

Trait 1

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.</i>	<i>To cover our fear of people and our dread of isolation we tragically become the very authority figures who frighten others and cause them to withdraw.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We move out of isolation and are not unrealistically afraid of other people, even authority figures.</i>	<i>We face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation and stop intimidating others with our power and position.</i>

Our families were not safe enough for us to feel comfortable in being ourselves. Thus, we isolated ourselves by burying, hiding, denying, abandoning, and betraying our True Self and presenting a false self to the world. From this protective space, we could keep our fear of people at an acceptable level. We didn't allow many folks the opportunity to hurt us, and when they were able to get close, any separation produced an almost intolerable feeling of pain that led us to fortify our defenses and to further isolate ourselves from any intimacy. The same scenario was played out with authority figures either at work or at play. Our rebelliousness to authority was more an acting out of this trait than any legitimate push back *against authority*.

In this process of dissociation we had mastered the moves: isolate ourselves and continue to fear people and authority. Combined with the inevitable separation, we experience even deeper pain, greater isolation, and more fear. Game, set, and match! On it goes until we hit bottom and become willing to admit that we are powerless over this effect and that our lives had become unmanageable. We had dissociated from ourselves and others so perfectly that we felt we had mastered the process of dissociation. This process only produces a constant downward spiral of increasing loneliness and exaggerated fear that cripples our ability to engage in meaningful relationships or to be productive members of our society.

Still, the childhood loss of trust permeates all of our interactions, relationships, and intimacy as the repetition or recycling of our traumatic childhood dynamics beckons us to find resolution or expression of our original pain. This is a natural and logical response to the chaotic family dynamics we were raised in as described in **The Laundry List**.

However, many ACAs seem to have overcome their fear of people and authority figures, and it is presumed that we have achieved – despite our upbringing – a measure of success due to our resilience. Some of us understandably occupy positions of relative authority. Some of us

may even occupy seats of power in corporations and nations. In a real sense, our childhood experiences made us adept at maintaining control, multi-tasking, managing chaos, and being decisive – all useful qualities for those in a position of authority.

On the other hand, maintaining control, multi-tasking, managing chaos, and being decisive were also dissociating skills, which we learned to make our childhoods safe. This dissociation may also reflect a form of acting out. We become the very authority figures who frighten others and cause them to withdraw.

Outwardly, we may be socially celebrated and well respected, but this is an ironic validation of our false self. The cost of this “success” for our “leadership” is that we may still be unconsciously reacting to our childhood dynamics – still being a hero or martyr. The payoff for our acting out in this manner is that we are actually “denying” our True Self and reinforcing our overly protective and defensive false self. To maintain this “false authority” self, we unconsciously dose ourselves with adrenaline to feed constant fear, anger, or pain to armor ourselves against our unrealistic fear of people and the dread of being isolated, as described in **The Other Laundry List**.

Thus dissociated, we are compelled to continue to sacrifice our True Self so that we do not lose our false sense of security through the dysfunctional family tactics of people pleaser, problem solver, quick thinker, or decision maker. Controlling or manipulating takes the place of genuine living.

From this protective and domineering position, we can often unknowingly and sometimes purposely intimidate our family members, friends, subordinates, and superiors. We can cause them to obey us with little regard to their humanness, figuring that the supposed skills we have developed are better than any actual weakness the people we deal with may have.

With the consistent daily work we do in ACA, we move out of isolation and are not unrealistically afraid of other people, even authority figures (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**). When confronted by adult situations, we can learn not to regress to a stage in our childhood. We can respond appropriately to the situation at hand. Freeing ourselves from the childhood reactions of isolating and extraordinary fear, we can reparent ourselves, take the ACA Twelve Steps, get clear about how the effect is impacting us, and decide to try a different approach.

When challenged about our positions of power (**The Other Laundry List**), we can face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation, and stop intimidating others with our power and position (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**). No longer driven by unconscious fear of people and dread of being alone, we can engage *with* the world, accepting the demands of our position while not depriving family members, friends, or our colleagues of their dignity and integrity. This will take a great deal of effort on our part, and we may not be able to immediately recognize how this effect drives us to be reactionary or how it impacts those

around us. The meetings and our fellow travelers may help us if we ask. The effect on us and those around us will gradually become clearer as we develop the insight and experience garnered from working the ACA Steps and reparenting ourselves, one day at a time. The gifts of becoming a whole, integrated human being will make the journey of life a wonderful adventure with the ever-present guide of our Higher Power, without whom these gifts may go unrealized.
(The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 1 Reflections

The Laundry List

We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.

1. When have I been isolated and afraid of people and authority figures?

2. Where and when has this occurred?

Trait 2

fantale

intressante

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.</i>	<i>To avoid becoming enmeshed and entangled with other people and losing ourselves in the process, we become rigidly self-sufficient. We disdain the approval of others.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.</i>	<i>We realize the sanctuary we have built to protect the frightened and injured child within has become a prison and we become willing to risk moving out of isolation.</i>

Children need, seek, and expect that their parents or their caregivers will approve of them. When a parent is emotionally, physically, or spiritually absent, the child learns to reverse the relationship's current flow and instead becomes the one who works to gain the approval of their caregivers by acting in the way that seems to get the caregiver's attention and love. This initiates the Game of Dissociation. Our true identities are hidden from our caregivers and, more importantly, from ourselves. Paradoxically, we lose our true identity and we lose an essential ingredient to healthy development – to be valued for who we are versus who our caregivers wanted us to be. We placate our caregivers and become an unwilling victim in the Game of Dissociation. (**The Laundry List**)

The people-pleasing false self seems like the solution to all of our problems. We are performing for people and they appear to be happy with us. The problem is that the people-pleasing false self is dishonest. We fall into despair, anger and depression, fretting over controlling the uncontrollable, our false self, and the reactions of people.

In this we are not alone. We are in a constant state of worry – trying to suppress who we are while figuring out who others want us to be. We make mistakes and become more exhausted from overthinking, and we become angry. We explode with righteous indignation. “Don’t they know who we are?” “Don’t they know how hard we have worked?” But in reality we chose to hide our true identity. We did not respect our own or other people’s free will. We create a mental prison that is made up from shaming beliefs about ourselves. We don’t care about boundaries – we are focused on holding others hostage. We become enmeshed in others and lose our identities.

In the absence of a caregiver attuned to our needs, we, the abused and neglected children, soon learn to take care of our own needs. We are the children who are often admired for our maturity beyond our years and are a relief to our caregivers, teachers, and later our bosses.

