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A note to ACA members: This is an excerpt of a draft being written by the ACA “sponsorship subcommittee” to address different forms of support beyond the terms *sponsor* and *fellow traveler* which are used, sometimes confusingly, in Adult Children of Alcoholics/Dysfunctional Families (Big Red Book or BRB). Our purpose is not to find sponsors or other support for members but to show the variety of ways we can give and receive support.

We welcome the response of the membership to the work we are doing. You can email your comments to literature@acawso.org. Please put the words Draft Excerpt in the title of your reply

CONNECTIONS: A GUIDE TO GIVING AND RECEIVING SUPPORT IN ACA RECOVERY

Opening Meditation (taken from Tradition 9)

Higher Power. May I remember that ACA and its meeting and service structure are different from my family of origin. May I be patient and avoid reaching for the easiest way out when I am confronted with a difficult situation. Help me and [those supporting me in my ACA program] ask for help in keeping our [relationship] safe and recovery-oriented. Also help us celebrate the things that we do right.

We recognize that *Adult Children of Alcoholic/Dysfunctional Families* (the BRB or the Big Red Book) recommends that one "get a sponsor." (p.125) Over the years since the Big Red Book was written, ACA members have moved away from all or nothing thinking and found varied ways of supporting each other in recovery without a formal "Sponsor." In this guide, therefore, we don't use the word "Sponsor" exclusively because it describes only one type of support relationship. More important, the experience of our members has demonstrated that one does not need a formal one-on-one "Sponsor" in order to recover in ACA.

We focus less on “sponsor” as a noun and more as a verb. To sponsor someone is to provide support for another person’s recovery as well as one’s own. To be sponsored is to receive support from another person to work the ACA program. The

main priority is to find a way to break isolation and begin to speak up about our childhood experiences and identify how that affects our life today.

Today, the terms “Sponsor,” “Sponsee,” “Co-sponsor,” “Fellow Traveler,” “Mentor,” “Recovery Partner,” “Recovery Friend,” and others are commonly used in ACA. We use the words the “Supporter” and the “Supported” or the “Supported person,” to refer to these types of relationships, recognizing that these roles may shift back and forth in a support relationship. This guide offers information on different support relationships that can be helpful in recovery.

ACA does not offer any one “right” relationship for all people at all times. The nature of the relationship may evolve as we change and grow in our program. Also, regardless of the terms used, the benefits, commitments, and problems that may arise are common. This guide is organized to discuss the features of working together that are common to those both seeking and offering support. It also contains sections directed specifically to either the person seeking support or to the person offering support.

The Importance of Anonymity

We believe that the support relationship requires anonymity--both of the content of what is shared, and the identity of supporter and supported person. See the section below on “Traditions.”

1. Range of Ways of Working with Others in Recovery

The ACA program has embraced a wide range of supportive relationships with people at different recovery levels. These help us go through the step work and laundry lists, reparent our inner child, and explore feelings and progress in our ACA recovery. As we grow in our program, the nature of the relationships may change. We may not be of equal Experience, Strength and Hope (ESH) with another, but we are all on equal footing—human beings deserving of respect. We can learn from those with more ESH and also from those who are newer than ourselves. As our ESH grows, we watch for any tendency to become an authority figure.

Having a range of relationships to choose from allows us to work our program with gentleness, humor, love, and respect.

The only requirement to attend ACA is the desire to recover from a dysfunctional upbringing. Some ACAs choose one-on-one support and others will prefer group support. We are all encouraged to find the support we need to recover and break isolation.

Below are some of the different ways we can work with another in recovery:

a) Working One-on-One with Someone with More ACA Experience

In this approach, one person shares their ESH with someone less experienced.

People with more experience can offer support to work through survival traits. They have healed, integrated, or released some of theirs. This method is different from sponsorship in some other 12-step programs in that it is supportive rather than directive.

Both the more experienced and the less experienced members can grow in trust and intimacy as the relationship develops. The experienced member shares their spiritual program of recovery and guides the newcomer who is building their own foundation for recovery through the Twelve Steps of ACA. The experienced member understands the effects of being raised in a dysfunctional family, and the importance of resolving stored grief and reparenting oneself through the ACA Steps. These experienced members are not therapists or counselors, but they can offer needed support to another person revisiting abuse, trauma, and other overwhelming childhood experiences.

