

Setting + Keeping Safe Boundaries

Using the ACA Twelve Steps + ACA Resources

ACA Boundaries Subcommittee
July 2020



This ACA WSO Publication is under fellowship review, with a goal of eventual Conference approval. Fellowship comments are invited.

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To submit feedback, please complete the form at <https://acawso.org/literature-committee-contact-form/>.
This is an interim draft of the Literature Committee’s Boundaries Subcommittee.

Choice + the ACA Paradox

The level of choice we develop in ACA is proportional to the integrity of our boundaries. The more we let go, the stronger our boundaries become. This is an ACA paradox: Letting go creates stronger boundaries. BRB p. 148

Boundaries

Boundaries are essential recovery tools/actions to remove chaos and help bring clarity, sanity, and spiritual freedom. The insight and power of sharing knowledge and experience in the BRB, YB Step work, ACA materials, and ACA meetings offer sane and functional tools and resources supporting boundaries. Setting safe boundaries along with recovery is not a quick progression. The ACA program offers everything needed to gain spiritual freedom and emotional sobriety.

A Boundary is an action not a reaction.

A boundary is a spiritual process using the ACA 12 Steps and ACA resources provided in our program, to recover from enmeshment and to find our own voice. When we establish a boundary, we break the “Don’t talk, Don’t trust, Don’t feel” rules. We let go of self-harming behaviors with the help of our Higher Power. We discover the self-love and courage we need to speak with honesty and do whatever it takes to achieve clarity, joy, happiness, serenity, and freedom in our lives.

- There are different types of boundaries, but their purposes are to allow us to be safe, respected, and free from harm. When we establish a boundary, we must be willing to follow through. All boundaries remind us that feelings, behaviors, and attitudes of others are separate from our own. We must be willing to follow through and honor our **boundary**. We do not negotiate our **boundary**. We set boundaries for ourselves, not to demand a change in others. Adapted from BRB pp. 346-347

Our boundaries can help us gain serenity, joy, happiness, and freedom.

General Definitions of Feelings as They Pertain to ACA

Adapted from the BRB pp. 162-163

1. Loved – A sense of feeling valued, understood, and heard. Listened to. Feeling safe with another. Warmth in the heart. Lightness of body.
2. Fear/Anger – Fear is usually masked by anger. Fear – pounding heartbeat, dilated pupils, increased breathing, tightened skin, extreme alertness. Anger – tightened jaw, upwelling in the chest, gritted teeth, dilated pupils, angry thoughts.
3. Shame or Ashamed – An intense sense of being faulty, wrong or inferior at the core of our being. A feeling of being ruptured. A burning feeling in the stomach. A sensation of the body shrinking. Spiraling inward in the stomach or chest or both. Constricted throat. Difficulty in speaking. Heaviness on the chest and difficulty breathing. Feeling glared at by others.
4. Guilt – A sense of unease or regret for a wrongful or neglectful act against another. Different from shame because guilt is usually about something we have done rather than a statement of who we are.
5. Amused – A light feeling of humor or good spirit. Grins and smiles. High Power’s medicine.
6. Abandoned – A sense of loss, being left, pushed out, forgotten, minimized, betrayed, feeling vulnerable. Feeling physically small. A dot. Lost at sea.
7. Embarrassed – An emotion arising from being exposed, caught in the act, confronted, ridiculed. Feeling flushed. Heat or redness in the face. Shortened breath. Involuntary stomach flutters.
8. Betrayed – Similar to abandonment; lied to, being deceived in meaning, feeling fooled, spiraling inward. Weakness in the limbs. Praying is difficult.
9. Satisfied – A sense of feeling full inside, rested, not worried, trustful thoughts Being in the moment. Not wandering. Being in the body. Centered to earth. Grounded to earth.
10. Hopeful – An expectation that things will work out, trusting oneself and others, energy level rises. Breathing is easier. Hitting all green lights.
11. Inspired – A sense of hope and wonderment of people and things, colors seem brighter, problems seem to find their right size. More energy in the body. Lightness of foot. Obstacles are secondary to solutions.
12. Humiliated – A sense of having the inner self exposed, abused, or taken away by the act of another or self. Vacuumed out. Void. Soul theft.
13. Loss or Grief – A sense of something that has been taken, a longing for feeling, given the answers to life but unsure of the questions. A school yard without children.
14. Joy – A sense of integration of survival traits/common behaviors. Coming out of a dark night of the soul with sureness of foot. Divided self reunited. Inner peace. Recognizing the True Self within. Knowing you can trust yourself. Seeing light in self and others. Energy and warmth throughout the body.