We are the lonely “self starters” who are a “pleasure to work with” because we require little or no supervision; we are the quiet neighbor who rarely talks to anyone, and the compliant partner in relationships. The “payoff” for us is that we ward off any disappointment by not allowing ourselves to express any needs to anyone or to admit that we need anything. The denial of our needs is a small price to pay to avoid the overwhelming sense of loss buried under layers of self-sufficiency. (**The Other Laundry List**)

In the process of recovery, we learn to identify ourselves and our needs each time we say, “My name is Henry and I am an adult child.” By this simple act we begin to take responsibility for ourselves and not depend on anyone to tell us who we are or how we “should” act. In fact, attending ACA meetings and associating with other adult children is an expression of a need of our True Self, and the ACA fellowship meets that need by accepting us just the way we are without any preconditions. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

As time passes, we may begin to free our True Self from the intricate web of denial that we created to sustain us in the alcoholic or dysfunctional families we were raised in. By regularly attending and participating in fellowship meetings, taking the ACA Twelve Steps, and reparenting ourselves, we are beginning the process of moving out of the sanctuary we had built for our True Self and become part of the fellowship that celebrates our individuality. No longer alone, we can take the ACA Steps to become the person we were meant to be or want to be instead of the person who we became to satisfy the needs of our caregivers. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

*Look at some things (actual)
Make a noise
Eat a peach
Smell some cinnamon
Pat your face*

Trait 3

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.</i>	<i>We frighten people with our anger and threat of belittling criticism.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.</i>	<i>With our renewed sense of self-worth and self-esteem we realize it is no longer necessary to protect ourselves by intimidating others with contempt, ridicule and anger.</i>

Alcoholism and addiction are very angry and destructive solutions to a spiritual dilemma. The families we grew up with were usually loaded with hostility, both spoken and unspoken. As a result of our early exposure to this anger and the accompanying criticism, we became sensitive to any actual or potential expression of anger or criticism. In an oftentimes angry world, we may have become avid anger and criticism avoiders. In the Game of Dissociation, this is the victim position that gave us some solace, but also made us prone to being victimized even more. Out of sheer necessity, we “dosed” ourselves with the inside drugs of worry (cortisol), fear (adrenaline), and pain (melatonin) to numb ourselves of our feelings, because the trauma and loss we experienced were too great for our tiny bodies to withstand. (**The Laundry List**)

Instead of being anger and criticism avoiders, some of us became angry and critical, thinking “If we can’t beat them, we’ll join them!” We anger easily or offer cutting “helpful” criticism, especially if the object of our anger or criticism reminds us of our own buried vulnerabilities. We think a hard dose of “tough love” is a jolt of reality that is in others’ best interest. Such “truth” without compassion is hurtful and reflects our desensitization or dissociation from our own vulnerable True Self. Unchecked, we will gather around us only those who can withstand the constant barrage of anger and criticism that we carry inside ourselves. We “dose” ourselves with the adrenaline we get from taking charge and controlling others. This tactic of the Game of Dissociation blocks our painful memories and feelings of the hurt we experienced as children. (**The Other Laundry List**)

At ACA meetings we begin the process of learning to trust again. First we trust that the meeting will be there and that we can share without being judged or criticized. Then we begin to trust the members to be available as fellow travelers. These meetings provide a space for us to learn to view angry people as folks who are expressing pain, fear, grief, or sadness, and that it doesn’t necessarily have anything to do with us. At some point we may realize that another’s anger or criticism did not threaten us or make us run away. The miracle of recovery has begun to take hold. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

If we are working the suggested program of recovery we will soon realize that we no longer need to express contempt, ridicule or anger to defend our false self and that we are comfortable with who we are. Our renewed True Self esteem and True Self worth allows us to admit we are humans and very likely to make mistakes. If someone is angry with us, we can hear them out, ask ourselves what, if anything, we might have done to harm the person. If nothing is of our doing we simply say, "Thank you for sharing. I am sorry you feel that way."

No longer petrified with the fear of anger, we can stand in the present and take responsibility for our mistakes when we find we are in the wrong. Even criticism may be viewed from this emotionally sober perspective. We can hear the observations of others, sit with it and see if there is some truth to what is being shared that could be to our benefit. If there is, we can thank the person for showing us an aspect of ourselves that otherwise we probably wouldn't have seen. If it doesn't resonate as true to us, we can set it aside until it might be relevant. "If it doesn't apply, let it fly." (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

- Look at some things (actual)*
- Make a noise*
- Eat a peach*
- Smell some cinnamon*
- Pat your face*

Trait 4

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We either become alcoholics, marry them, or both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.</i>	<i>We dominate others and abandon them before they can abandon us or we avoid relationships with dependent people altogether. To avoid being hurt, we isolate and dissociate and thereby abandon ourselves.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.</i>	<i>We accept and comfort the isolated and hurt inner child we have abandoned and disavowed and thereby end the need to act out our fears of enmeshment and abandonment with other people.</i>

Those of us fortunate to have recovery from alcohol or substances other than alcohol (so called “dry goods”) refer to ourselves as double winners. Having been an addict or alcoholic, and having begun the process of recovery from addiction by the time we reached ACA, we found we had more work to do. Perhaps we ended up with a mate who was an alcoholic or substance abuser, or perhaps had another compulsive personality or was a rageaholic. In a real sense we had chosen to be with partners who would help us play out the abandonment we experienced as children. As difficult as it may seem, when we are honest and look at our relationships carefully, we can see that either we chose to be with people who were otherwise unavailable or that, over time, we provoked their abandonment. In the Game of Dissociation, we assumed the role of rescuer. In time, we either became a victim or victimizer. (The Laundry List)

For some of us the idea of becoming an alcoholic was turned upside down. Instead of becoming dependent on alcohol or some other outside substance, we chose to dose ourselves with an internal concoction of pain, fear and excitement. By becoming the dominant player, we controlled the ebb and flow of our relationships. With this tactic, we chose to connect only with those we could keep at arm’s length. We created a conflicted dynamic of being in a relationship with another person – without intimacy. When the relationship seemed to veer toward intimacy, we withdrew, isolated and dissociated. The end result was no different than with the alcoholic or dysfunctional family – we protected our True Self by creating a false self to hide our authentic needs and wants. (The Other Laundry List)

The Game of Dissociation allows us to be either the abandoned (victim) of **The Laundry List**, or and abandoner (victimizer) of **The Other Laundry List** – in an endlessly repetitive cycle to not remember or remind ourselves of our traumatic childhood experiences.

Our ACA work gives us many gifts. Steady, daily Step work with a fellow traveler, regular attendance at meetings, and giving service from a place of love helps us realize that our habit to form unhealthy relationships reveals the conflict between our desire for closeness and our fear of intimacy. The layers of denial are carefully revealed and gently pulled away. It is important to remember that reparenting involves more than getting in touch with feelings and buried memories. We also can take an emotional inventory of our patterns of bonding that may reveal how we recreate or recycle our abandonment. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

The process of reparenting starts before we attend our first ACA meeting. The bottoms we hit prepare us to receive the gift of recovery and, after a while, we realize we couldn't have been willing unless we had hit our bottom. We can finally allow ourselves to reach out and ask for help.