Various terms apply to this type of relationship, such as Sponsor, Fellow Traveler or Recovery Partner.

b) Working one-on-one on a Temporary Basis with Someone with More ACA Experience

In this approach, a person with time and experience in the program serves as an interim support until longer-term support can be found. Some people work through parts of the Big Red Book or yellow Step Study book together. Others focus on helping the person learn and practice reparenting skills.

Various terms apply to this type of relationship, such as Mentor, Temporary Sponsor, Fellow Traveler or Recovery Partner.

c) Working one-on-one with Someone with Similar ACA Experience

In this approach, two ACA members with similar program time and experience support each other's continued recovery. This model works well for ACA members with significant time and experience in the program because they will have worked through some of their distorted thinking and will be familiar with program literature and principles. This can also work for two relative newcomers. Both of these relationships can be helpful in places where there aren't many people with sufficient ESH to guide or help newcomers.

These relationships apply to two people working together through the Steps, the Laundry List Traits Workbook, reparenting, feeling work and other program literature.

Various terms apply to this type of relationship, such as Co-sponsor, Fellow Traveler or Recovery Partner.

d) Working in a Closed Study Group (Steps, Traits, Reparenting, etc.)

Some ACAs join private groups that aren't registered as open ACA meetings to work

the program. These groups often meet to complete a cycle of the Twelve Steps or other ACA workbooks. These members provide each other with indirect support. Members seek answers together, collectively discovering how to set boundaries, release family roles, what it means to become an inner loving parent, and much more. Working in a closed group allows members to notice family roles and dysfunctional family dynamics in a supportive atmosphere.

Closed groups can benefit ACAs who work with a support person one-on-one, as well. Some ACAs choose to work primarily in private groups; others work in closed groups and also meet one-on-one with other adult children. The ACA program offers choice, and encourages creativity in how members avail themselves of support.

e) Long Distance Support

Working by Skype, internet, or telephone is another way to work with a support person. This can work well where distance or circumstances (like few or no local ACA meetings) prevent in-person contact. Members can use mail, e-mail, telephone, and video conferencing services to do extensive Step (and other) work with a long-distance support.

f) Working with a "Mentor"

A mentoring program is designed to provide one-to-one support to newcomers in their first six weeks in ACA and introduces them to the program.

A mentor aspires to

- € Establish a connection with a newcomer
- € Answer questions
- € Share their story of family alcoholism or dysfunction
- € Provide information about the ACA program, recovery, and service
- € Provide their contact information and a meeting phone list
- € Explain the ACA steps
- € Explain the various tools and approaches to ACA recovery
- € Share the processes and tools they have used in ACA recovery
- € Introduce the Newcomer to the Service Structure of ACA and encourage the newcomer's involvement once they're ready
- € Participate with the Newcomer in ACA events and opportunities to learn more.

Help the newcomer understand the different ways people get support in ACA, and look for and find more permanent support.

g) Recovery Buddies

This term applies to people in ACA who have a more informal but supportive relationship, perhaps supporting one another by phone, meeting for coffee, finding ways to have fun and play, reading program literature together, or working together in Service. Various terms apply to this type of relationship, such as Fellow Traveler, Program Friend, Recovery Partner.

h) Informal Support

Attending ACA meetings and ACA workshops are a form of informal support. Groups that emphasize the Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions, program tools, service, and offer a well-stocked literature table with a phone list provide indirect support.

Social activities, for example coffee groups, lunch clubs, or other group social activities are another way we can practice our new-found recovery behaviors. Using the telephone to reach out to ACA members who have offered their numbers or written them down at a meeting as willing to be called can also provide support, whether during a single conversation or on an ongoing basis.

i) Service Support.

We can obtain support from another Adult Child as we take on service. We examine this in Part E Service Support.

2. Types of Ways to Work a Program with Others: What We Will Work On.

Some of these types of work will naturally precede others, such as Ready, Set, Go. Others may be done in a different order. It can be helpful, for those new to ACA, to first understand what has worked for others and then choose to explore what works for you.

a) Ready, Set, Go (RSG)

This program has been developed to introduce people to ACA, to the Steps and to the inner child over a short period; it can also be used as a refresher for more experienced members. Ready, Set Go guides a participant with an introduction to the ACA program, the ACA 12 steps and the Inner Child. The book will serve as a guide for members to run any version of RSG that they choose: a One Day RSG Event, a five-week face-to-face RSG meeting, or a six- week RSG online or telephone meeting.

