

ACA Newcomers & The Inner Child

Charlie H., Oct 17, 2020

This material draws from ACA's "Getting Started" & "Loving Parent Guidebook" projects



Overview

- *Emotional needs of ACA newcomers are similar to the needs of the Inner Child.*
- *Knowing this can jump-start our recovery*



Overview

- How are the newcomer and the Inner Child alike?
- Exploring the Inner Child's emotional healing
- Insights and priorities for early recovery
- Reparenting and newcomer support tools



What If You're Not a Newcomer?

- Knowing the needs of our Inner Child helps us at all stages of recovery
- Accepting our Inner Child gets us unstuck
- Loving ourselves as we are frees us from shame, helps us set boundaries



Opening Survey

- Have you made contact with an Inner Child?
- Do you feel confident you can be a parent to that Inner Child?
- Do the terms 'Inner Child' and 'Reparenting' confuse you?



Needs of the Newcomer

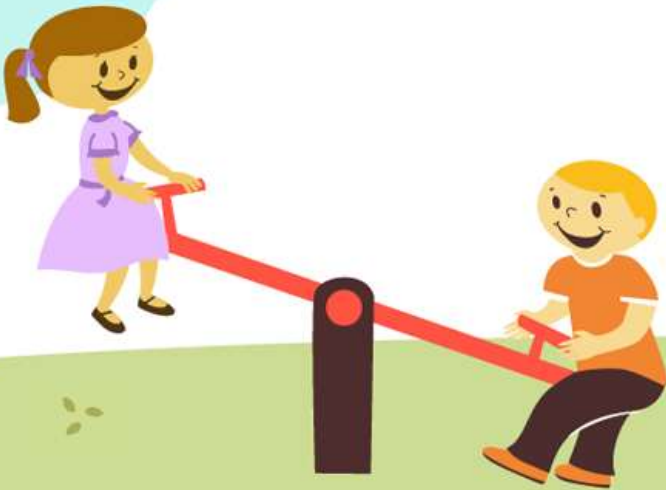
- 1) Safety (freedom from fear)
- 2) Validation (emerge from denial)
- 3) Grieve Early Losses (feel our feelings)
- 4) Love and Self-Worth (release all childhood shame)



Dealing with the needs of the Inner Child will help us deal with the needs of the newcomer



Needs of the Inner Child



Our Childhood Lives Within Us—Today



Our Parenting Lives Within Us—Today





A Loving Parent ...

- Focuses on child's needs
- Accepts a child's limitations
- Provides the essentials: Love, Safety, Validation, Guidance and Encouragement
- Models healthy adult behavior
- Solves adult problems for the child: "I've Got this."
- Avoids abandonment/shame



Supports a Healthy Child ...



- Feels secure
- Is capable of trust
- Forms attachments
- Is emotionally open, authentic, and caring
- Ready to explore a bigger world
- Responsible for choices



Who Becomes a Healthy Adult ...

