

ACoA Step Four Intensive

Adult Children of Alcoholics · The Recovery Files

A Searching & Fearless Moral Inventory — With Compassion

A Dual-Recovery Approach for SUD & Mental Health

Your progress 0 of 6 parts done · Searching · Looking beneath the surface · Fearless · Writing the full truth · Integrated · Understanding transforms · Who Is This For?

This intensive is for anyone in substance use disorder and/or mental health recovery who also identifies as an Adult Child of an Alcoholic (ACoA) or grew up in a dysfunctional family system. It expands the traditional Step Four inventory to include childhood wounds, family roles, inherited shame, and the intersection of developmental trauma with addiction.

In this workbook

- Part 1 · ACoA Step Four: The Inventory That Goes Deeper
 - Check-in: Inventory Resistance & Avoidance
 - Check-in: Resentment Patterns & Origins
 - Exercise: ACoA-Enhanced Resentment Inventory
- Part 2 · Inherited vs. Acquired: Sorting What Is Yours
 - Check-in: Shame Burden: Inherited vs. Earned
 - Exercise: The Shame Sorting Exercise
 - Exercise: Defect vs. Adaptation Reframe
- Part 3 · The ACoA Survival Roles: Characters in the Family Smile
 - Check-in: Family Role Identification
 - Exercise: Family Role Excavation
 - Exercise: Relationship Pattern Mapping
- Part 4 · The Fear Inventory: ACoA Fears vs. Addiction Fears
 - Check-in: Fear Inventory Readiness
 - Exercise: Fear Inventory — Roots & Branches
- Part 5 · From Inventory to Integration: Making Step Four Transformative
 - Exercise: Daily Inventory Practice (7 Days)
 - Exercise: The Dual Harm Inventory
 - Exercise: Assets Inventory — Strengths from Struggle
 - Exercise: Step Four Summary & Step Five Preparation

Each reading is followed by its check-in questions and exercises, in the same order as the app. Your scored results are shown in the app.

PART 1 OF 5 · READING

ACoA Step Four: The Inventory That Goes Deeper

Step Four reads: "Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." In traditional Twelve Step recovery, this inventory focuses on resentments, fears, harms done to others, and patterns of selfish or dishonest behavior. It is a powerful and necessary process. But for Adult Children of Alcoholics who are also recovering from substance use disorders and mental health conditions, the traditional Step Four format often feels incomplete — because it was designed for people whose primary problem began with their own drinking, not for people whose primary wounding began before they ever picked up a substance.

The ACoA experience of Step Four requires an expanded frame. Yes, you need to examine your resentments — but you also need to understand that many of your resentments are rooted in legitimate childhood injuries that were never your fault. Yes, you need to examine your fears — but you also need to recognize that many of your fears are not irrational anxieties but survival responses to genuinely dangerous environments. Yes, you need to examine your role in the harm you have caused — but you also need to acknowledge the harm that was done TO you, because that harm is the soil from which many of your harmful patterns grew.

This does not mean you get a free pass. Recovery requires accountability, and ACoA identity cannot become a permanent excuse for destructive behavior. But accountability without context is cruelty, and asking an Adult Child to take a "searching and fearless moral inventory" without examining the family system that shaped their morality is like asking someone to audit a financial ledger without acknowledging that the books were cooked from the beginning.

You are not starting from a neutral baseline. You are starting from a childhood that distorted your understanding of normal, healthy, and acceptable.

The ACoA-enhanced inventory adds critical dimensions: where did this resentment originate? Is this a childhood wound wearing adult clothing? Am I resenting this person for something they actually did, or for something they remind me of from my family of origin? And crucially: what is MY part, given that my "part" was often shaped by survival patterns I developed as a child who had no other options?

For people managing dual recovery — healing from both ACoA wounds and active substance use — the Step Four inventory becomes a document of intersection. The resentments fueled by childhood pain are often the same resentments that fueled the drinking. The fears installed by a dysfunctional family are often the same fears that made sobriety feel impossible.

This is not Step Four as punishment. This is Step Four as excavation — unearthing the truth of your life so that it can finally be processed, shared (Step Five), and released.

Reflection Questions

1. When you hear "searching and fearless moral inventory," what is your immediate emotional response? Does it feel like an invitation to freedom or a sentence to shame?

2. How does your experience as an Adult Child complicate the traditional Step Four process? What aspects of the traditional inventory feel incomplete for your story?

