The Laundry List

Characteristics of an Adult Child

1) We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.
2) We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.
3) We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.
4) We either become alcoholics, marry them, or find another compulsive person such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5) We live from the viewpoint of victims and are attracted by that weakness in our love and friendship relationships.
6) 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.
7) We get guilty feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8) We become addicted to excitement.
9) We continue with pity and tend to "love" people who can "pity" and "rescue".
10) 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).
11) We judge ourselves harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.
12) We are irresponsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.
13) We confuse love with pity and tend to "love" people who we can "pity" and "rescue".
14) Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

The Other Laundry List

Characteristics of an Integrated Person

1) We move out of isolation and are not unrealistically afraid of other people, even authority figures.
2) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
3) We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.
4) We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.
5) We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.
6) We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.
7) We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.
8) We avoid emotional intimacy and choose workable relationships instead of constant upsets.
9) We are able to distinguish love from pity, and do not think "rescuing" people we "pity" is an act of love.
10) We come out of denial about our traumatic childhoods and regain the ability to feel and express our emotions.
11) We stop judging and condemning ourselves and discover a sense of self-worth.
12) 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.
13) The characteristics of alcoholism and para-alcoholism we have internalized are identified, acknowledged, and removed.
14) We are actors, not reactors.
15) We face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation which traumatized the very authority figures who frightened and caused them to withdraw.
16) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
17) We are responsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.
18) We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.
19) We inhibit our fear by staying deadened and numb.
20) We hate people who "play" the victim and begin to be rescued.

The Flip Side Of The Laundry List

Characteristics of an Adult Child

1) We face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation which traumatized the very authority figures who frightened and caused them to withdraw.
2) We realize the sanctuary we have built to protect the fragmented and injured child within has become a prison and we become willing to risk moving out of isolation.
3) We recover, acknowledge and express our childhood fears and withdraw from emotional intoxication.
4) We have compassion for anyone who is trapped in the "drama triangle" and is desperately searching for a way out of insanity.
5) 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.
6) We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.
7) We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.
8) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
9) We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.
10) We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.
11) We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.
12) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
13) We are responsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.
14) We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.
15) We inhibit our fear by staying deadened and numb.
16) We hate people who "play" the victim and begin to be rescued.

The Other Flip Side Of The Other Laundry List

Characteristics of an Integrated Person

1) We face and resolve our fear of people and our dread of isolation which traumatized the very authority figures who frightened and caused them to withdraw.
2) We realize the sanctuary we have built to protect the fragmented and injured child within has become a prison and we become willing to risk moving out of isolation.
3) We recover, acknowledge and express our childhood fears and withdraw from emotional intoxication.
4) We have compassion for anyone who is trapped in the "drama triangle" and is desperately searching for a way out of insanity.
5) 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.
6) We do not use enabling as a way to avoid looking at our own shortcomings.
7) We do not feel guilty when we stand up for ourselves.
8) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
9) We are not automatically frightened by angry people and no longer regard personal criticism as a threat.
10) We do not have a compulsive need to recreate abandonment.
11) We stop living life from the standpoint of victims and are not attracted by this trait in our important relationships.
12) We do not depend on others to tell us who we are.
13) We are responsible and self-centered. Our inflated sense of self-worth and self-importance prevents us from seeing our deficiencies and shortcomings.
14) We make others feel guilty when they attempt to assert themselves.
15) We inhibit our fear by staying deadened and numb.
16) We hate people who "play" the victim and begin to be rescued.
Completing the Circle in the Cycle of Violence

To understand how the Cycle of Family Violence is transmitted (from parents to children) it is necessary to identify and delineate all of the components of the inter-generational transfer of traumatically generated internal addiction and emotional intoxication. These are: repetition of dialogue (self-talk and self-recrimination), re-creation of scenes (the symbolic movies in the mind) and situations (with real-time “stand-ins” - the “Replacements”) which together can be called “The Distractors”, the recapitulation of emotions (feels the same) through the reconstitution of the biochemistry (internal uppers, downers, pain-killers and thought regulators) and reconfiguration of the body (held the same way), all of which is called the process of traumatic reproduction (Freud/Ferenczi). This results in a predictable dissociative forgetting which leaves a person numb, unconscious and stuck in the past.