ACA Twelve Steps

1. We admitted we were powerless over the effects of alcoholism or other family dysfunction, that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and, when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understand God, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others who still suffer, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

BRB p. 586

ACA Twelve Steps + Their Spiritual Principles	
Step One	Powerlessness and Surrender, BRB p. 129
Step Two	Open-Mindedness and Clarity, BRB p.137
Step Three	Willingness and Accepting Help, BRB p.149
Step Four	Self-Honesty and Courage, BRB p. 188
Step Five	Honesty and Trust, BRB p. 206
Step Six	Willingness, BRB p. 216
Step Seven	Humility, BRB p. 226
Step Eight	Willingness and Self-Forgiveness, BRB p. 234
Step Nine	Forgiveness and Courage, BRB p. 249
Step Ten	Honesty and Discernment, BRB p. 262
Step Eleven	Seeking and Listening, BRB p. 278
Step Twelve	Love and Self-Love, BRB p. 294

ACA Slogans That Work

ACA is Simple but it is Not Easy

Live Beyond Mere Survival

There Is Another Way to Live

One Day at A Time

Easy Does It

Keep It Simple

Progress Not Perfection

First Things First

This Pain Too Shall Pass

Let Go. Let God.

H.A.L.T.- Don't Get Too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired

Keep Coming Back

Name It, Don't Blame It

Ask for Help and Accept It

Pray and Pray Hard

Don't Just Do Something. Sit There

Be Still and Know

There is no Healing Without Feeling

BRB p. 52

H.A.L.T. - Humility, Acceptance, Love, Tolerance

2020 AWC Traditions Presentation

ACA Prayers

Third Step Prayer

God. I am willing to surrender my fears and to place my will and my life in your care one day at a time. Grant me the wisdom to know the difference between things I can and cannot change. Help me to remember that I can ask for help. I am not alone. Amen

BRB p. 149

Fourth Step Prayer

Divine Creator. Help me to be rigorously honest and to care for myself during this Fourth Step process. Let me practice gentleness and not abandon myself on this spiritual journey. Help me remember that I have attributes, and that I can ask for forgiveness. I am not alone. I can ask for help. Amen.

BRB p. 171

Fifth Step Prayer

Divine creator. Thank you for this chance to speak honestly with another person about the events in my life. Help me accept responsibility for my actions. Let me show compassion for myself and my family as I revisit my thinking and actions and have blocked me from your love. Restore my child within. Restore my feelings. Restore my trust in myself. Amen.

BRB p. 206

Seventh Step Prayer – Character Defects

God. I am now ready that you should remove from me all of my defects of character, which block me from accepting your divine love and living with true humility toward others. Renew my strength so that I might help myself and others along this path of recovery.

I ask you to:

Remove my defect of _____.

Remove my defect of _____.

Remove my defect of _____.

Remove my defect of _____.

Amen.

Seventh Step Prayer – Laundry List Traits

God. I am now ready that should integrate my survival traits, which block me from accepting your divine love. Grant me wholeness.

I humbly ask you to:

Integrate my trait of _____.

Integrate my trait of _____.

Integrate my trait of _____.

Integrate my trait of _____.

Amen.

BRB pp. 220-221

Boundaries Worksheet – Example #1

What happened?	How did I react in the moment? Character defect/ laundry list trait	Does this remind me of something from my past?	What feelings and physical sensations did I experience?	How do my Inner Teenager and Inner Children feel about what happened?	My Boundary/My Action
<p>An ACA member waited after a meeting and attempted to give me a hug.</p> <p>This person did not ask for permission.</p> <p>This person wanted their needs met, not mine.</p>	<p>Afraid</p> <p>Judgemental</p> <p>Hypervigilant to emotional pain</p> <p>11. I judge myself harshly and have a very low sense of self-esteem.</p>	<p>A controlling person tried to force me to do something I didn't want to do.</p> <p>I was not listened to.</p> <p>I was not safe.</p> <p>I was the victim of a predator.</p>	<p>I felt fear, anxiety & shame, in my back & neck until I gave it up to God.</p> <p>I felt a new sensation, Power over me. Courage!</p> <p>I felt hope that this new way of life would work out.</p>	<p>My Inner Child felt afraid and needed her supportive Loving Parent's protection and support. She called to me.</p> <p>My Inner Teenager felt anxious, outraged and felt caged in. He needed to be hugged and listened to.</p>	<p>I broke the "no talk" rule. I stated that hugs without permission made me feel angry and anxious.</p> <p>My ACTION - I do not hug after meetings. I am practicing using boundaries about my personal space.</p> <p>My True Self and my supportive Loving Parent gave my Inner Child and Inner Teenager the support and caring they needed. We listened, validated, and gave love to my Inner Children.</p> <p>Hugs for all.</p>