b) Work the Steps using the Yellow ACA 12 Step Workbook

The Yellow ACA 12 Step Workbook is designed with questions and reflections about the Steps. Some Adult Children at similar experience levels use this workbook one-on-one as fellow travelers to guide their way through the Twelve Steps, answering and sharing their answers. Others may join a step study, in which a small group of ACAs answer the questions in advance and come together to share answers. . The person with more experience might share answers at times or as requested, or each time as the pair decide. Others use the workbook with an ACA with more experience, where the focus is more on the answers and reflections of the person

working the Twelve Steps for the first time Some ACA groups use the ACA Step Workbook as their main piece of literature, with members answering questions in a meeting setting. Many members find it helpful to revisit their answers in subsequent sessions, assessing their growth in the program as they go.

c) Work the Laundry List Workbook

The Laundry List Workbook takes an in-depth look at the traits from a variety of angles. While it can be used at any stage of program work, some members find the material easier to digest and explore once they have worked the ACA Twelve Steps and/or done some reparenting work. Others find the perspective they gain from working the laundry list helps them recognize and release, heal or integrate laundry list traits. This workbook also addresses the "flip side" of laundry list traits, which helps members see where they may need to make amends.

d) Feeling Work, Grief Work

We can work with a supporter in uncovering feelings. We may share feelings without asking for comment; our supporter may ask us what we are feeling as we tell our story; or a supporter may provide feedback or mirroring of feelings. As we recover, we can feel grief, anger, sorrow, fear, guilt, joy, playfulness, love and serenity or more. When we are helping another, we encourage and accept these feelings in ourselves as well as in the other person.

Some ACAs who are not familiar with their feelings turn to sources outside of ACA to go deeper into this work, whether with a therapist or by reading books. Mindfulness meditation can also support feeling work by helping us learn to ground our attention in the body.

e) Work on Reparenting Skills.

We can work on reparenting skills in a variety of ways. We can work through the sections in the BRB on Reparenting; we may attend telephone or in person meetings that address reparenting; we may also work through the *Becoming Your Own Loving Parent Guidebook* (LPG) in an open meeting or closed study group can provide a supportive place to learn reparenting along with others, and share challenges and triumphs along the way.

Guidance for working in a closed ACA group is offered in the LPG's appendix along with a suggested group format script. The guide offers additional suggestions for one-on-one work.

It helps to do reparenting work with someone who has experience with reparenting and family of origin grief work. Others can support reparenting work, including spiritual advisors .

f) Connect with the Inner Child or Children.

We learn how to hear and validate our Inner Child or Children. We identify the age

of our inner children as they are reacting to the trigger; and how our inner children feel when the trait is triggered. As we learn how to understand the inner family's needs when triggered and how to develop a cooperative solution between adult and child. the adult becomes aware of the spirit of joy that inhabits every child and recognizes the need for openness and spontaneity in feeling completely alive.

g) Work to integrate (balance), heal or release the Laundry List Survival Traits.

We can work on identifying and addressing our Laundry List Survival Traits in a support relationship. Support will help us pause, meditate or pray, and learn how to self-soothe the various parts of the inner landscape so we can have a clear mind to do the work) and practice self-care proactively. We will identify which trait is triggered in a given moment, identify which traits cause problems in our life overall (help identifying patterns) and learn to practice dialogue to stand up for oneself

Our Supporter can help identify what is a healthy use of a particular trait.

h) Boundary Work

We learn the important process of setting boundaries. This includes identifying issues with boundaries (absence of, or confusion around, boundaries, boundary violations), learning about the need for boundaries, practice and support identifying and setting boundaries. This process takes time and can be difficult for adult children, but can ultimately be very rewarding.

i) Understand and Use the Twelve Traditions

The Twelve Traditions of ACA (see Appendix) guide our Groups and our service structure, outlining fellowship Unity, Group Autonomy and the authority of a Higher Power in our Group consciences.

The benefits of using the Traditions extend to our whole lives. They give us a roadmap for living, which can improve our relationships. We develop boundaries and mutual respect.

This results in healthier groups and business meetings. Our service work and communities benefit, as well.

We can study the Traditions with the support of someone more experienced, someone with a similar level of experience, or in a study group. We can learn more about their principles, and how they can be applied in practice.

j) Understand and Use the Concepts of Service

The twelve Concepts (see Appendix) keep our World Service and groups focused on carrying a consistent ACA message while maintaining a service structure responsible to the fellowship voice. They mainly guide World Service Organization (WSO) and help trusted servants discern the will of ACA and carry out the responsibilities granted by the fellowship. We can learn more about their principles, and how they can be applied in practice.

We can study the Concepts with the support of someone more experienced in service, someone with a similar level of experience, or in a study group.