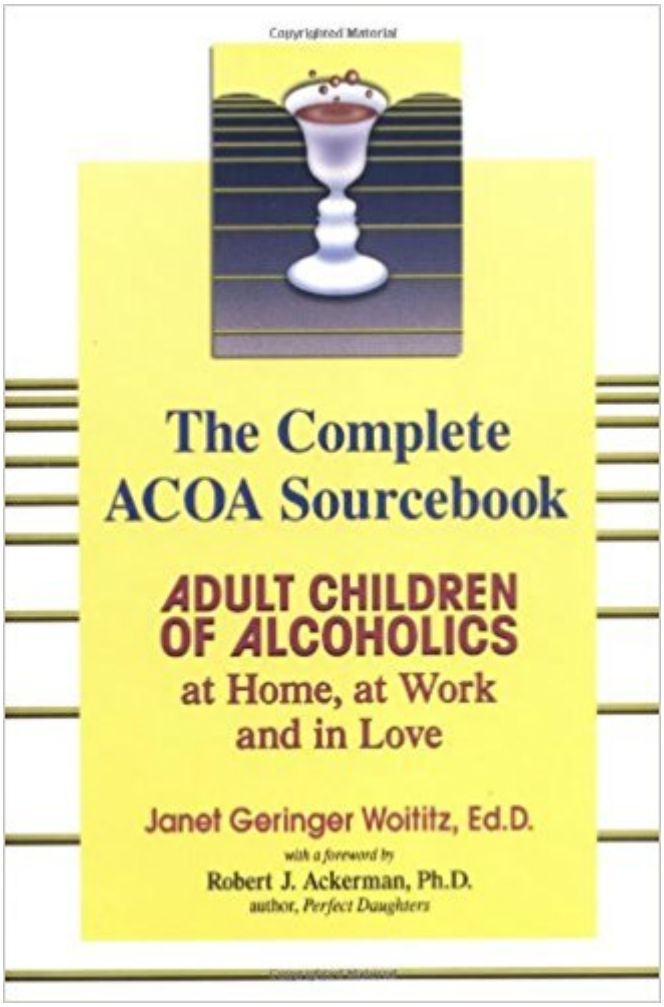
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The Complete ACOA Sourcebook: Adult Children Of Alcoholics At Home, At Work And In Love



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Synopsis

When they were first released in the 1980s, Janet Woititz's groundbreaking works, Adult Children of Alcoholics, Struggle for Intimacy and The Self-Sabotage Syndrome, provided a new message of hope to adult children who had grown up in the shadow of alcoholic parents. Their message today is as profound and timeless as it was two decades ago. Now, in this complete collection, readers will learn again the insight and healing power of Janet Wotitiz's words. The Complete ACoA Sourcebook is a compilation of three of Dr. Woititz's classic books, addressing head-on the symptoms of The Adult Children of Alcoholics syndrome and providing strategies for living a normal life as an adult. Readers will find help for themselves: at home, in intimate relationships and on the job. They will discover the reasons for the way they think, believe and feel about themselves; ACoAs often feel isolated, have difficulty in relationships, in the workplace and in feeling good about themselves. Readers who are familiar with Woititz's work will find wisdom once again in this classic collection. Those new to ACoA will gain fresh insight into their behavior patterns and find an avenue for self-love and healing. Noted ACoA expert Dr. Robert Ackerman, author of the best-selling Perfect Daughters and Silent Sons, provides a foreword and explains why Janet Woititz's message will continue to help millions of readers for generations to come.

Book Information

Paperback: 413 pages
Publisher: HCI; 1 edition (March 8, 2002)
Language: English
ISBN-10: 1558749608
ISBN-13: 978-1558749603
Product Dimensions: 1 x 6 x 9 inches
Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)
Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 72 customer reviews
Best Sellers Rank: #124,569 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #39 inÃ Â Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Addiction & Recovery > Adult Children of Alcoholics #213 inÃ Â Books > Health, Fitness & Dieting > Addiction & Recovery > Alcoholism #11494 inÃ Â Books > Self-Help

Customer Reviews

Janet Woititz was the author of Adult Children of Alcoholics, which was on the New York Times bestseller list for over a year. She wrote several other books, including Lifeskills for Adult Children; The Self-Sabotage Syndrome; The Struggle for Intimacy; Marriage on the Rocks; Healing Your

Sexual Self and many others. Woititz was the director and founder of the Institute for Counseling and Training in West Caldwell, New Jersey.