3. Can you identify a resentment that you have always attributed to an adult experience but that actually has its roots in your childhood? What happens when you trace it back?

4. How has untreated or undertreated mental illness affected your ability to do honest inventory work? What clinical supports do you need in place before diving deeper?

5. If Step Four is about excavation rather than punishment, what buried truth most needs to be unearthed in your life right now?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Inventory Resistance & Avoidance

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I have started Step Four inventory work multiple times but have not completed it

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I intellectualize the inventory process rather than engaging with it emotionally

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I fear that writing down the truth about my life will make it more real and more painful than I can handle

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I avoid examining certain topics — specific relationships, traumatic events, or patterns — that I know need attention

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I use "not being ready" as a permanent delay strategy rather than a legitimate assessment of timing

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I am afraid that my inventory will be used against me, even in the context of a safe therapeutic or recovery relationship

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I minimize the importance of Step Four, believing I can recover without this depth of self-examination

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I fear that looking at my childhood wounds will overwhelm the progress I have made in SUD recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Resentment Patterns & Origins

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I carry deep resentment toward one or both parents for their addiction, neglect, or dysfunction

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. My resentments toward family members are entangled with resentments toward myself for repeating their patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I resent people who had "normal" childhoods and cannot relate to the anger this creates

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I hold resentments toward institutions — schools, churches, systems — that failed to protect me as a child

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. My resentments frequently trigger cravings, relapse urges, or mental health symptoms

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I use resentment as fuel — it gives me energy, identity, or a sense of being right, even though it is destroying me

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I have difficulty distinguishing between justified anger at what was done to me and the toxic resentment that keeps me sick

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I resent recovery itself for asking me to examine my part when so much was done TO me that I did not cause

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

ACoA-Enhanced Resentment Inventory

The Four-Column Approach: Who, What, Why It Hurts, and Where It Started

Part 1

1. The Addicted/Dysfunctional Parent

Column 1 — The Cause: What specifically are you resentful about?

Column 2 — What Was Threatened: Which core needs were affected?

Column 3 — Childhood Root: Does this resentment connect to something from childhood?

Column 4 — My Part (With Context): What is your part, including any survival patterns?

Part 2

2. The Other Parent / Enabler

Column 1 — The Cause:

Column 2 — What Was Threatened:

Column 3 — Childhood Root:

Column 4 — My Part:

Part 3

3. Yourself

Column 1 — The Cause:

Column 2 — What Was Threatened:

Column 3 — Childhood Root:

Column 4 — My Part:

Part 4

4. An Adult Relationship / Institution

Column 1 — The Cause:

Column 2 — What Was Threatened:

Column 3 — Childhood Root:

Column 4 — My Part:

Part 5

5. Resentment Inventory Summary

Which resentment carries the most emotional charge?

How many of your adult resentments trace back to childhood roots?

Which resentment most directly connects to your substance use?

Write a statement of willingness to begin releasing...

PART 2 OF 5 · READING

Inherited vs. Acquired: Sorting What Is Yours

One of the most critical tasks of the ACoA Step Four inventory is learning to distinguish between what was done TO you and what you have done — between the wounds you inherited and the wounds you inflicted. This distinction is not about avoiding accountability. It is about achieving accurate accountability, which requires understanding the full picture rather than accepting blame for everything indiscriminately or deflecting blame for everything reflexively.

Adult Children of Alcoholics often fall into one of two traps. The first trap is total self-blame: "Everything bad in my life is my fault. I am the problem. I caused all of this." This is not accountability — it is the internalized voice of a family system that needed someone to carry the shame, and the child volunteered because children will sacrifice their own wellbeing to preserve the family system.

The second trap is total externalization: "Everything bad in my life was done to me. I am a victim. None of this is my responsibility." This is not healing — it is the protective stance of someone who has been so wounded by false accountability that they cannot risk taking any accountability at all.

The healthy middle ground — and the goal of ACoA Step Four — is what might be called "informed accountability." This means: I acknowledge that I grew up in a dysfunctional system that installed patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving that I did not choose and could not have prevented. AND I acknowledge that as an adult, I have perpetuated some of those patterns, developed new harmful patterns (including addiction), and caused real harm to others and myself. BOTH of these things are true simultaneously, and the inventory must hold both.

For those in substance use recovery, this sorting process has direct clinical relevance. Many addictions begin as self-medication for pain that originated in childhood. The shame spiral that drives compulsive use is often shame that was installed decades before the first drink or drug.