In ACA we are shown that we can make the space for our inner loving parent to step in and begin building a relationship with our wounded and lonely Inner Child. As with any relationship, this process takes time and effort. This is a commitment we have to keep to nurture a trusting relationship. The more we connect our Inner Child with our inner loving parent, the more the fears of being engulfed or annihilated are reduced and eventually eliminated. As we enter a relationship we bring these new gifts with us and create true and lasting intimacy primarily with our True Self and subsequently with those who are equally available to us to bond with. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 5

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We live life from the viewpoint of victims and we are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.</i>	<i>We live life from the standpoint of a victimizer, and are attracted to people we can manipulate and control in our important relationships.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.</i>	<i>Because we are whole and complete we no longer try to control others through manipulation and force and bind them to us with fear in order to avoid feeling isolated and alone.</i>

As children, we were subjected to a constant assault of our sensibilities. Whether our parents drank or not, our dysfunctional families bound us in their toxic mix of hurt and anguish coupled with denial and defiance. There is no admission fee to the Game of Dissociation. All members of the family are, unfortunately, given one of four roles in the game: victim, victimizer, rescuer I, or rescuer II. As a result of this conditioning, we grew up feeling disempowered and unable to make healthy choices. Disconnected from our own feelings and our sense of power, we go through our lives being blown about by the winds of the times, neither realizing our abilities nor recognizing that we chose relationships with people who will prey on our inability to exercise our power. Usually with a shrug of resignation, we accepted our situation as our fate – unable to break free from the compulsion to recreate and recycle this unhealthy dissociative habit. (**The Laundry List**)

Somehow during all the chaos visited upon us in our childhoods, we were taught that the weaker members were losers and we became determined to be among the winners. This meant that we became the victimizer or rescuer II. Either passively or actively, we exercised our power beyond the requirements of the situations. In fact, we chose to bring into our circle only those who we could manipulate to be subservient. These submissive members reinforce our “strength” and we feed the refortification of our take charge defenses. If someone challenged our power, we somehow distanced ourselves from them or provoked their sudden departure. The specter of losing our victimizer role was too threatening to us. (**The Other Laundry List**)

The process of emotional recovery is not a solitary event. Going to meetings, sharing honestly, chatting after the meeting either in person or over the phone – all of these gives us an opportunity to exercise greater power in incremental but progressive ways. Instead of feeling helpless, we are encouraged by what we see, hear, and read in our ACA meetings. The veil of

denial, which seemed like a thick, immovable tapestry, now seems like a sheer satin sheet easily moved by us when we are ready. Now, as we approach our day, we see the opportunities to stop viewing life from the perspective of what is happening to us, and become able to see ourselves as a participant in those instances. We exercise discernment when choosing to be in a relationship, observing the person with whom we are trying to connect with for their ability to be responsible for themselves and not looking for us to be the decision maker. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

Throughout the course of our ACA Step work and reparenting, we have been learning about and applying the concepts of critical survival inner parent, inner loving parent, Inner Child, and our Higher Power. We have achieved a sense of wholeness and completeness because of this painstaking work and can see that controlling others is a form of acting out the same behaviors that beset our families. When tempted or lured into a situation where control and manipulation seem to be the answer, we change the question. Instead of "How can I dominate?" we might ask, "How can I humbly participate?" If someone is starting to walk away from us, we no longer resist their leaving, and instead use the ACA Twelve Steps and reparenting to comfort our Inner Child. No longer fearful of being alone or isolated, we recognize the opportunity to deepen our ACA Step work with our inner loving parent, our Inner Child, our Higher Power, and our critical survival inner parent. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 6

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility and it is easier* for us to be concerned with others rather than ourselves. This enables us not to look too closely at our own faults.</i>	<i>We are irresponsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.</i>	<i>Through our in-depth inventory we discover our true identity as capable, worthwhile people. By asking to have our shortcomings removed we are freed from the burden of inferiority and grandiosity.</i>

As babies and young children we have a natural belief that we are omnipotent. The baby who cries and then sees her caregiver appear believes that her crying magically produces her caregiver. As young children our sense of having magical powers is overused to give us a sense of normalcy in the chaotic and destructive families we were raised in. We assumed that since we had magical powers, we could control the caregivers and families that were acting crazily. We would be responsible even though their behavior was not our responsibility and was beyond our control.

This rescuer role in the Game of Dissociation allows us momentary pause before defaulting into either a victim or victimizer role. The internal dosing goes from adrenaline (excitement) to cortisol (worry) to an internal speedball. As adults, this tactic became a habit where we always assumed over-responsibility for others because it gave us an excuse not to look at ourselves. The discomfort of honestly looking at ourselves, our pain, and our losses was easily overshadowed by our inclination – our habit – of looking for others for whom we could be “responsible”. Meanwhile the unexpressed feelings and memories from our traumatic childhood continue festering, to be acted out repeatedly, producing a paradoxical mixture of us being “helpful” to others, while injurious to our True Self. (**The Laundry List**)

* It is probably more accurate to say hypervigilance made it *necessary* for us as children to focus on others so that we could survive. Preferring and choosing come from higher order thinking and reasoning capacities that most adult children do not yet have conscious, consistent access to. It is not that we disregard our own faults out of some sort of conscious preference as adults – as children we were completely busy looking outward to survive. As adults, when we *do* examine our own faults, we are almost always looking destructively, in a self-critical manner. We continue this pattern until we learn otherwise – after a great deal of focused therapy and recovery. With the majority of ACAs coming from this state of hypervigilance and self criticism, we simply don't yet know how to look at ourselves in a constructive way.

The sheer weight of all that responsibility becomes too much to bear by a solitary human being, and the tendency is to go in the opposite direction: Instead of being overly responsible, we dissociate from our responsibilities. We become so engrossed in our false self that what is important to others doesn't matter to us. Instead of being appropriately responsible, we strategize that if people just took care of themselves everybody would be okay. This increased level of false self attention worsens over time and alienates those around us. Armed with this false self-importance, we act out on our loved ones, co-workers, and friends the very deficiencies and shortcomings that we suffered from in our childhoods. Our false self-centeredness keeps us blinded to our deficiencies or shortcomings when we stand so close to our defensive false self. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

The ACA inventory through the Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions is in-depth and painstaking, but has as its reward a relief from the burden of taking care of everyone and the realization of our True Self. No longer bound by our “magical powers,” we can enjoy being a fellow ACA with our ACA family, our loved ones, coworkers, and friends. Our True Self shines through and we can admit, accept, and be the capable and worthwhile individuals that we were intended to be. Allowing others to bear the brunt of their own decisions and not attempting to control their actions restores a great deal of our energy and power. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

As we continue to use the ACA Steps and Traditions to better understand and integrate our traits, we are clear where our behavior is enabling and, with our Higher Power's grace, able to abstain without any sense of grandiosity or judgmentalness in the full knowledge that only one's Higher Power has the ability to grant someone the courage to change themselves. Left to face our inner hurts and memories, the torrent of unexpressed emotions eventually subsides and allows us to be emotionally, psychologically, physically, and spiritually present foremost for our Inner Child and then for others. If we dedicate ourselves to this life restoring process, our spirit's majesty awakens. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 7

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.</i>	<i>We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.</i>	<i>We support and encourage others in their efforts to be assertive.</i>

Perhaps the greatest loss we suffered as children in an alcoholic or dysfunctional family was losing our ability to stand up for ourselves. The aggressive demand by the family to deny what was actually happening was extraordinary and, for a defenseless child, overwhelming. As children, instead of challenging the family's denial system, we played the only role we could, which was to passively give in (submit) to the family's denial system to survive the impact of the alcoholic or dysfunctional family. By giving in, we are unconsciously playing our role in the Game of Dissociation and receiving a payoff of not feeling our feelings.