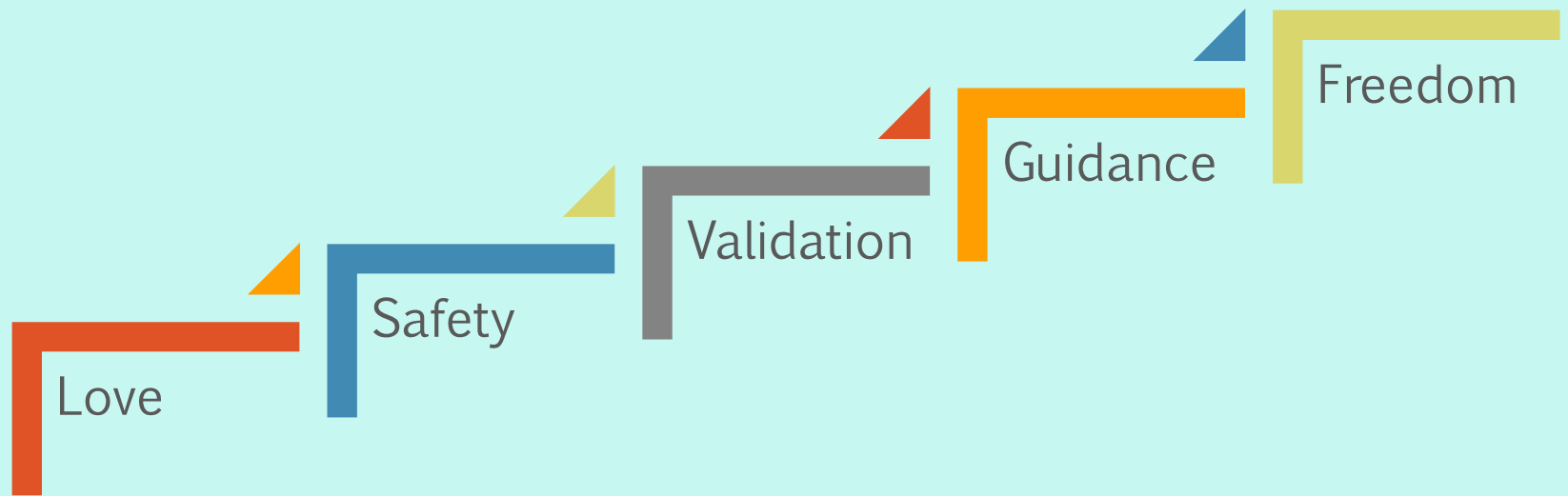


- Honors 'real identity'
- Able to share intimacy
- Sets healthy boundaries
- Not terrified of abandonment
- Chooses healthy friends and partners
- Accepts adult responsibility

Source: The ACA Promises and Solution



The Needs of Healthy Childhood



‘Normal’ Losses



- Loving parents help us cope with disappointment, frustration, etc.
- Life as a learning experience
- ‘Natural’ 12 Steps

Key: Even in moments of loss, we feel supported. This builds trust & hope.



When our family functions well...



We trust the world enough to face new challenges, form human connections, and take responsibility



Needs of the Newcomer

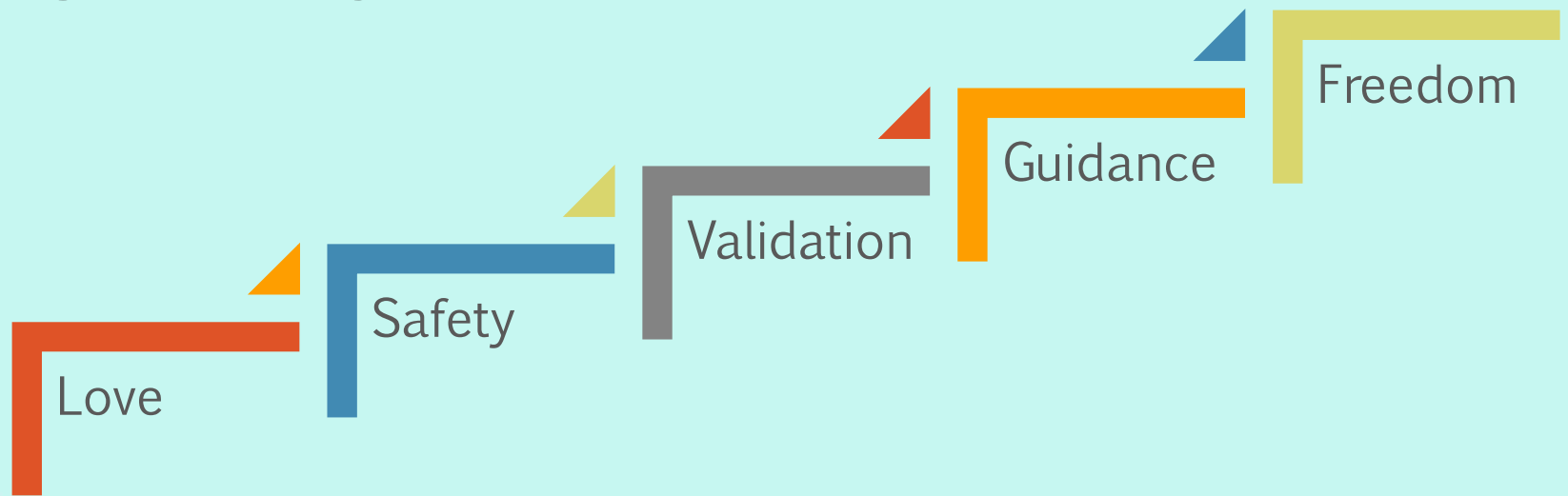
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Dealing with the needs of the Inner Child will help us deal with the needs of the newcomer



Newcomer Needs What We Did Not Get as Children



What Went Wrong?