The mental health implications are equally significant. If the inventory is done with clinical awareness, it becomes apparent that much of what has been labeled as "character defects" in traditional Step work may actually be symptoms of untreated trauma, depression, anxiety, or developmental disruption. The "defect" of isolation may be avoidant attachment. The "defect" of people-pleasing may be anxious attachment. The "defect" of emotional volatility may be complex PTSD.

This does not eliminate the need for change — but it changes the approach from shame-based correction to trauma-informed healing.

Reflection Questions

1. Which trap do you tend toward — total self-blame or total externalization? How has this pattern affected your recovery and your previous attempts at inventory work?

2. Can you identify three specific patterns in your life that are INHERITED (installed by your family system) and three that are ACQUIRED (developed through your own choices in adulthood)? How do they interact?

3. Has any aspect of your personality or behavior that has been called a "character defect" actually been a trauma response or survival adaptation? What changes when you reframe it?

4. What is the difference between understanding why you developed harmful patterns (compassion) and using that understanding to avoid changing them (excuse)? Where is that line for you?

5. What grief do you need to process as part of your Step Four — grief for the childhood you should have had, the protection you should have received, the development that was disrupted?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Shame Burden: Inherited vs. Earned

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I carry a deep sense that something is fundamentally wrong with ME — not just my behavior, but my core identity

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I have difficulty separating the shame I inherited from my family system from the shame I generated through my own choices

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I believe I deserve punishment, and my addiction or suffering was somehow justified by who I am

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I use shame as motivation — pushing myself through self-criticism rather than self-compassion
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. The thought of writing an honest inventory terrifies me because I fear confirming that I am as bad as I believe
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I minimize what was done to me as a child because acknowledging it makes me feel weak or like I am making excuses
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I take excessive responsibility for things that were not my fault — a pattern I learned in my family of origin
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I avoid inventory work because I fear the shame will be unbearable and could trigger relapse
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Shame Sorting Exercise

Separating What Was Done TO You From What You Have Done

Part 1

1. Inherited Shame: What did your family system teach you to be ashamed of?

Part 2

2. Inherited Shame: What labels were placed on you?

Part 3

3. Inherited Shame: What shame are you carrying that actually belongs to your parent(s)?

Part 4

4. Earned Shame: What have you done in active addiction that generates genuine shame?

Part 5

5. Earned Shame: Who have you harmed through your own adult choices?

Part 6

6. Integration: Write a shame sorting statement — "I am returning ____ (inherited shame) and taking responsibility for ____ (earned shame)."

YOUR EXERCISE

Defect vs. Adaptation Reframe

Reclaiming the Strength Inside the Survival Pattern

Part 1

1. "Controlling" — Adaptation: You learned to control because your environment was chaotic.

Do you recognize this pattern? How does it show up as a problem AND as a strength?

What would the EVOLVED version look like?

Part 2

2. "People-Pleasing" — Adaptation: You learned to please because upsetting others had dangerous consequences.

Problem AND strength?

Evolved version?

Part 3

3. "Perfectionism" — Adaptation: You learned that mistakes were punished and perfection was the price of love.

Problem AND strength?

Evolved version?

Part 4

4. "Emotional Numbness" — Adaptation: You learned to shut down because feeling everything would have been overwhelming.

Problem AND strength?

Evolved version?

Part 5

5. "Hypervigilance" — Adaptation: You learned to scan for danger for survival.

Problem AND strength?

Evolved version?

PART 3 OF 5 · READING

The ACoA Survival Roles: Characters in the Family Smile

Every dysfunctional family system operates like a theatrical production, and every member is assigned a role — not through conscious choice, but through the invisible logic of the system's survival. These roles serve the family by distributing the stress of dysfunction in ways that allow the system to continue functioning, but they come at an enormous cost to the individuals who play them. For ACoAs, these roles become identity, and they persist long into adulthood.

The Hero (also called the Responsible One or the Golden Child) is the family member who achieves, performs, and presents a facade of normalcy to the outside world. Inside, the Hero is exhausted, anxious, and terrified of failure, because their self-worth is entirely dependent on performance. In adult recovery, the Hero approaches Step Four as another performance — writing the "best" inventory, being the "most thorough," and using the process to demonstrate competence rather than to be genuinely vulnerable.

