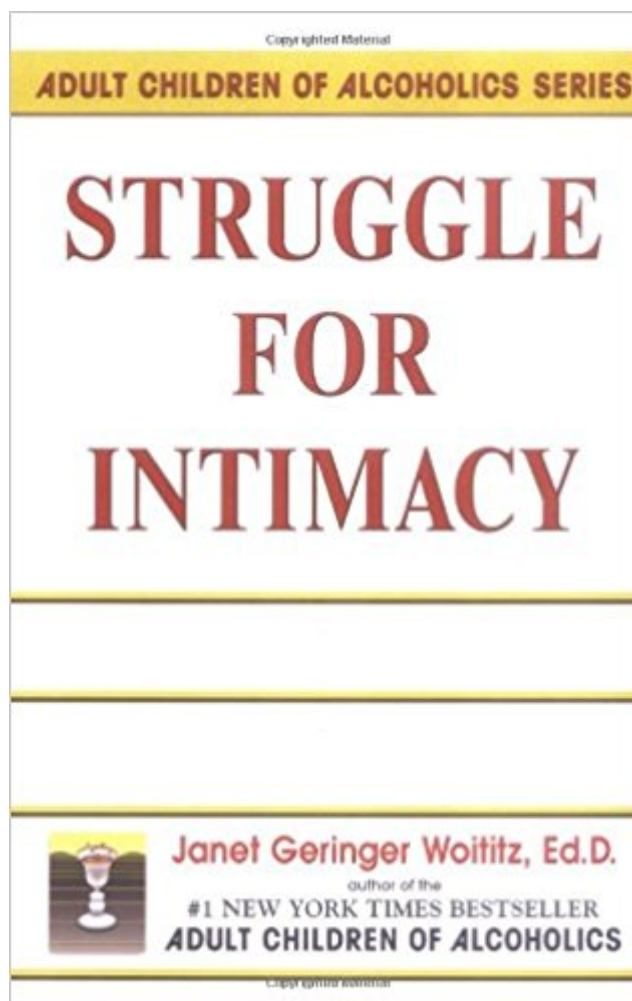


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Struggle For Intimacy (Adult Children Of Alcoholics Series)



Synopsis

Janet Woititz, mother of the recovery movement, sensitively addresses the barriers of trust and intimacy that children learn in an alcoholic family. She provides suggestions for building loving relationships with friends, partners, and spouses.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Janet Geringer Woititz, Ed.D., is the founder and President of the Institute for Counseling and Training in West Caldwell, NJ, which specialized in working with dysfunctional families and individuals.

1Who Do You Pickfor Your Lover? Why Do You Pick the Lovers That You Do?Everything is going wrong with my relationship. I know that it's all my fault. I try everything I know to fix it, but it doesn't work. I'm not even sure if I love him/her. Maybe I don't know what love is. I'm so Â-confused.'Sound familiar? It should. It is almost verbatim the story I hear when an Adult Child of an Alcoholic enters therapy because an intimate relationship is souring. And the story is the same whether the COA is twenty years old and in a first serious relationship, or forty years old and the veteran of one or more failed marriages.'It just has to be my fault. Relationships always go this way. I thought it would be different this time, but it Â-wasn't. Maybe I'm better off alone.'Have you felt that way? We all haveâ •and we've all said similar self-deprecating things while in the midst of a troubled or troublesome relationship. Is it a 'normal' way to feel? It depends upon whether you are feeling that way because of the current circumstances or whether these are deep-seated messages which have