From the Big Red Book: “Adult Child”

- ‘When confronted, we regress to a stage in our childhood.’
- ‘Responds to adult situations with self-doubt, self-blame, or *a sense of being wrong or inferior*—all learned from stages of childhood.’



The Lasting Harm of a Critical Parent



A Critical (or Unavailable) Parent ...



- Focuses on own needs
- Rejects a child's limitations
- Projects anger, fear, and shame onto others
- Avoids adult responsibility
- Practices shame, blame & abandonment



Creates a Wounded Child ...



- Feels unsafe
- Is afraid to trust
- Isolated/alone ('Don't Talk')
- Emotionally numb ('Don't Feel')
- Fearful of larger world
- Shame-based; fears blame and judgment



Who Becomes a Wounded Adult Child



- Feels unsafe
- Is afraid to trust
- Isolated/alone (“Don’t talk”)
- Emotionally numb (“Don’t Feel”)
- Fearful of larger world
- Shame-based; fears blame and judgment



The Adult Child may seem outwardly controlling, confident, etc., but they retain a Wounded Inner Child’s perspective.



When Our Family Fails Us...



We distrust the world, avoid human connections, struggle to grow, stay stuck in our wounded childhood



A Tragic Inner Dialogue



Our life is defined by an internalized frightened child, and an internalized critical parent. Every life situation can re-create this shaming interaction.

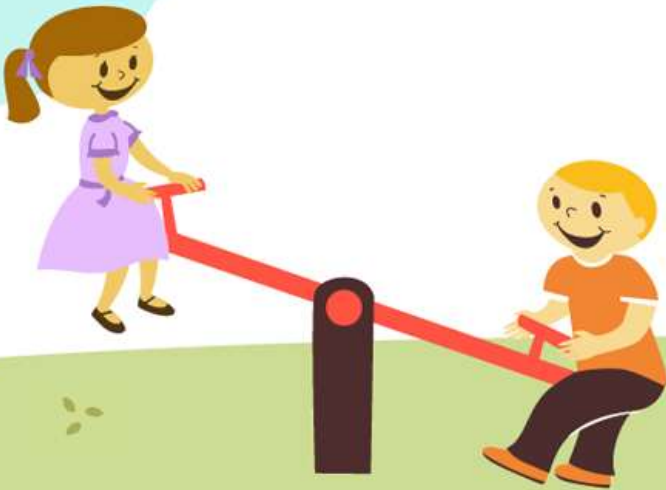
The Tragedy of Self-Abandonment

As we grow up,
we forget and
ultimately abandon
our Inner Child.

We become numb
to our own
inspiration, feelings,
and dreams.



Loving Our Child=Supporting the Newcomer



Our Parenting Lives Within Us—Today



All the feelings we experience as newcomers echo the hurt
Inner Child who never healed. 🌻

Our Childhood Lives Within Us—Today



We couldn't process feelings and events when they happened. So we carry old hurts and fears inside us—ready to be activated every day.

▪ Signs of a Wounded Inner Child

- 'We judge ourselves harshly,' feel inferior
- 'We fear people and authority figures'
- 'We lose our identity, try to people-please'
- We hide behind a 'false self'
- 'We stuff our feelings'
- We revert to a 'frightened child' state (emotional flashbacks)



Sources: ACA Laundry List and BRB 'Adult Child'

Why Do Newcomer and Inner Child Needs Align?



Why Do Newcomer and Inner Child Needs Align?



‘Newcomer anxiety’ IS our Inner Child. Old wounds never heal until we enter ACA!



Why Do Newcomer and Inner Child Needs Align?



Our wounded child/Laundry List qualities can hold us back. Early reparenting is important.



A Loving Parent ...



- Focuses on child's needs
- Accepts a child's limitations
- Provides the essentials: Love, Safety, Validation, Guidance and Encouragement
- Models healthy adult behavior
- Solves adult problems for the child: "I've got this."



Above all, avoids shame and abandonment



Ways to Access Your Loving Parent



- Letter to a Loving Parent
- Affirmations
- Speak kindly to a childhood photo (or image)
- Ask for guidance (others in recovery, meditation, prayer)
- ‘What would a Loving Parent do?’