The Scapegoat (also called the Acting-Out Child or the Problem Child) absorbs the family's dysfunction by becoming the identified problem. The Scapegoat carries the family's projected shame and is often the first family member to enter treatment. In Step Four work, the Scapegoat may take on excessive blame, believing they truly ARE the problem, or they may resist the process entirely.

The Lost Child (also called the Invisible One or the Adjuster) survives by disappearing. In Step Four, they may have difficulty identifying their own resentments, fears, and harms because they have spent a lifetime minimizing their own experience.

The Mascot (also called the Clown or the Entertainer) manages family tension through humor, distraction, and emotional caretaking. In Step Four work, they may use humor to deflect from the seriousness of the process.

The Caretaker (also called the Enabler or the Parentified Child) takes over the parental function that the addicted or dysfunctional adult has abandoned. In Step Four, the Caretaker may focus exclusively on the harm done by others or may take responsibility for others' behavior in the inventory.

Identifying your role — and honestly examining how it persists in your adult life, your recovery, and your approach to this inventory — is not an optional addition to Step Four. It is essential. A Step Four that does not examine the family role is an inventory of the surface. The ACoA-enhanced inventory examines the foundation.

Reflection Questions

1. Which ACoA family role (or combination of roles) did you play as a child? How did this role protect you, and what did it cost you?

2. How does your childhood role show up in your adult life and recovery RIGHT NOW? Give specific, recent examples.

3. How has your family role influenced your substance use? Did you use to sustain the role, escape the role, or because the role failed?

4. How might your family role be shaping the way you approach this Step Four inventory? Are you performing it (Hero), resisting it (Scapegoat), minimizing it (Lost Child), deflecting from it (Mascot), or focusing on others rather than yourself (Caretaker)?

5. What would it look like to do this inventory as your TRUE self rather than from the position of your family role? What would you include that the role would normally prevent you from seeing?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Family Role Identification

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I played a specific role in my family (hero, scapegoat, lost child, mascot, caretaker) and still play it in my adult relationships and recovery

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. My identity is so entangled with my family role that I do not know who I am without it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I attract and am attracted to people who need me to play the same role I played in my family
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. My family role protected me as a child but has become a prison in adulthood — I cannot stop performing it even when I want to
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I have adopted a role in my recovery community that mirrors my childhood role
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I experience intense anxiety or disorientation when circumstances prevent me from playing my usual role
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I confuse my role with my identity — I do not know who I am apart from what I do for others or how I perform
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. My family role has directly contributed to my substance use — either through the exhaustion of performing it or the pain of failing at it
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Family Role Excavation

Unearthing the Character You Were Assigned

Part 1

1. The Hero / Responsible One — did you play this role?

How strongly do you identify? Describe how it shows up.

How has this role shown up in adult relationships and recovery?

How did this role contribute to your substance use?

Part 2

2. The Scapegoat / Problem Child — did you play this role?

How strongly do you identify? Describe how it shows up.

How has this role shown up in adult relationships and recovery?

How did this role contribute to your substance use?

Part 3

3. The Lost Child / Invisible One — did you play this role?

How strongly do you identify? Describe how it shows up.

How has this role shown up in adult relationships and recovery?

How did this role contribute to your substance use?

Part 4

4. The Mascot / Caretaker — did you play this role?

How strongly do you identify? Describe how it shows up.

How has this role shown up in adult relationships and recovery?

How did this role contribute to your substance use?

Part 5

5. Role Summary

Which role(s) did you primarily play?

What did your role cost you as a child?

Who are you APART from your role?

How can understanding your family role make your inventory more accurate?

YOUR EXERCISE

Relationship Pattern Mapping

How Family-of-Origin Patterns Repeat in Adult Relationships

Part 1

1. Romantic / Intimate Partners

What is the PATTERN? What happens again and again?

How does this pattern mirror your family-of-origin dynamics?

What is YOUR part in maintaining this pattern?

Part 2

2. Friendships

What is the PATTERN?

Family-of-origin mirror?

Your part?

Part 3

3. Authority Figures (Bosses, Sponsors, Therapists)

What is the PATTERN?

Family-of-origin mirror?

Your part?

Part 4

4. Recovery Community

What role do you play? How do family-of-origin patterns show up?

Your part in maintaining patterns?

What would breaking the pattern require?