Although we may have sensed that our submission was wrong, we denied our truth by self-betrayal and self-abandonment, or betrayed and abandoned ourself, or died countless small deaths as we joined in the dysfunction of denying the obvious and, in turn, denied our True Self the birthright of expression. This interaction was repeated regularly, even hourly, until it became routine for us to deny ourself and give in to the conscious or unconscious demands of the family system. So deeply ingrained was this habit that we can read another's body posture, tone of voice, or facial expressions. Even before our own perception can be formulated we act out our passive/submissive role, thwarting any awareness of having our own viewpoint. We preempt any thought of our own beliefs or needs by our constant scanning of those we interact with for their needs, and react to fill those needs, cost us what it may. Thus robbed of our inner senses, we wander and wonder, "Where am I in all this?" (**The Laundry List**)

Having been conditioned by the family dysfunction to submit and deny, or bury, or perish our True Self, some of us chose to survive by becoming the aggressors or perpetrators. While we still survey our surroundings to get a lay of the land, we especially watch for and target those whose views would hold greater sway than us and we attack them. Sometimes our attacks are indirect slights; other attacks may be more of a full frontal assault. Whether we chose a passive or aggressive form of acting out, our overriding goal is to prevent the other person from asserting any kind of expression of their True Self. Our ulterior motive is to hide our own hurts and feelings developed from having been similarly denounced as children. In this dissociative game, we take away the other person's ability to share their view so we can keep our own view of our own deprivations locked away in our subconscious. The payoff is a false sense of mastery,

domination, and control. This usually leads other people to either turn away from us or be drawn to the dysfunctional form of control we exhibit. Either way, we lose our ability to be genuine, human, and to express our buried hurts and feelings. (**The Other Laundry List**)

As we embark on this spiritual voyage to wholeness, one of the first ports of call is our ability to feel and express ourselves at ACA meetings. Here no one interrupts us, makes comments about our shares, or judges us, because what we say is true for us. This safe environment gives us the opportunity to delve deeper into the unconsciously assumed roles we adopted as children. Usually in a gradual manner, our sacrifices are grieved with the other ACA members witnessing us with empathy. As we continue on this spiritual quest, we may find that sharing our truth produces choppy waters, an occasional swell, or some other unfavorable condition. Here, the inner compass we have reconnected to, along with the ACA Steps and ACA Traditions, gives us the confidence we need to stay on course. Even when we may have strayed from our course, the ACA Steps allow us to re-adjust our bearings and correct our direction until we reach our goal, or reach the road of happy destiny where we will be free to explore the world as the happy, joyous, and free individuals we were meant to be. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

In ACA the most hurt people on the planet are welcomed with open arms, hearts, and ears. Once we have found ACA, it is suggested that we find a fellow traveler to journey with. In these spiritual teams, we venture backward and forward with action coming from love, understanding, and patience. At first, this unconditional support may threaten our sensibility. After all, we have never had support and encouragement at this level, but over time we can re-build the trust that allows us to explore the furthest recesses of our subconscious minds to explore the roots of traumatizing childhoods. We emerge emotionally sober and confident of our views and are supported and encouraged by our groups, our fellow travelers, our inner loving parent, our Inner Child(ren), and our inner Higher Power. This outer team and the inner crew help us find our True Self, learn to discern when it is time to be assertive, and quietly cheer us on to deeper levels of trust and empowerment. What may have started out as a raft became a boat and is now a ship of love and goodwill for all who may venture into our meetings and have the gift of willingness.

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

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Trait 8

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We become addicted to excitement.</i>	<i>We inhibit our fear by staying deadened and numb.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We avoid emotional intoxication and choose workable relationships instead of constant upset.</i>	<i>We uncover, acknowledge and express our childhood fears and withdraw from emotional intoxication.</i>

Addiction to excitement may sound like a good thing, but for adult children it takes a very bad turn. We seek out negative excitement – dangerous situations, travel with untrustworthy individuals, and live life precariously – all the while complaining about our circumstances. As children from alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional families, we received our first doses of excitement very early on, sometimes even *in utero* – before we were born. We were deprived of our innocence as our families struggled with the destructive nature of alcoholism and family dysfunction and the aftermath alcoholism and dysfunction left for the family to clean up. We were thus always in a state of excitement – negative excitement. Tony A. originally wrote that we were addicted to fear, but he thought that the adult children attending the very first ACA meetings would not admit to being fearful. Excitement, he thought, would be easier for them to accept. Negative excitement can come from either being a victim, a victimizer, or a rescuer. In each role, the internal dosing leaves us emotionally intoxicated. Whether at work, home, or even at our meetings, we can conjure up the familiar excitement (fear) we seem to believe is natural. (**The Laundry List**)

ACAs come to meetings because they have hit a bottom, but that bottom is only the beginning of the re-sensitization – the return of feelings. In the Game of Dissociation, we may have used outside substances, a flurry of activities, or a cocktail of internal substances to keep ourselves deadened, numbed, and armored. The result of this was that we felt nothing. The bad news is that we couldn't even have genuinely good feelings beyond the superficial "okay" we would utter when asked. This inhibition eventually stops working for us. Slowly the feelings slip through the cracks of our armor and in our quiet moments we often wonder, "What's wrong with me that I cannot feel?" (**The Other Laundry List**)

As we work the ACA Twelve Steps, reparent ourselves, attend meetings, and process our grief, we begin to see our use of fear as undesirable. We discern the difference between positive and negative excitement and make spiritually conscious decisions to avoid emotional intoxication. Once we have our feelings and buried memories expressed, dosing ourselves with fear or excitement no longer attracts us. In fact, we are repelled by it because it is the life robbing

experience of our childhood. Instead, we look for and engage in workable relationships. No longer dissociated or in denial, we accept when a relationship is fraught with constant upset, and we look for life enriching relationships to further our spiritual development. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

Disinhibiting and freeing the inhibition to our feelings is a very painstaking process that the ACA Steps, reparenting, and ACA meeting attendance make possible. Through the ACA process of recovery, we unearth the hidden childhood fears, we acknowledge our experiences, and we allow ourselves to express our feelings in the safe environment of our meetings, with our fellow travelers and support group. With the support of our ACA family of choice, we can begin to withdraw from the people, activities, and situations that keep us emotionally high, drunk, upset, or otherwise intoxicated. It might feel foreign at first, but eventually we begin to feel rejuvenated and alive – perhaps for the very first time in our life. The freeing up continues as we progress in the program. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION **Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses**

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

* *Pat your face*

Trait 8 Reflections

Laundry List

We become addicted to excitement.

1. If you could go back to one day of your childhood right now as an invisible person, what level of tension/excitement/fear would you feel?