Chapter 5 Recovery Hints It is important to be clear what recovery means for adult children. Alcoholism is a disease. People recovering from alcoholism are recovering from a disease. The medical model is accepted by all responsible folks working in alcoholism treatment. Being the child of an alcoholic is not a disease. It is a fact of your history. Because of the nature of this illness and the family response to it, certain things occur that influence your self-feelings, attitudes and behaviors in ways that cause you pain and concern. The object of ACOA recovery is to overcome those aspects of your history that cause you difficulty today and to learn a better way. To the degree that none of us have ideal childhoods and to the degree that even an ideal childhood may be a cause for some concern, we are all recovering to some extent or other, in some way or other. Because there are so many alcoholic families and because we have been fortunate in being able to study them, it is possible to describe in general terms what happens to children who grow up in that environment. To the degree that other families have similar dynamics, individuals who have grown up in other "dysfunctional" systems identify with and recover in very much the same way. RECOVERY HINTS FOR ADULT CHILDREN Reading the book Adult Children of Alcoholics is the first step toward recovery. This section addresses the questions "What now?" and "How can I protect the quality of my recovery?" For those recovering from addiction to alcohol and/or drugs. If you have been in recovery for a year or more, you are ready to proceed to the next step. Many folks who are doing well staying sober experience the nagging feeling that there is a piece missing. Addressing the ways in which your past impacts on your present and filling in those empty spaces will enrich the quality of your sobriety. If you have been in recovery for less than a year, give yourself the rest of the year to concentrate on staying sober or clean. That has to be your first priority. There will be plenty of time to go on from there, but it has to be first things first, and sobriety comes first. If you keep relapsing or can’t put ninety days together . . . Many times folks find themselves unable to maintain sobriety because they are using the substance in order not to feel the pain of their secret. "You are as sick as your secrets" is an expression that makes a lot of sense. Keeping the secret keeps you stuck. The alcoholic family system is a place of lots of secrets. You may need, if this is your situation, to work first with a professional who understands substance abuse and understands what it means to be an ACOA. The purpose of this is to expose your secret&#151:if only to you and your therapist&#151:and drain some of the pus out. (Some folks are able to use the fifth step of AA to do this, but it doesn’t work for everyone.) Most of the secrets in my

experience relate to shame. Many men and women have been sexually molested or were unable to stop the abuse of siblings. Others are gay or lesbian and, because of parental, religious or societal attitudes, believe that is not an okay way to be. Once the secret, whatever it is, is exposed and the weight of keeping that buried is no longer present, your next chore is to get clean or sober and maintain that for a year. Then it will be time to go on to the next step. For those recovering from addictions that are not alcohol or drug related, such as gambling, food or sex, it is possible to combine that Twelve-Step recovery and ACOA recovery. Any recovery program should work well alongside ACOA recovery. If it doesn't, you need to discover what is going on. Read the pamphlet "Guidelines for Self-Help Groups." For folks not in recovery from addiction. Go first to Al-Anon and learn the principles of a Twelve-Step program and how to work the steps. Not all ACOA support groups follow the steps, but since so many of their members belong to other Twelve-Step programs, the principles are followed and the language is used. For everyone. All folks in ACOA recovery need to learn the Al-Anon principle of detachment regardless of whether or not they are recovering from addiction or are living with an addict. Until you do this, you can go no further. Detachment is the key. Because of the inconsistent nature of the nurture a child receives in an alcoholic family system and the child's hunger for nurture, many of you are still joined to your parents at the emotional hip. Even if you are no longer with them, you continue to seek their approval and are strongly influenced by their attitudes and behaviors. You will need to learn to separate yourself from them in a way that will not add to your stress. This is one of the primary goals of the Al-Anon program. Once you have learned how to detach (it will take six months to a year), you may now be ready to join an ACOA support group. Keep in mind that the goal of a support group is to share experience, strength and hope. Many groups do this very well, and by identification and example, members learn how to make healthy choices. If the group you attend does this&#151:wonderful, but if the group you attend spends its time sharing horror stories and blaming parents, be warned: You may not be in the best place for you. Living in the past and blaming parents are ways to avoid living in the present and taking responsibility for your own behavior. They are ways to stay stuck. It doesn't mean that your life wasn't a horror show and that your parents didn't do terrible things. What it does mean is that you are now an adult: You create your own horror show and you must be accountable for your behavior. You are also the only one who can make you feel better about yourself. Talking about the past is appropriate in a beginners meeting or with a professional but not in the meeting itself. Folks in recovery from addiction need to keep their memory green but folks recovering from the behaviors of others do not share the same benefit. People recovering from the behaviors of others need to change their response to other behaviors, and that can best be done by focusing on the present.