A Loving Parent doesn't have to be perfect, just 'good enough.' Think of Loving Parents you've known



Ending the Tragic Inner Dialogue



Our Inner Child hears, and absorbs, every negative comment made to us. A Loving Parent must quiet our Critical Parent and others who belittle us.

Facing the Critical Parent

- Must end language of shaming and abandonment
- Our child hears and absorbs everything
- Ending self-shaming language opens space for loving language that will heal our Inner Child



Putting the Loving Parent in Charge

- Be a loving parent to the Critical Parent. Compassion & respect
- Thank the Critical Parent for caring.
- “Why don’t you sit and rest?”
- Think of the Critical Parent as a well-intended grandparent or parent-in-law. It has ideas, but you are in charge.
- “I appreciate everything you’ve done to protect us.”



Setting Boundaries

- 'I've got this.'
- 'I need you to speak kindly.'
- Turn attention to (and reassure) the Inner Child
- Scrutinize the Inner Parent's 'truth' and authority. Ask others for a reality check.
- Patience and persistence

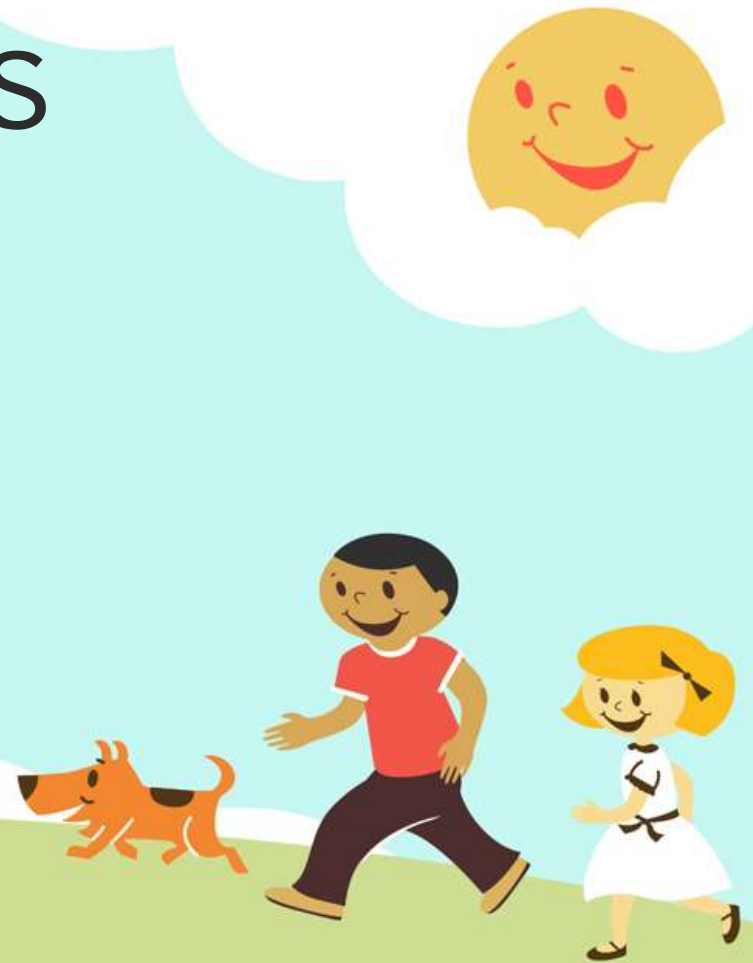


Ways to Access the Inner Child

- Lead with your heart
 - Look at photos of you as a child
 - Post affirmations in your home and read them.
 - Do things you enjoyed as a child—or wanted to do as a child
 - Non-dominant handwriting
 - Guided meditations
 - Imagine you have a real physical child at your side
 - Take regular time each at least 2-3 days a week
-
- **Be consistent, fulfill promises, and accept their feelings!**



Childhood Photos



Photos help us connect emotionally to our real early selves; and understand we were not to blame for our family. We were children.

Revisiting Childhood



Do activities you found some joy or safety in as a child. Imagine your child is right beside you as play, walk, whatever.