Trait 9

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We confuse love with pity and tend to “love” people who we can “pity” and “rescue”.</i>	<i>We hate people who “play” the victim and beg to be rescued.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We are able to distinguish love from pity, and do not think “rescuing” people we “pity” is an act of love.</i>	<i>We have compassion for anyone who is trapped in the “drama triangle” and is desperately searching for a way out of insanity.</i>

The confusion of feelings is a natural by-product of being raised in a family where alcoholism or dysfunctionalism is denied. In our families, the constant conflict of perceptions and realities left us prone to being confused about a great many things. Without our perceptions and realities being validated by an empathetic family, we even have doubt about such fundamental feelings such as love and pity.

As a child, we mimicked our caregivers. We mirrored their emotional, psychological, and spiritual landscape and didn't have the wherewithal to choose or distinguish our feelings. After all, we were babies. We were bound or entranced to our caregivers' relationship patterns out of our natural survival necessity. Clearly in these kinds of families there was, and still may be, an unhealthy dependence. There was a misalignment between the feelings of pity and sympathy on the one hand and compassion and empathy on the other.

In our relationships we relay these mixed signals that we received as children and draw others to us who are equally misaligned. Thus, if we were heroes, we draw people who need rescuing. If we were martyrs, we become involved with lost causes. We do this, all the while thinking and believing we were having healthy relationships with a “normal” share of ups and downs. Still, these misaligned relationships felt unhealthy, unrewarding, and unfulfilling. (**The Laundry List**)

When a child is bombarded with conflicting and confusing messages, the natural tendency is to become psychologically, physically, and spiritually tone deaf or numb. The Game of Dissociation has its benefits. No longer able to bear the weight of such emotional baggage, we strip down our senses to the basic essentials. If anyone even seems like they want to hoist a small packet of “need” on us, we recoil or strike out at their “neediness”.

Subconsciously, we may sense that a person's need to be rescued is exactly the same need we buried in the wasteland of our childhood. The accompanying realization of that basic (ontological) loss is too much for us to process or acknowledge. We lash out at them and blame them for

being “needy” much the same way we inflicted self-hatred onto our vulnerable True Self, forcing us to take the untenable position of self-sufficiency.

By recycling this dynamic with acquaintances, loved ones, and colleagues, we can unknowingly embrace our ability to stave off our childhood traumas. Yet the resulting psychologically, physically, and spiritually barren person is an inviting oasis to the underwhelmed person. This creates an ecosystem of attraction and repulsion, where both are reenacting a childhood dynamic and each is getting what they subconsciously need to stave off recalling their losses. As a win for the supposed “loser” and a loss for the supposed “winner”, this is a lose-lose situation. (**The Other Laundry List**)

Recovery, in this sense, is to be dedicated to achieving clarity by disentangling the confusion. Using the ACA Steps, we can learn to discern between what we were shown and learned as a habit and what we truly believe. When we share at meetings and the space is created to speak our truth, sometimes the internal light may shine suddenly or, like a dimmer switch, may begin to glow a little bit and gradually brighten our insights. We confused love because we were raised in families that were confused about love. We pitied people and called it love because our families showed care and attention toward those they felt sorry for and called it love. In our meetings we don’t enable one other, we allow each person to share and create a safe place for all – in essence we say and demonstrate love without pity.

As we take the ACA Steps, we are given an opportunity to release ourselves from the misperceptions and misalignments we were bound to as children, and forge new perceptions and alignments on anvils of patience, tolerance, and acceptance. As we strengthen the atrophied spiritual muscles of discernment, we may find some previously unseen weakness that requires some additional attention, and discover new strengths that deserve an equal measure of celebration. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

As we become more spiritually conscious beings, we become more understanding of our false self and familiar with our True Self. From our emotionally sober True Self, compassion gushes forth and we can see the symbiotic interconnectedness between the “victim” and “victimizer”. The interplay between the adrenaline-surged hero or savior, and the melatonin-induced victim or martyr are first realized in us as our True Self emerges and, as we turn our attention outwardly, we can observe these unhealthy dynamics all around us.

Realizing that it was only with God’s grace that we were given the humility to find our way to ACA, our peace comes from knowing that somehow, in some miraculous, mysterious way, God will guide those around us when they are ready. No longer compelled to rush into the flames of discord or desperation, we can stand ready for those who might turn to us and ask for help or direction. With a deep sense of gratitude and love, we can share our initial pilgrimage into our family-of-origin work – making a call, searching the internet, reading a book or article,

talking with a member of the clergy, or even finding an ACA flier in the street seemingly by coincidence – only to find it was God’s invitation to join in this lifetime spiritual quest.
(The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 9 Reflections

The Laundry List

We confuse love with pity and tend to “love” people who we can “pity” and “rescue”.

1. In your past, have you found a “payoff” for “rescuing” a person?

2. In your past, have you found a “payoff” when someone “rescued” you?

3. What is your definition of “confusing love with pity”?

Trait 10

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We have stuffed our feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (denial).</i>	<i>We deny that we've been hurt and are suppressing our emotions by the dramatic expression of "pseudo" feelings.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We come out of denial about our traumatic childhoods and regain the ability to feel and express our emotions.</i>	<i>We accept we were traumatized in childhood and lost the ability to feel. Using the 12 Steps as a program of recovery we regain the ability to feel and remember and become whole human beings who are happy, joyous and free.</i>

In an effort to deal with our overwhelming and terrorizing childhood experiences (trauma), we learned to “stuff” our feelings. Whether we utilized an internal or external “stuffing”, to survive the disruption of our sense of safety we dissociated or disconnected ourselves from our reality and adapted to survive. Sometimes this meant not speaking up because we knew that our families would not be responsive. At other times it might have meant that we used outside substances to help us ignore the feelings. In the Game of Dissociation, we exchanged feeling pain with the relief of not feeling at all. This strategy cost us dearly. In stopping the natural expression of feelings, we also sacrificed our ability to feel or express all of our feelings and became invested in the family denial system. We may have dealt with the overwhelming and terrorizing childhood circumstance, but at what cost? (**The Laundry List**)

One tactic in the Game of Dissociation is to build a life on a false foundation of “resilience”. Our imperfect childhoods gave us “strengths”. These “strengths” are sometimes noted by others, which reinforces the notion that we found a successful tactic out of our childhood calamities. Over time we may have even been able to speak about our childhoods without any rancor, or to proclaim deep feelings and declare ourselves “finished”. Forgiveness, we might have insisted, had been the answer to freeing us from the chains of our childhood experiences. Upon closer inspection, this firmness has some sway. With time the foundation chips away as more of the still unexpressed feelings and memories continue to recycle through our lives. If we are honestly looking at our lives, we might be able to admit that while we did survive, the scars of our childhood experiences still affect us. The unexpressed hurt has nowhere to go. It seems we can neither ignore it nor resolve it unless we first admit it. No longer able to act on the superficial feelings we created to justify our suppression, we find ourselves seated with other ACAs, attempting to pull back the layers of denial and wondering how bad the damage has really been. (**The Other Laundry List**)