What you learn about yourself as you are growing up becomes a part of who you are and how you feel about yourself. No one can change that but you. Your parents, even if they recover and treat you differently, cannot fix what makes you feel bad about yourself. You may start a new and healthy relationship with them in the present but no amount of amends on their part will fix the past. That is why dwelling on their part in your ongoing pain will not get you through it or past it. Your present difficulties are your problem. To put the focus outside yourself is to delay your recovery. Emotions that have been held down for years and years will come to surface. That is why it is suggested that if you are recovering from an addiction, you need to focus on that first so that you will not be tempted to relieve those feelings in destructive ways. You will go through a number of powerful emotions in your recovery. It is part of the process. Not everyone goes through the stages of the process in the same sequence, and many of you may block some of those feelings. There is no "right" way. I just tell you about the process because those feelings may surface without your conscious direction and frighten you. And they will resurface many times with each new discovery. The recovery process is different for different folks. Only you can determine the way that will work best for you. Your immediate response to reading this book may be: Relief. The realizations that you are not alone and that you are not crazy will be freeing. It may be a life-changing event. Pain. The awareness of the amount of your suffering and your powerlessness may overwhelm you along with the knowledge that you have been living a lie. It will be similar to the extraordinary pain you experienced as a child before you learned how to numb out. Anger. It is not unusual for all the anger that you've been sitting on for all these years to begin to bubble up to the surface, and you may become fearful of your own rage. Grief. The losses that you have experienced have to be grieved for, and you may feel this level of pain as well. You may believe that if you begin to cry you will never stop. Joy. Going through the process eventually will allow you to experience a freedom that you have never felt before. When you are an adult you can be the child you were unable to be when you were a child. For some of you, reading books and attending support groups may be enough. I will give a suggested reading list at the end of this book. Others will need additional tools to manage these feelings and begin a new life. Some of you may find counseling useful. A counselor is like a coach who helps you find a better way to live in the here and now. You may have a difficult decision that needs to be made and be having trouble filtering out the various possibilities. Someone without a vested interest in the outcome, who is trained to help others to do this, can be most useful. Some of you may have suffered early trauma that is getting in your way. You can use the help of a therapist to look at your life with attention to understanding, reframing and desensitizing the past, making use of the light of the present. Some of you may enter a therapy

group. Self-help support groups assist in individual growth but do not focus on interaction. A therapy counseling group will help you understand and modify both your behavior and your reactions to others in an interactive context. That is, others will share their responses to you and you to them in useful ways. In one-to-one therapy or counseling, the professional only knows what you report and sees you through that lens. The one-to-one relationship does not show how you appear to others. You may come across to others in ways that are inconsistent with how you feel inside. Learning those differences and making those changes may greatly enhance your recovery. SELECTING A THERAPIST If you choose to see a therapist, there are some things to keep in mind. The therapist needs to have an understanding of addictions. The therapist needs to have an understanding of self-help programs. The therapist needs to understand what it means to be an ACOA or come from a dysfunctional family but does not have to be from one. The therapist needs to have at least a master's degree in counseling, social work or psychology. The therapist must be willing to answer your questions. The therapist need not self-disclose&#151:sponsors self-disclose. The therapist may be friendly but is not a friend. You can interview therapists. You don't have to continue seeing the first one you check out. You are obligated to pay for the time but if you don't have a good feeling about the person, check out someone else. If you interview several potential therapists and no one satisfies you and if the people fulfill the above criteria, you may be not as ready as you think. At some point in your recovery process it will be important to reconcile yourself with your spiritual side. There are some empty places and some painful places that can only be filled with a spiritual relationship. It will happen in your own way in your own time. Recoverer beware. The process of recovery for adult children is very disruptive. It means changing the way you have perceived yourself and your world up until now. This is a tall order. In comparison, "Don't drink and go to meetings" is a piece of cake&#151:and you know how rough that can be. The volcano, once erupted, cannot be put back neatly in the cone. It has to be addressed. Don't be surprised if you feel like you no longer belong in your skin. It is to be expected. Remember that your need to save everyone else from their ignorance is saying to them not only "There is a better way," but also "Turn your whole life upside down and inside out." That's quite a lot to ask of another person. So, if you choose to do so, ask yourself: Am I prepared to be there for this person through this process? Am I willing to accept this person's right to make the choice not to change? If you're not, you may be better off waiting for others to come to you. If you're not in an intimate relationship, try to hold off until you get some of your issues sorted out. You will only repeat old mistakes and overcomplicate things. You will not be the same a year into the process as you were when you started, so your choices will be different. If you are currently in a relationship, keep the other person apprised of