Adapted from the BRB Stored Anger (Resentment) Worksheet p. 172 and the PTSD Worksheet p. 184

Boundaries Worksheet – Example #2

What happened?	How did I react in the moment? Character defect/ laundry list trait	Does this remind me of something from my past?	What feelings and physical sensations did I experience?	How do my Inner Teenager and Inner Children feel about what happened?	My Boundary/My Action
<p>I resent being treated as an inferior instead of an equal partner.</p>	<p>1. I became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.</p> <p>3. I was frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.</p> <p>7. I get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.</p> <p>10. I have stuffed my feelings from our traumatic childhoods and have lost the ability to feel or express our feelings because it hurts so much (denial).</p> <p>11. I judge myself harshly and had a very low sense of self-esteem.</p>	<p>... being told that I know nothing, that I need to change for you, that I need to follow your rules.</p>	<p>Sarcastic comments make me feel unloved, not valued, unsafe, and affects my feeling of self-worth in a negative way.</p> <p>Courage - I will not be drawn into your dysfunctional behavior.</p>	<p>Inner child feels ashamed, fearful, sad, and ashamed.</p> <p>My Inner Teenager was angry, resentful, fearful, and anxious. He wanted to react in-kind</p>	<p>The next time I am put down or belittled, I will walk away.</p> <p>I have made my choice - no verbal abuse.</p> <p>“I” Statements</p> <p>Self-care - safest boundary option</p> <p>Supportive Loving Parent hugs my Inner Child</p> <p>Act don’t react</p> <p>Use any tools needed</p>

Adapted from the BRB Stored Anger (Resentment) Worksheet p. 172 and the PTSD Worksheet p. 184

Boundaries Worksheet

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ACA Tools that Work

- Affirmations
- Attending ACA related events
- Presentations and workshops
- Boundary exercises and practice
- ComLINE - reading and contributing
- Completing workbook and practice exercises - feelings, praise, mirror, non-dominate handwriting
- Fellow Traveler
- Gratitude lists
- Group work
- Inner Child work
- Journaling
- Listening
- Loving Parent Guidebook
- Meditation
- Meetings
- A New Hope ACA Beginners Meeting Handbook
- Ready, Set, Go!!
- Reparenting
- Phone calls
- Playing and having fun
- Reading selections
- Rewrite your own custom Third Step Prayer
- Smiling
- Sharing
- Sponsor and sponsoring
- Slogans and sayings
- Volunteering and giving back

Using “I” Statements

Submitted by AL025 as an ABC 2017

Proposal was approved

Why Using “I” Statements is So Important!

When sharing with an individual or as part of a group, using “I” statements can make a big difference. An “I” statement is sharing in the first person, as opposed to using words such as “we,” “they,” “us,” and “you.” At first, it may seem like an insignificant detail, but using third person statements is distancing and impersonal. It can even be an attempt to subconsciously control others or place responsibility outside of oneself.

Example: “When you get abused, it hurts you.”

Change this to: “When I got abused, it hurt me.” Sharing in the first person promotes self-responsibility by divulging information only about yourself.

When you are tempted to use the generic “you,” “we,” etc., try to catch yourself and replace it with “I.”

You will be surprised how different it feels and how much more you and others get out of your share. It may feel uncomfortable at first. That’s because you are casting off your protective shield and revealing the real you.

Remember:

- 1) An “I” statement exercises my self-control.
- 2) I” statements build my self-respect while offering others a true opportunity to have a real relationship with me.
- 3) Struggling with “I” statements will often reveal the hidden aspects of the issues at hand. If you truly want to disclose your feelings so that you and others can learn more about YOU, use an “I” statement.