Words of Love for Your Inner Child



- 'I love you.'
- 'You're beautiful'
- 'I'm here for you'
- 'What do you need?'
- 'It's okay to be a child'
- 'It's okay to be
(happy/sad/angry/hurt)'
- 'I'm so glad you're alive'



Loving Touch



Creating Space for Your Inner Child's Feelings



- Support their grieving
- Validate their emotions
- Accept and release your own sorrow



Grieving is a painful but essential gateway to a full healing.

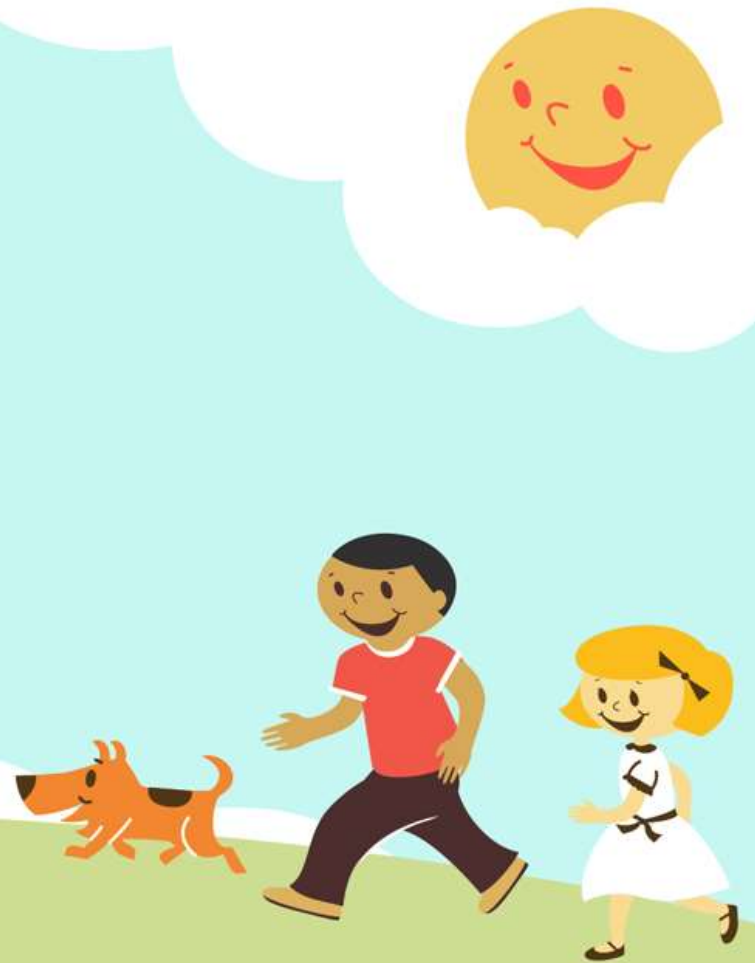


Guided Meditation



© Shutterstock / fizkes

Please close your eyes and slow your breathing.



What Our Loving Parent Can Give



- Provides the essentials: Love, Safety, Validation, Guidance and Encouragement
- Focuses on child's needs
- Accepts limitations; remembers, 'This is a precious child in me'
- (Gently) reins in Critical Parent
- Finds 'safe' Friends
- 'I love you. You're okay!'



When Reparenting Is Working ...



Our inner world begins to heal. We gain trust in ourselves, a Guiding Power, and in the safe people we invite into our lives. Our Inner Child grows in trust.



When Your Inner Child Feels Safe

- Feelings get unfrozen.
- We start growing again.
- We feel love in our hearts.
- The Inner Child gains trust.
- Laundry List trades fade.
- We become whole & happier.



Supporting Your Inner Child, and Your ACA Newcomer



Early ACA Is Like 'First Day of School'



- You may feel scared
- You may feel alone, like you're on the 'outside'
- Stupid & confused, like you don't know what you're doing
- Don't know how to be honest



For newcomers, anxiety is the norm. Our Inner Child feels very exposed. 🌻



Critical Parent Messages ...



In High-Stress Situations, We Regress



Newcomers Can Use a Loving Parent



- ‘It’s Okay’
- ‘You’re With Friends Now’
- Set Boundaries for Critical Parent Messages
- ‘I’m going to be with you’
- (Optional) ‘HP is with us’



In moments of doubt, put the Loving Parent in charge. Offer love and support. The child and newcomer will take this in.