The ACA Steps and reparenting are extraordinary tools that fit every aspect of the work we do in ACA. While reading ACA literature and attending meetings, we are bound to have both great and small moments of insight. These insights are usually accompanied with memories of one-time fantasies of a well adjusted childhood, but now are reframed as childhood losses. Along with these insights and memories, a well of feelings may come that properly and completely express the hurt. A full remembrance finally frees us from the Game of Dissociation. No longer trying to shut the door, we find the door is opened through God's grace and through our consistently gentle, loving, respectful, and sometimes humorous work. Though coming out of denial and into reality requires persistence, the reward is greater than we could have imagined. Our feelings and perceptions are keener and clearer; our emotional sobriety is purer and longer lasting. What we once considered our plight, is now our delight. Life is worth living once again. **(The Flip Side of The Laundry List)**

Accepting that we were traumatized in childhood results in a total separation from our former belief system that somehow we were unscathed or super resilient. Once off that haughty perch, our descent into our rightful place is made so much the easier through the application of the ACA Steps. As we practice admitting, coming to believe, turning our will and lives over, searching without fear, becoming entirely ready, humility, and listing and making amends, we land on solid ground of the spiritual principles of our program. From here on, our ability to feel deepens. Our ability to recall sharpens, and as we become more integrated, we also find greater integrity within ourselves and with others. There is perhaps no greater gift than to be a whole person after having been fragmented in so many respects throughout all of our lives. The words "happy, joyous, and free" only begin to hint at the rewards. Spiritual awakening and wholeness are equally descriptive, but cannot capture the full breadth of love of life that the work has given us. With our sense of being a part of this extremely powerful and life giving program, we are ready to help the next member who admits they need help and who is willing to accept it. **(The Flip Side of the Other Laundry List)**

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 11

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.</i>	<i>To protect ourselves from self-punishment for failing to "save" the family we project our self-hate onto others and punish them instead.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We stop judging and condemning ourselves and discover a sense of self-worth.</i>	<i>In accepting we were powerless as children to "save" our family we are able to release our self-hate and to stop punishing ourselves and others for not being enough.</i>

As children we were subjected to extremely difficult conditions which went largely unnoticed. Whether our families were alcoholic or otherwise dysfunctional, chances are that there were few in the family or the community who could see our suffering. As a child, the need to idealize our circumstances left a disconnect between our reality and our fantasy. If we could not be supported in our anger toward our family, that anger had to go somewhere and the only place we could safely place that anger was, ironically, against ourselves.

As we tried to avoid our pain, we became rigid in our views of our conduct and feelings. We figured that the way to avoid the anger of our families was to escape judgment by judging ourselves. The game of dissociating from our feelings gave us safety, but cost us True Self esteem. After all, constant self-criticism means there must be something wrong with merely being. We had tactfully avoided the scorn of our families, but the price we paid was to be hyper-vigilant against any action, behavior, thought or feeling that would reveal our vulnerability or humanness. (**The Laundry List**)

As we grew older, we might have tried to keep the full brunt of our childhood experiences from surfacing, and turned our disappointment and self-hatred onto others. We might have found that others failed to meet our standard. We might have found fault with their clothes, their manner of speaking, how they lived, how they drove – everything and anything that could be criticized was. We took every opportunity to point out flaws and judged them as not being good enough. This undercurrent of criticalness, judgmentalness, and all-or-nothing attack is the belief that, had we been strong enough or good enough, we could have saved our family from alcoholism or dysfunctionalism. If only we had been stronger, wiser, gentler, or smarter, then we could have saved the family.

As a form of grieving, we were stuck in the denial (unfeeling) stage. Denial of our pain became paramount. This "protection" is on its surface designed to make sense of the world around us. However, the net result of such "protection" is that we hurt our True Self and those around us

because of the constant barrage of criticism we level on those who are probably as dissociated as we are. The game is completed by our recycling the same unfeeling and uncaring attitude that was embedded in us as children. (**The Other Laundry List**)

We had been preparing to begin this spiritual journey even before learning about ACA. Perhaps it was the constant reminder of our family dynamics or the sudden admission that we were recycling our childhood scenarios. In order to go to an ACA meeting, we had to first stop believing we were guilty. Certainly we could not attend a meeting and feel that we were culpable. No, to make a meeting there had to be a small opening that allowed us to believe that perhaps it wasn't all our doing, that maybe there were contributing factors that led us to the place we found ourselves in. In this way, we have been given a gift: the gift of being freed from believing we are condemned to a life of misery. At the same time there is hope: hope that we can get better and have value beyond what our childhood circumstances left us feeling.

This sense of True Self worth may be hard to detect at first, but consistent attendance at meetings allows the feeling to increase until we are strong enough to make a bold step of finding a fellow traveler to work the ACA Steps with. We slowly, gradually yet unmistakably withdraw from the Game of Dissociation. No longer able to deny how we were affected, the memories and feelings are revealed to us over the course of our time in ACA. The promise of who we were meant to be comes into view as we make a commitment to our well being born of True Self esteem. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

Accepting our inability to "save" the family brings relief from this burden. Like a huge boulder we have been subconsciously carrying, the release of the tension from playing the Game of Dissociation releases the pent up energy that went into keeping the familial weight on our shoulders and back. No longer bound by self-punishment or being a punisher of those around us, we can each feel the freedom to be a person among persons.

We can allow others to be themselves and without our becoming drawn into a Game of Dissociation. We know the Game of Dissociation is full of false self-hatred that impedes our spiritual growth and the spiritual growth of those around us. We have nothing to gain from playing the game. We no longer get ourselves "high" on others' problems or conjure up "issues" to work on. There will be endless opportunities to rejoin the game.

Instead, we choose life. We stand emotionally sober, facing legitimate issues that need to be addressed with the strength of the ACA Twelve Steps, our fellowship, and our fellow travelers. There is no gain from the game. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 11 Reflections

The Laundry List

We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.

1. Who judged you harshly as a child? Describe who judged you, how they judged you, and how it affected you.

2. Did you observe others being judged in your childhood? Who was getting judged, who was doing the judging, and what was the judging about? Write in detail what happened and how it affected you.

Trait 12

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.</i>	<i>We "manage" the massive amount of deprivation we feel, coming from abandonment within the home, by quickly letting go of relationships that threaten our "independence" (not too close).</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We grow in independence and are no longer terrified of abandonment. We have interdependent relationships with healthy people, not dependent relationships with people who are emotionally unavailable.</i>	<i>By accepting and reuniting with the inner child we are no longer threatened by intimacy, by the fear of being engulfed or made invisible.</i>

As babies, human beings have the longest childhood dependency period of any species. We are dependent on our parents to make us feel safe and accepted. If, as babies, we receive that important nurturing, we can develop naturally and healthfully. If the basic dependency need is not met, we are emotionally, physically, and spiritually abandoned. As adults, we carry this childhood experience to our adult relationships. We subconsciously seek out individuals who are emotionally, physically, and spiritually absent, and insist on staying with the relationship even though we know the relationship is not fulfilling our basic intimacy needs. The mere thought of leaving wracks us with fear – the same fear we experienced as babies looking up to our caregivers and getting everything but love.