ACA Bill of Rights

1. I have the right to say no.
2. I have the right to say, "I don't know."
3. I have the right to detach from anyone in whose company I feel humiliated or manipulated.
4. I have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.
5. I have the right to make mistakes and learn from them.
6. I have the right to be wrong.
7. I have the right to make my own choices and decisions in my life; I do not have to feel guilty because someone does not like what I do, say, think, or feel.
8. I have the right to grieve any actual or perceived losses.
9. I have the right to all of my feelings.
10. I have the right to feel angry, including towards someone I love.
11. I have the right to change my mind at any time.
12. I have the right to a spiritually, physically, and emotionally healthier existence, though it may deviate entirely or in part from my parents' way of life.
13. I have the right to forgive myself and to choose how and when I forgive others.
14. I have the right to take healthy risks and to experiment with new possibilities.
15. I have the right to be honest in my relationships and to seek the same from others.
16. I have the right to ask for what I want.
17. I have the right to determine and honor my own priorities and goals, and to leave others to their Higher Powers.
18. I have the right to dream and to have hope.
19. I have the right to be my True Self.
20. I have the right to know and nurture my Inner Child.
21. I have the right to laugh, to play, to have fun, and the freedom to celebrate this life, right here, right now.
22. I have the right to live life happy, joyous, and free.

ACA Bill of Rights - in the final review process

<https://acawso.org/2020/02/08/aca-bill-of-rights-in-final-review-process/>

The Laundry List (14 Traits 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 both, or find another compulsive personality such as a workaholic to fulfill our sick abandonment needs.
5. We live life 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 guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves instead of giving in to others.
8. We became addicted to excitement.
9. We confuse love and pity and tend to "love" people we 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 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.
13. Alcoholism is a family disease; we became para-alcoholics and took on the characteristics of the disease even though we did not pick up the drink.
14. Para-alcoholics are reactors rather than actors.

BRB p. 648, Newcomer Booklet p. 5

The ACA Promises

1. We will discover our real identities by loving and accepting ourselves.
2. Our self-esteem will increase as we give ourselves approval on a daily basis.
3. Fear of authority figures and the need to “people-please” will leave us.
4. Our ability to share intimacy will grow inside us.
5. As we face our abandonment issues, we will be attracted by strengths and become more tolerant of weaknesses.
6. We will enjoy feeling stable, peaceful, and financially secure.
7. We will learn how to play and have fun in our lives.
8. We will choose to love people who can love and be responsible for themselves.
9. Healthy boundaries and limits will become easier for us to set.
10. Fears of failure and success will leave us, as we intuitively make healthier choices.
11. With help from our ACA support group, we will slowly release our dysfunctional behaviors.
12. Gradually, with our Higher Power’s help, we will learn to expect the best and get it.

BRB p. 591

Addressing Predatory Behavior

ACA meetings have one primary purpose: to carry the message to adult children who still suffer. This group believes that allowing predatory behavior to occur in and around meetings creates a distraction from this purpose.

We come into the rooms of ACA to find healing from childhood experiences of being victimized. As the Other Laundry List states, some of us may act out this trauma by becoming victimizers ourselves. As a result of childhood dysfunction, perpetrators learn early to detect and take advantage of those who have not yet learned to trust their instincts or set healthy boundaries. We call this predatory behavior.

By maintaining a proactive approach to addressing this dynamic, our meeting is less vulnerable to re-creating dysfunction and secrecy. As we practice healthier connections in ACA, we monitor our motivation to connect with the newcomer or other members. We strive to respect one another's boundaries. We avoid using the fellowship to solicit emotional gratification, personal or financial favors, or romance and sexual encounters. We refrain from taking advantage of perceived authority, such as service roles or long-time membership within the fellowship, to assert control over other members.

If you feel uncomfortable about the approach from a member, before, during or after the meeting, we suggest you speak up! The 12th Tradition of Anonymity is not a shield from openly addressing in-appropriate behavior. Rather, as the ACA Solution suggests, the healing begins when we risk moving out of isolation. We urge you to speak to one or more trusted members or bring up your concern at a group conscience meeting. We believe that openly addressing predatory behavior is the responsibility of all ACA members and every group.

We aren't perfect. If you don't feel the group is taking your concern seriously, please seek support outside the meeting, which may include trying other meetings.

Addressing Predatory Behavior Tent Card

https://adultchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/APB-Tent-Card_LTR_R.pdf