become a permanent part of your self-image because they were hammered at you time and time again while you were growing up. In both cases, the feelings are equally painful, but they are more difficult to erase in the second case. Read those opening statements again: 'Everything is going wrong. I know that it is all my fault. I try to do everything that I know, but it just doesn't work.' Today you are saying those phrases about your relationship. The context may be new for you, but the phrases and the feelings are not. Once again, you are experiencing the helplessness of your childhood and reacting to an 'old tape.' Nonetheless, the feelings are real, and, oh, so powerful. Other familiar feelings also well up, including confusion, the sense of being stuck, of being unable to change your destiny. This is all part of being in an intimate relationship. It will drag out all things, old and new, that you have experienced and felt before. You will play it all out again. With work, the process and outcomes will be different, but the struggle cannot be avoided. Even those who have not been affected by living in an alcoholic family find one must work to have a good and healthy relationship. You have plenty of company in the struggle! To probe a little deeper into the nature of the struggle you are facing, it is important that you recall some of the early inconsistent messages you were given by your parents. Like it or not, want to believe it or not, these messages are still influencing you on an unconscious level throughout all aspects of your life. To change your life, you must change the message. And, awareness is the first step toward changing the message. The knowledge of how your current patterns were formed will begin to release you from the self-critical indictment which is such a basic part of your nature. Let's take a look at these double-bind messages and how they affect you today: 'I love you. Go away.' Sometimes your alcoholic parent was warm and loving, sometimes rejecting and hostile. Although your non-alcoholic parent told you that you were loved, he or she was often so absorbed with worry and so irritable that you rarely felt loved. There was no consistency. This is love as you understood it as a child, and are still experiencing it. Ever wonder why you are attracted to that person who is warm and loving one day, and rejecting the next? Ever wonder why the person who says he or she will call and doesn't seem more desirable than the one who is consistent? If, by chance, you do become involved with a lover who is consistent, you find that sort of person very unsettling, because you have no frame of reference for this kind of behavior. I am talking about the type of individual with order in his/her life, the person who can predict with a reasonable amount of certainty what tomorrow will bring. This also is someone who will behave, feel and think tomorrow much as he/she behaved, felt and thought today. The challenge to win the love of the erratic and sometimes rejecting person repeats the challenge of your childhood. You are grateful when the inconsistent person throws you a crumb, but get bored quickly with the one who is available all the time. You are playing out your childhood all

over again, because the only consistency you knew was inconsistency. The only predictability you had was the lack of predictability. You lived your childhood on an emotional roller coaster. And that is what you understand. Think a minute: How many times have you created a crisis in your relationship to get the energy flowing again, and bring the relationship back to more familiar ground? Even though this may be obvious to you on an intellectual level, bear in mind that it may take longer for you to truly feel this truth because you were conditioned at such an early age. 'You can't do anything right. I need you.' Here is another set of conflicting messages which you play over and over again. When you were a child, you could never meet your alcoholic parent's perfectionistic standards, no matter how hard you tried. You were never good enough. And you truly believed that everything that went wrong was your fault. If you would have been good enough, things would have been better for your family. Yet you knew you were needed, and that they couldn't get along without you. That was perfectly clear also. Since it was impossible for them to get along without you, even though you were so worthless, you would struggle until you could find a way to 'fix' things. As an adult, do you find yourself drawn to partners who are both extremely dependent and highly critical? Are you drawn to those who repeatedly put you down, although you know they can't get along without you? You continue to strive for their approval, because on a deep level you believe that there would not be so much trouble in the relationship if you were only good enough. And you know you can't keep letting down someone who needs you so desperately. Sound familiar? Another setup. 'Yes, it's true that your mother/father did/said those terrible things. But you must understand that he/she was drunk.' The implications of this double-bind message are especially destructive to you when you are in an intimate relationship. Your unconscious tells you that if you can find an explanation for inexcusable behavior, you must believe that the behavior is excusable. In the family system affected by alcoholism, the alcoholic is rarely held accountable for his/her behavior. More likely, the child hears from the other parent, 'What did you expect from a drunk?' Or, in early family recovery, 'You have to understand that your father/mother has a disease.' The child hears the message that the parent can do whatever he or she wishes by simply using the excuse of drunkenness or alcoholism. Now that you are an adult, you have become the most understanding person in the world when it comes to your loving relationships. Right? In almost every situation, you will find a way to make everything okay - certainly if someone must be at fault, you will take that fault upon yourself. You have learned how to understand, and you have learned how to take full responsibility upon - yourself. Therefore, when you are treated in a lousy way, you analyze the situation and don't allow yourself to experience any angry feelings. Understanding a behavior does not make it automatically acceptable. But you learned to do that very well when you were a child,