This dynamic allows us to remain disconnected from our mates and, just as critically, dissociated from our buried memories and feelings. Constant discord fuels the engine of dissociation by giving us shots of internal drugs. If we are frustrated or angry, we are getting a good dose of adrenaline (an "upper"). If we worry about our mate's well-being, we could be getting a solid dose of endorphins (a "depressant"). If we are depressed, our internal drug of choice may be cortisol or melatonin. With this cocktail of internal drugs, little if any relief from our childhood trauma can be realized. (**The Laundry List**)

Hidden behind our inability to bond with others is a stark truth: we prefer being alone. For us, relationships spell closeness and closeness means pain. The pain of our childhood deprivation, neglect, or abuse is ever present in our interactions with others, and we manage to avoid any close relationships (despite our outward appearance of being sociable) to keep the realization of our childhood pain at bay.

If someone seems nice, we eventually see that they have aspects of their personality that don't match ours. We restrict our circle to only those whose way of interacting with us doesn't cross that invisible emotional wall we have around us to avoid intimacy. Occasionally a person gets through our well-guarded barrier, and gets close enough that we might even think of establishing a genuine relationship. Just as suddenly, we shut them out, because of a real or imagined slight, and reinforce our disconnection from others. We vow never to allow another to come into our world, and thus the disconnection is reinforced.

We declare our independence without realizing we are still imprisoned in our childhood dynamics. The vow of "never again" was probably first a quiet thought as we laid down as children and realized that no one "got us". As adults, we keep our guard up, push back, demean, or otherwise create an atmosphere of fear that blocks any deep connection with others, all the while reinforcing a defensive tactic that speaks to our hidden fears and memories. (**The Other Laundry List**)

With the daily practice of the ACA spiritual principles, we begin to develop our healthy dependence upon our inner loving parent, Inner Child, and our inner Higher Power. As we learn to reparent ourselves through the ups and downs of daily living, we strengthen our bond with our Inner Child. We learn to take our inventory to pull back the veil of denial so that we can witness the return of feelings and memories. The unconscious emotions and memories rise gradually and naturally to the front of our minds, marking our progress.

Allowing these cathartic experiences to happen every so often assures us that the program is working and that our Higher Power is giving us the ability to recall these experiences at the pace Higher Power has determined is best for us. But come they do – and must. It is the expression of these memories and feelings that gives us true independence. When relationships present themselves, we make sure that we are protective of the Inner Child, while also not fearing others unrealistically. We can be an equal partner with others, either as ACA members, fellow travelers, or just by being a member of our communities. No longer wrapped in painful fear, our chosen friendships are easy to entertain and derive wholesome fun from. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

In ACA we begin with the concept that as children, our True Self went into hiding. We must accept this fact if we are going to heal. We cannot reunite or bond with the Inner Child if we believe that healing is a pipe dream. Once we have accepted the reality of our Inner Child, then there is the process of reuniting with that Inner Child. It is important to note that the Inner Child will not reunite with the inner critical survival parent without the assistance of the inner loving parent.

It is best to be confident that our connection to our inner loving parent is strong, that the inner critical survival parent has been identified, and that we have the support of fellow ACAs to help us make and keep this bond. When we have our Inner Child in the loving and protective

embrace of our inner loving parent, we realize that there is nothing “out there” that threatens us “in here”. We can be intimate if we choose and not feel that we are being suffocated or ignored. We don’t take a dose of the drama of those who would want us to get emotionally (hormonally) high with them. Being emotionally, physically, and spiritually present and visible, we take strides in our spiritual evolution. (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 12 Reflections

The Laundry List

We are dependent personalities who are terrified of abandonment and will do anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to experience painful abandonment feelings which we received from living with sick people who were never there emotionally for us.

1. What do you think “dependent personality” means in reference to this trait? Some adult children have hung on to relationships beyond the point of abuse. Has this been the case for you? If so, please explain in detail why you think this happened.

Trait 13

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>Alcoholism is a family disease and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of the disease even though we did not pick up the drink.</i>	<i>We refuse to admit we've been affected by family dysfunction or that there was dysfunction in the home or that we have internalized any of the family's destructive attitudes and behaviors.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>The characteristics of alcoholism and para-alcoholism we have internalized are identified, acknowledged, and removed.</i>	<i>By acknowledging the reality of family dysfunction we no longer have to act as if nothing were wrong or keep denying that we are still unconsciously reacting to childhood harm and injury.</i>

Anyone who was raised in an alcoholic home knows that the alcoholic affected everyone in the family. In this trait, however, we are also told that the entire family is affected by the disease. How can this be? I don't drink – how can I be affected? The second part of this trait spells out the affect: para-alcoholism. When Tony A. wrote "para-alcoholism", he was trying to convey that we were like the alcoholic. In the years since, our experience has shown us that we aren't "like an alcoholic", we are internal addicts just as dependent on the inside drugs as the alcoholic is on the outside substance. In fact, the alcoholic was an internal addict first, then she/he picked up the outside substance. Thus, the characteristics of the alcoholic are the same as the characteristics of the internal addict.

These characteristics were passed on and we acquired them as defenseless children. Whether we chose to drink or use other substances, the core of our being is consumed by addictive attitudes and behaviors. We can easily substitute one substance or behavior for another and keep using the Game of Dissociation to deny the full remembrance of our traumatic childhood experiences. (**The Laundry List**)

Refusing to admit that we have been affected is more damaging to us than merely denying that we or our family have been affected. Refusal is the use of the will to resist. Thus entrenched, any hint of the impact of addiction on our childhoods can be met with strong opposition and a wide range of defenses, some of which can be quite fierce. After all, this admission can mean that everything we have built our lives on has been a falsehood. We might point to our homes, our children, and our careers as testimonials of having found our way. Yet the gnawing question is, "If we are so well-adjusted, then why do we feel so empty that it brings us to these meetings?"

If we look carefully at **The Laundry List** and **The Other Laundry List** traits and do not find anything in them that catches our attention, then perhaps we are not adult children. Indeed this would be a most miraculous result. However, if we are honest, as we survey our lives and consider these lists, it is a rare person who can claim to have survived such experiences without scars that affect other aspects of their lives. (**The Other Laundry List**)

Attending and sharing at meetings, reading ACA literature, and working with a fellow traveler allows the natural and gentle unburdening of unprocessed hurt or grief to occur. The discomfort is identified through consistent work of the ACA Steps. As we acknowledge the effect, the removal of the sting of our childhood experiences becomes less and less. We might even find some of our recollections to be humorous. Our tears of sadness eventually turn to tears of laughter as we begin to realize that the gift of recovery has come into our lives.

As we keep coming to meetings, the Power that brings us to the rooms of ACA reveals the tender love available to us as a result of having such harrowing experiences so that we can have a magnificent ascent to spiritual consciousness. As the retrieval and removal work continues, we are amazed at the gifts we receive. Clarity, insight, and the ability to express unprocessed grief are some of the benefits of working the ACA program. We realize our Higher Power holds us in a tender embrace, allowing us to know the unconditional love of the True Self, of inner Higher Power, Inner Child(ren) and our fellow ACA members. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

As we work the program, our denial eventually turns to acceptance. Our admission that we were affected starts a chain of events that leads us to deeper acknowledgments about our excuses for our contorted world view. In the process we begin to admit that things aren't always right and that we are unconsciously reacting to childhood harms that went unacknowledged in the past. Our injury, our losses, and our grief finally have an opportunity to be released. The joy of living life becomes a reality. Even though we once thought we were living the best lives we could imagine, now our Higher Power opens the blinds, letting new light into our world and shining love wherever we look.