Reparenting the Newcomer



In recovery meetings

- Boundaries
- Feelings
- Ask for help, especially others' experience
- Praising ourselves (eg, 'You're brave')
- 'You're not alone'



Newcomer Affirmations



- 'I will take time to listen to my Inner Child'
- 'It is okay not to know everything'
- 'It is OK to explore & say I like this, or I like that.'
- 'It is OK to say I love myself.'
- 'Inner Child, I love you'



Source: BRB, Chapter 8, Pages 328-330



Newcomers & Inner Children: Common Needs



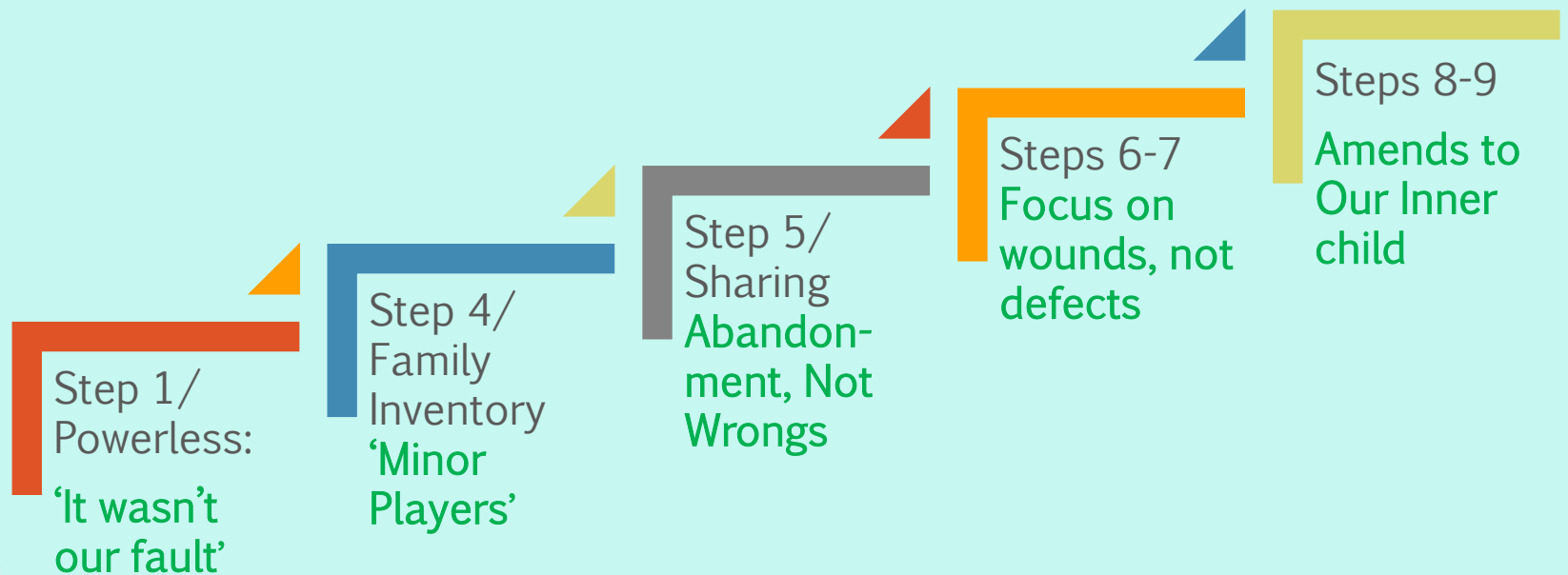
- Gentleness
- Patience
- Accountability
- Love & FORGIVENESS
- Care & Support—From Self and Others



After years of isolation, we need help learning to form healthy trust. Trust>Emerge From Isolation>Growth



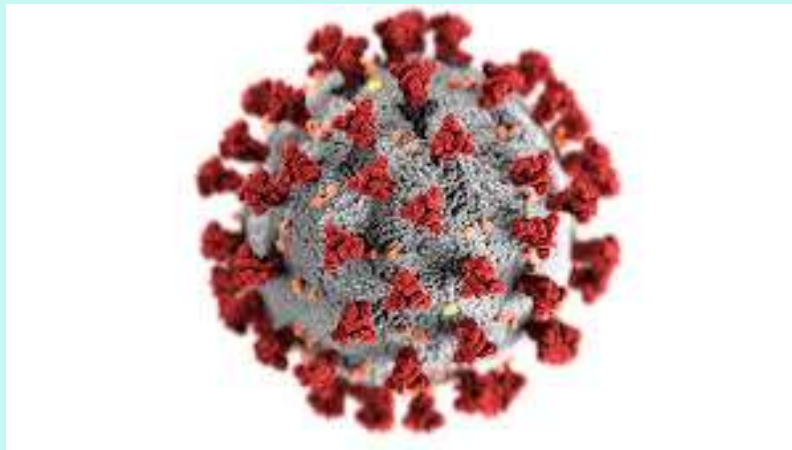
Childhood-Focused Steps...