Children who are caught up in the frightening, erratic, chaotic and demoralizing environment of a severely dysfunctional family are constantly searching for clues and indicators as to what their highly conditional “providers” demand and will tolerate in meeting the basic needs of the children. The children have no way of knowing that their caregivers themselves are relying on a confusing, hurtful, “superstitious” mix of sane and insane behaviors and beliefs about survival that was passed on to them. The beat goes on with one generation pounding its insanity into the next. In order not to go completely mad children have to dissociate or partially separate from their unbearable reality. The dilemma of dissociation is that traumatized people can’t afford to forget what they do not want to remember. The memories of early trauma experiences represent how the world was, who to fear, and what must be done to maintain some degree of safety. Therefore, early trauma memories and emotions are always threatening to break through into consciousness. A dissociated person is preoccupied with dividing energy and attention into maintaining dissociation and attempting to live some kind of meaningful life in the present.

The Problem says we are “dependent personalities” who are “terrified of abandonment,” and will “do almost anything to hold on to a relationship in order not to be abandoned emotionally”. However we keep “choosing insecure relationships because they” match “our childhood relationship with alcoholic or dysfunctional parents.” The “almost anything” we will do is to hold on to the “package deal” of dissociative living we were given in childhood and the not unreasonable belief that that is the only way we can do. The form of the package deal follows Eric Berne’s life game of “alcoholic”. However, for adult children, Berne’s variation of “dry drunk” is the best fit. As in all of Berne’s games there are a series of moves by the players (transactions) that result in a “payoff”.

In the “game” of dissociation there are two basic positions, victim and victimizer (persecutor). The victim may have a confederate, the earnest, “helpful”, ineffective rescuing friend or pal (Type I Rescuer). The Type I Rescuer is essentially a victim waiting to happen. The persecutor may be disguised as a highly conditional rescuer – “I’ll ‘accept’, ‘love’ you if and when” (Type II Rescuer). Of course the conditions can never be met and the Type II Rescuer can flip into the persecutor at the drop of a hat. The persecutor is the one who gives the insults and injuries that maintain dissociation (dissociative dosing transactions) while the victim is the one who does the receiving. A “successful” dosing transaction is one in which the insult and injury exchange leaves both (or all) the players in the game more absent than present (unconscious–stupefied) and more there then (regressed) than here now, in other words, dissociated (hypoxic, hypercarbic, hypoglycemic).

Both victim and persecutor are terrified of abandonment. The victim is more obviously desperate and needy while the persecutor is so terrified of falling into the abyss of abandonment that the terror has been completely walled off. The only form of love or connection that can be tolerated is to be the one who punishes and abandons, to not be the one who is punished, neglected and finally abandoned. Children don’t know they are targeted to become objects of addiction in the “game” of dissociation, that the adults will overtly and covertly force the children to accept (introject) their demands that they embrace the addict way of life. To put it bluntly the demand from adults to children in a conflict-addicted family is “we need you to be a player (addict) to cope with and endure our hyper-dependency syndrome”. The forced introjection is the means whereby the “game” of dissociation is transmitted intergenerationally along with the twisted, superstitious justification / rationale for continuing the family’s insanity.

The solution is to use the 12 Steps to eject the introjects and stop the “game”, to regain personal integrity, to become sober and sane. The essential point is the traumatic etiology of addiction – stop the trauma / re-trauma; stop the dissociation / addiction. The word addiction comes from the Latin “to say to”, to say yes to a strong habit (denial). Essentially recovery is a matter of turning that around and just saying “No!”

The Complete Picture