Even the newcomer's resistance is appreciated as the first stage of ACA work. No longer caught in the false self bind, we can empathize without feeling compelled to rescue. We realize that Higher Power is in charge and guiding newcomers the way we were guided – with love and patience. We share about our continuing spiritual awakening – not solely for the benefit it may give others, but more importantly – because it reinforces and furthers our own spiritual consciousness. We are alive! We are truly alive! (**The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

Look at some things (actual)

Make a noise

Eat a peach

Smell some cinnamon

Pat your face

Trait 13 Reflections

The Laundry List

Alcoholism is a family disease and we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of the disease even though we did not pick up the drink.

1. How would you define para-alcoholism? How would you define the characteristics of the disease of alcoholism? Which was it for you; did you pick up the drink, or did you *not* pick up the drink? Can you explain this in detail?

2. Were there any family members who were not affected by the characteristics of the family disease? If so, please list them and how they were different, and why you think they were different. If, in your situation, all members were affected, how does that reality make you feel about them, about yourself, etc.?

Trait 14

The Laundry List	The Other Laundry List
<i>Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.</i>	<i>We act as if we are nothing like the dependent people who raised us.</i>
The Flip Side of The Laundry List	The Flip Side of The Other Laundry List
<i>We are actors, not reactors.</i>	<i>We stop denying and do something about our post-traumatic dependency on substances, people, places and things to distort and avoid reality.</i>

The term para-alcoholic is meant to suggest that as children we adopted or adapted a belief and behavioral system that parallels the alcoholic. In the years since, we have learned that the belief system and behavioral patterns are not “like” (para) an alcoholic but are indeed the same as the alcoholic. The non-drinking member of the alcoholic family system is governed by the same internal biochemical and psychological disposition that ultimately leads to alcoholism, addiction, and unhealthy dependence. Viewed in this light, adult children are equally dependent on the chaos, upset, excitement, and fear as the alcoholic is to the alcohol, drugs, or behaviors. In fact, these attitudes and dispositions are a precursor to becoming an alcoholic or addict.

Clearly, the alcoholic or addict is first addicted to these internal biochemical and psychological attitudes and disposition, and this leads to the use of outside substances as an add on to the already primed system.

The reactive quality that we can easily see in the alcoholic’s behavior is just as evident in the non-drinking member of the alcoholic family system; although not as socially stigmatized as the stumbling alcoholic or the drug addict, it is just as intoxicating and life draining. Our primary addictive reactions are our “high”, no matter how socially acceptable or righteous, and it is as progressive and deadly as a secondary addiction to alcohol, drugs, and other addictive behaviors. Whether we are enabling or acting like a hero, our “role” in the Game of Dissociation rewards us by not allowing us to feel the pain of being emotionally, physically, and spiritually hurt. (**The Laundry List**)

While we can more easily admit that our families may have been unhealthy, we usually have an escape in denial: “It didn’t affect me.” We act differently; we are responsible, well adjusted, model employees, and productive members of our society. This third act completely conceals the first and second act of this classic family tragedy. Without the expression of the buried hurt along with the memories they are attached to, our lives feel shallow and superficial. Our relationships are guarded. We are overly sensitive to people’s words and actions. The role in

this act is a difficult one that requires a great deal of emotional, physical, and psychic energy to keep the reality of our childhood experiences at a safe distance. The transfer of our family's dysfunction is fused with our being, even if we insist that it doesn't exist. Denial and distinction does not erase the plain fact that the apple and the tree are so closely connected. As social beings, we are bound to our family system from our need to belong, and if belonging means survival, we hold onto that bond with all our might until one day it occurs to us that the bond may be affecting our well-being.

The Game of Dissociation can last a lifetime or it can become dismantled slowly over a span of days or months when we start to see how we are dosing ourselves by indulging in superiority – intellectual escapism – self-righteous disdain for our fellow human beings. All of these perspectives are quite common and celebrated in a culture rich with critical absent-mindedness. We might strike out on our own, and feel that putting distance and some semblance of normalcy into our lives has severed the link. However, no matter where we go, there we are, finding another unhealthy dependence just like the one we grew up knowing best. We can run, but the addiction lurks in our subconscious, looking for the opportunity to numb us to the extraordinary burden of our heavy spirits. (**The Other Laundry List**)

The freedom of choice is rarely given freely. The work we do by attending meetings, taking the ACA Steps, doing service, connecting with our inner loving parent, getting in touch with our Inner Child, facing our inner critical survival parent, working with fellow travelers – yes, it is a lot of work – and we do it to achieve the freedom to choose how we respond to life versus reacting to it. In the heat of the moment, many of us will still react. However, we then take time later on to use the tools of recovery. We better understand the sequence of events, the part we played, and the possible alternative choices we could have made, and make a note to try it differently the next time we find ourselves in the same situation. As human beings, we are likely to make many mistakes.

Now, when we make a mistake, we have tools that show us some of the ways we can correct our human foibles. No longer dragged into the Game of Dissociation, we can release ourselves from the reactive qualities and stop the internal biochemical rush we previously thought was desirable. We now have keen awareness of these internal drugs as poisonous to our new way of life, and we take a healthy stand for living life without the use of this internal addiction. We simply walk away from the Game of Dissociation. The life we were meant to live awaits us, and we steady our gaze on our spiritual consciousness, and integration, and move forward. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

Resistance to the program is continuous, but through our consistent effort, the support of our fellowship, and with the grace of our Higher Power, we have stopped denying that we are recreating and recycling our learned reactions to being raised in a terrorized family system. The work of disentangling the numerous ways we are bound by unhealthy dependence on the

“stand-ins” of substances, people, places, and things is exhilarating – in a positive, spiritual way that without ACA would have caused us frustration and confusion. Led by the ACA Steps to deeper consciousness, we receive daily opportunities for spiritual growth and evolution. Our perceptions are less clouded by our past, and the authentic experiences that are presented in our daily lives are greeted by healthy, appropriate, and precise actions to be worked through instead of avoided. The road ahead of us has many curves, valleys, and tunnels. We slow down our speed to maneuver them graciously, knowing the Higher Power is only asking us to do what we need to do to advance our spiritual consciousness. Instead of playing the Game of Dissociation, we take our place in this world as vibrant lovers of life. (**The Flip Side of The Laundry List**)

ORIENTATION

Be Prepared to Engage Your Senses

*Look at some things (actual)
Make a noise
Eat a peach
Smell some cinnamon
Pat your face*

Trait 14 Reflections

The Laundry List

Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

1. Some people use the term “knee-jerk reaction” to describe something a person does automatically, as if on reflex. Would you say that you have some of these knee-jerk reactions that you’ve noticed? Please list them, and circle the ones that you remember other family members expressing.