelings, we may become substance abusers ourselves or marry them or both. We may become compulsive personalities such as a workaholic, or a habitual "people-manager" to plug the voids we sense within ourselves.

We feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves, so we either give in or we push people away. We hunger for steadiness and tenderness, yet we keep creating insecure relationships because they match what we already know how to manage and accept.

These symptoms are characteristics of those who grew up in dysfunctional family systems or who've been traumatized by events. They often persist even in those who do not presently abuse alcohol or drugs. We take on impossible tasks in the hope that we can accomplish a miracle and we blame ourselves and others when we cannot. We become addicted to excitement in all our affairs, preferring constant upset to being peaceful with uncertainty. This is a description, not an indictment.

[4] The Problem/Solution, (1980) by Jack E. & the Westwood ACA group, Santa Monica, CA were the founding documents for ACA/ACoA in most 'adult child' fellowships that developed prior to 2006. These are available in ACE Anonymous Archives and many earlier texts in their original form and may be used instead of these updated ACE Anonymous versions.

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