and denied yourself the pain for maltreatment because you believed that 'My father/mother wouldn't have done that to me if he/she were sober.' This also has elements of control and elements of guilt. Here is the kind of thought pattern that runs through the mind of the child in the alcoholic family system: 'If I feel guilty, then I am responsible. And if I am responsible, then I can do something to fix it, to change it, to make it different.' Giving up your guilt also means giving up your sense that you have control over the situation. And, of course, loss of control is a disaster. You have grown up to be the perfect doormat for an inconsiderate person. Often you end up in a perfect give-and-take relationship . . . you give, they take. 'I'll be there for you next time. I give you my word.' The underlying message here is 'forget it! So you learn how not to want so that you don't get disappointed. Sometimes you unwittingly become the doormat for a partner who truly doesn't want to treat you that way. Often you become tired and resentful. You complain about having to do everything in the relationship yet it is almost impossible for you to ask for anything for yourself. You want your partner to be a mind reader. Your fear of asking for something and then not getting it is as unsettling as your fear of asking for something and getting it! The first outcome reinforces your belief that you are too unworthy to deserve what you want, and the second possibility is so unfamiliar that you actually don't know how to react. Even a simple compliment may cause you great discomfort. You deal with the whole situation by abdicating responsibility for your happiness. You decide that your partner should know what you want and act on it without ever having been told. For example, 'If I have to tell him I want to go to the theater for my birthday, it proves that he doesn't really want to please me.' Your lover is now set up so that you can decide he doesn't love you if he doesn't pick up whatever vague hints you may have sent his way. You'll only be happy with a mind reader, a fantasy hero who will automatically know how to please you. Everything is fine, so don't worry. But how in the world can I deal with all this?' Both of these messages come through. 'Don't concern yourself everything is going to be okay.' Yet the underlying sense you get from your parents is that everything is not okay. The result is you develop into a super person by the time you become an adult. You can (and will) take care of everything. You are in charge. Nobody else around you has to be concerned about anything. You can manage. How often do you say the following things: 'Don't worry, we'll take my car' 'I've got enough money' 'I'll pick up the food' 'I'll make the arrangements' 'Don't worry' 'It's no problem for me!'

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Puts a lot of ACA's 'Big Red Book' into perspective. It's helped me understand different aspects of an ACOA and the struggles with interpersonal relationships

I just received this book, and what a disappointment. It's an excerpt from The Complete ACOA Sourcebook, which is also disappointing, but less so because there's more material and at least some of it will apply to folks with ACOA experience. I don't know -- the print is HUGE and it feels simplistic and what a waste of my money. Hoping I can return it.

Good information

this book is for adults whose relationships always seem to go sour, or people who sabotage their relationships. a pioneer in the ACOA field explains why. it really opened my eyes to self-defeating behaviors and gave me tools to change it.

I've sent this book out to countless friends. I got a lot out of the book.

Book was great! Just finished it. Helpful for anyone trying to understand themselves and why they gravitate toward unhealthy patterns in relationships.

My Therapist had this in her library, I already read it through and decided to buy my own copy. This book is most definitely the one to keep and refer to for adult children of alcoholics AND whomever they're in a relationship with. Those "normal" people get tremendous insight in how we try to make sense of our world and why we do and say the things we do and say!

This book was recommended to me by my therapist and I am so glad that I bought it. While not every part of the book rang true for me, a great deal of it did. I finished reading it about a month ago and it has helped me a great deal in understanding much of what I do that is destructive to my relationship. I am applying what I have learned and am moving toward healing. If you are an ACOA who can't seem to make relationships work this slender but powerful book is a must read.

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