Steps bring us clarity. When we examine our childhood with compassion, they help us release all shame and forgive ourselves.



Newcomers in the COVID Era



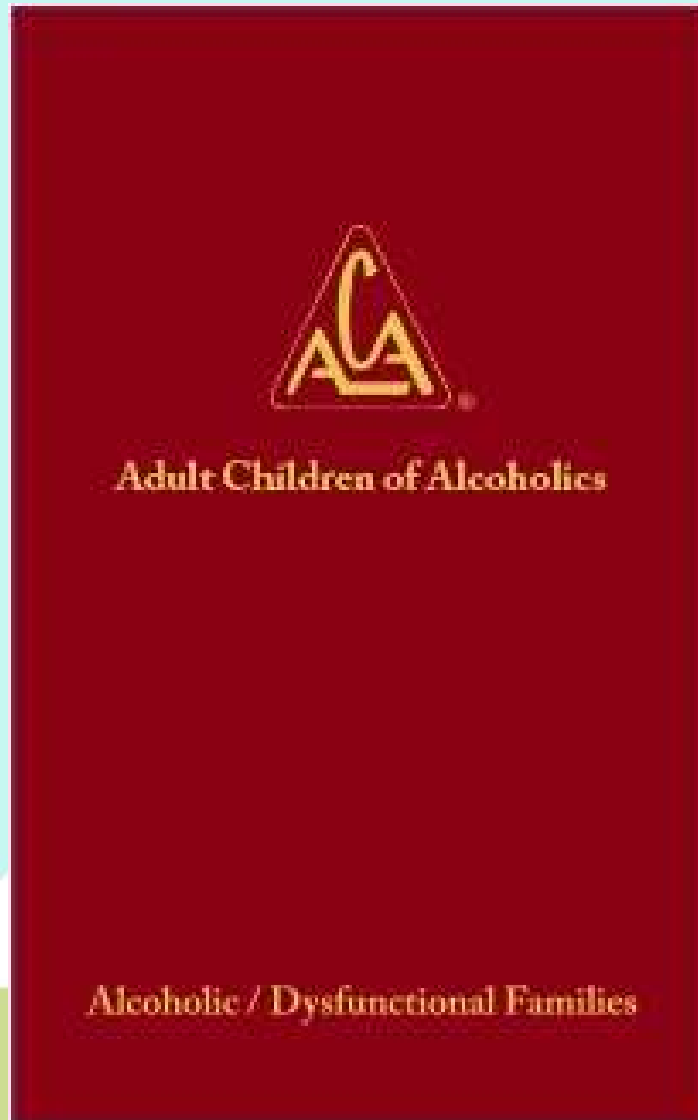
- Outreach must be more proactive-Take risks
- Community even more important
- Newcomer resources are growing! (Getting Started, LPG, Ready Set Go!!)
- Build the Loving Parent relationship-never need to be alone