what is going on with you. Have that person read this book and Struggle for Intimacy. Encourage working on this process together. If you have been enmeshed and now back away to be your own person, be aware of the fact that it is a change not only for you but also for others in your life. They may or may not react well. But remember, if you change the rules and you are in a relationship, two people should be involved in the rules change or the relationship will become dysfunctional regardless of whether or not you know it is "the best thing for both of you." If you have been neglectful as a parent and are now aware how you may be perpetuating the cycle, your becoming hypervigilant all of a sudden will not be well received. Reading material and talk shows will add to your store of knowledge and may give you insight. Although they may have some therapeutic value, books and media are not therapy. The good feeling from the power of the identification does not effect a lasting change. ACOAs are creatures of extremes. "Nothing worth doing is worth doing in moderation." What I am suggesting is: Recovery is a slow process. It has to be or it is not recovery. You may make rapid strides but it takes a while for the growth to belong to you. Recovery is discovery. Remember that recovery is a process you have not failed if something you thought you had resolved pops up in another form. It may now be on a deeper level. You have not failed if you go through a stressful time and find yourself reverting to old behaviors. Ã Â¬2002. All rights reserved. Reprinted from The Complete ACOA Sourcebook by Janet Woititz. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the written permission of the publisher. Publisher: Health Communications, Inc., 3201 SW 15th Street, Deerfield Beach, FL 33442.

The author of this book has so much experience in the area of alcoholics and the less spoken about area of the affect of growing up in an alcoholic home on children. This book should be available in every book shop all over the world. I am delighted to have found it on as it hasn’t been heard of in any of the bookshops I visited in Ireland.This book will help anyone who has grown up in a dysfunctional home but especially those who have had their childhood tainted by alcoholism.It will help these people to realize they are not alone and there are reasons for the way they behave as an adult. Not only will this book open your eyes to the situations resulting in your characteristics as an adult child of an alcoholic but will also help you to change certain behaviors that hold you back and make the most of the attributes that are of benefit to you.I wish I had been told about this book years ago, but in order for this book to be of benefit- the person reading it must be willing to delve into the past and deal with a lot of unresolved issues. It will take you on a journey of self-growth, knowledge and awareness of yourself and your relationships.If you are ready to take that step, then this book is

a great place to start.

Janet Woititz is an excellent author on the dysfunctional family unit and children brought up in an alcoholic environment. I love this book so much that I re-read it every few months. I wish I would of read this book long ago when it was first printed.I recommend this book be read by all recovering alcoholics in addition to the "Big Book".

Excellent book for those raised in dysfunctional families. It reminds the reader that they are not alone in many of the experiences they went through or the characteristics they developed over time. Very readable. I regularly share the book with ACOAs that I come across in my work as an addictions counselor. Without exception, they are very glad they read the book because it leads to greater self-understanding.

For those of us who have "been there", it all rings true. Although we each have our own path, we are more alike than different. It was tremendously helpful to know that there are certain character traits we share. We were sold a bill of bogus goods, so let’s get on with it by using the tools offered.

I wish I had picked this book up years ago. After getting this in the mail I read the entire thing within two day and all I can say is if you think you could benefit from this book, then you are right! A must read for anyone who had/has an alcoholic parent that affected their childhood.Through this book and seeking therapy, I have made the choice to no longer let my childhood experiences affect me and my ability to seek a meaningful intimate relationship. I have voiced to my sober parent that I will no longer contribute to what has been keeping our family apart for nearly 23 years, and the sentiment is that they wish I had said something much, much sooner.This book will change your life, or at least how you look at it.

This acoa issue is staggering. The book is trying to assist and help the student/reader understand the complexities of people affected. I personally read at a slower pace because there is alot to take in. Understanding produces empowerment. This book along with 12 step group support and a desire to become whole, is extremely encouraging. Society needs to become more committied to those who suffer. This book is very helpful, and shoud be used in part with other strategies and tools. I suggest ordering this book for greater insight and knowledge.

Being a recovering alcoholic and an adult child I can honestly say that this book has been of tremendous help to me.It puts into words feelings I've had and behaviors I've exhibited over the years that were detrimental to my well being. It also contains suggestions for overcoming these things that make a lot of sense. I feel that it's a good tool for those who are in a program to address these difficulties. If you print this review I would appreciate it if you keep it anonnymous as I am in the program.

Wow, I had no I'dea that my behavior was so typical of being an ACOA. Understanding the why of it is the first step towards healing and changing my behavior

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