Source: BRB, Chapter 8, Pages 328-330

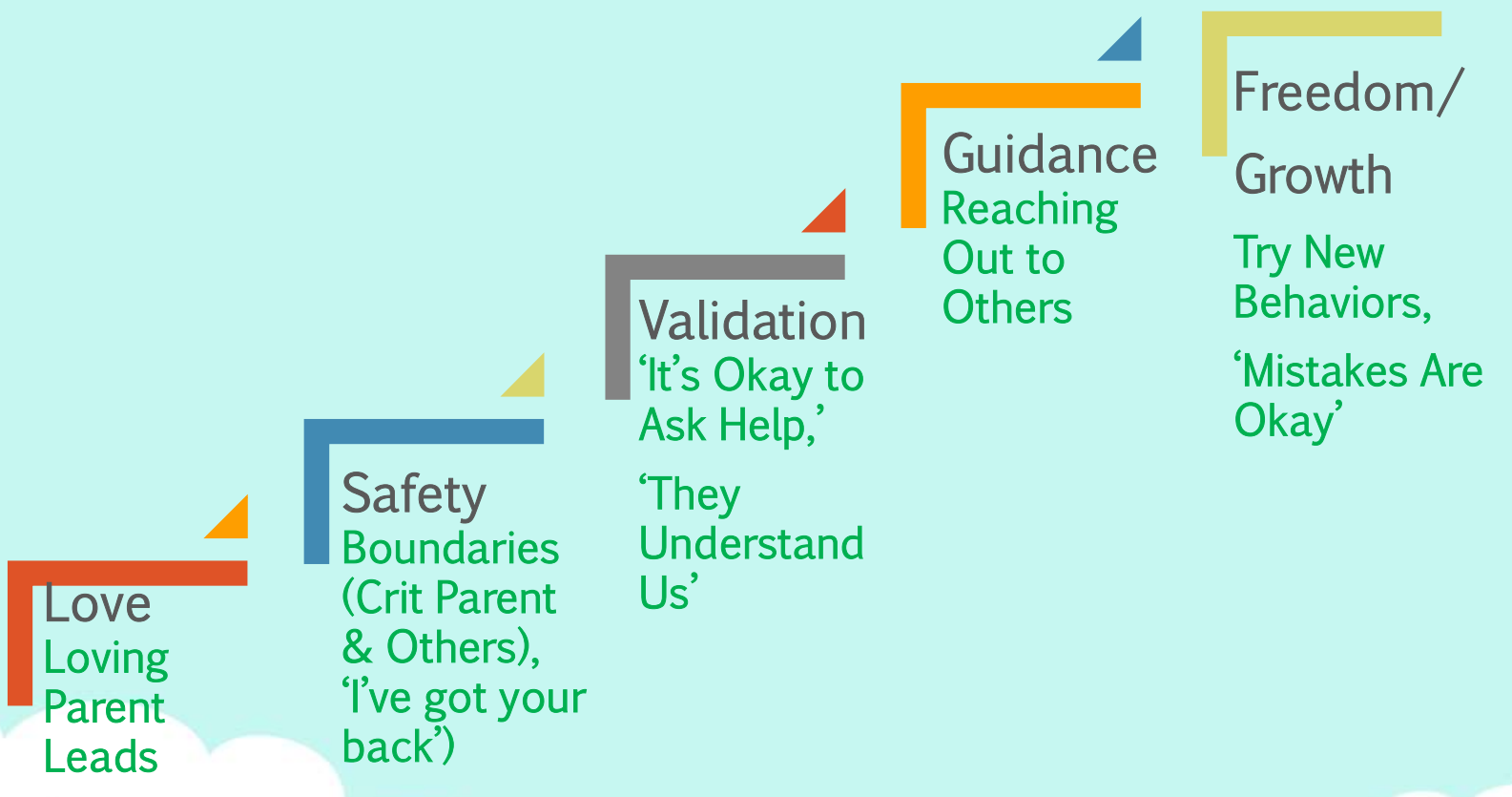


Resources

- Big Red Book, Chapter 8
- New WSO book in 2021, 'Loving Parent Guidebook'
- Others in ACA
- Trained Therapists
- Non-ACA literature
- WSO audios, including April 25 program on new literature



Supporting a Path to Growth...



Love
Loving
Parent
Leads

Safety
Boundaries
(Crit Parent
& Others),
'I've got your
back')

Validation
'It's Okay to
Ask Help,'
'They
Understand
Us'

Guidance
Reaching
Out to
Others

Freedom/
Growth
Try New
Behaviors,
'Mistakes Are
Okay'

With support, our ACA 'Kindergarten' is the start
of a lifelong journey of love and learning

Closing Survey

- Have you made contact with an Inner Child?
- Do you feel confident you can be a parent to this Inner Child?
- Do the terms 'Inner Child' and 'Reparenting' confuse you?



Summary & Questions



Note: This material was presented at the 2020 Western Great Lakes annual meeting. It is not approved literature of the ACA World Service Organization and reflects only the author's experience. Please do not reproduce or publish without permission from the author.