PART 4 OF 5 · READING

The Fear Inventory: ACoA Fears vs. Addiction Fears

The Big Book identifies fear as "an evil and corroding thread; the fabric of our existence was shot through with it." For most people in SUD recovery, the fear inventory examines fears that developed in the context of addiction: fear of sobriety, fear of financial ruin, fear of people's opinions, fear of being found out. These are real and important fears. But for Adult Children of Alcoholics, the fear inventory must go deeper, because the most powerful fears operating in your life were installed long before your first drink or drug.

ACoA fears are foundational. They were laid down in the neural architecture of a developing brain that was learning about the world through experiences of unpredictability, neglect, violation, or emotional chaos. These are not fears you chose to have. They are fears your nervous system created as a survival response to the environment it was given. They operate below conscious awareness, and they drive behavior with a power that rational thought cannot override.

The core ACoA fears include:

Fear of Abandonment — perhaps the deepest ACoA fear, rooted in the experience of having a parent who was physically present but emotionally gone, or who was literally absent due to addiction, death, incarceration, or departure. This fear drives codependency, people-pleasing, tolerance of abuse, and the desperate clinging to relationships that are harmful.

Fear of Authority — installed by authority figures who were unpredictable, punishing, or absent. This fear drives resistance to sponsors, therapists, treatment programs, and anyone who represents institutional power.

Fear of Emotional Expression — installed by households where emotions were dangerous. This fear creates the emotional constipation that makes Step Four feel so threatening: writing the inventory means FEELING the inventory, and feeling has been coded as dangerous.

Fear of Vulnerability — the meta-fear underneath many ACoA patterns. Vulnerability in a dysfunctional home was not a pathway to connection — it was an invitation to exploitation.

Fear of Repetition — the deep, often unconscious terror that you will become your parents. For ACoAs in SUD recovery, the discovery that they have developed the same disease their parent had can be both the most devastating and the most motivating insight of the inventory process.

When ACoA fears and addiction fears are mapped together, a comprehensive picture emerges of a human being whose entire emotional infrastructure was built on fear — and whose recovery requires not just listing fears but understanding their origins, challenging their current validity, and developing new experiences of safety that gradually rewire the fear response.

Reflection Questions

1. Which ACoA core fear (abandonment, authority, emotional expression, vulnerability, repetition) is most powerful in your life? How does it show up in your daily behavior?

2. Can you identify a fear that you always attributed to your addiction that actually has its origins in your childhood? What changes when you trace it back to its source?

3. How does the fear of becoming your parents affect your recovery? Do you see yourself repeating their patterns? How does that awareness make you feel?

4. What is your relationship with vulnerability in the context of Step Four? Can you tolerate the vulnerability required to be truly honest in your inventory, or is your nervous system in protective mode?

5. If fear is "an evil and corroding thread" in the fabric of your existence, where was that thread first woven? Who installed the fear, and how old were you when the installation began?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Fear Inventory Readiness

Scale: 1 = Not at all · 2 = A little · 3 = Somewhat · 4 = Quite a bit · 5 = Very much

1. I am driven by fears that I can trace directly back to my childhood in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2. I fear abandonment so intensely that I tolerate abusive, neglectful, or one-sided relationships rather than risk being alone

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

3. I fear success because visibility means vulnerability, and visibility in my childhood home was dangerous

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I fear authority figures because the original authorities in my life were unpredictable, punishing, or absent

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I fear intimacy because letting someone truly know me means they might see what I see — someone unworthy

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I fear my own emotions because in my family, emotions led to chaos, violence, or someone drinking

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I use substances, compulsive behaviors, or isolation to manage fears I cannot name or face directly

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I fear that a searching and fearless inventory will uncover something I cannot survive knowing about myself

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Fear Inventory — Roots & Branches

Tracing Each Fear from Its Childhood Root to Its Adult Manifestation

Part 1

1. Fear of Abandonment

Root: What childhood experience planted this fear?

Branches: How does it show up in your adult life and recovery?

Connection: How has this fear contributed to your substance use?

Part 2

2. Fear of Authority

Root:

Branches:

Connection:

Part 3

3. Fear of Vulnerability / Emotional Expression

Root:

Branches:

Connection:

Part 4

4. Fear of Failure / Success

Root:

Branches:

Connection:

Part 5

5. Fear of Becoming Your Parents

Root:

Branches:

Connection:

Part 6

6. Fear Inventory Summary

Which fear scored highest? How has it shaped your life?

Which fear most needs to be addressed for your recovery to deepen?

Write a fear release statement: "I acknowledge my fear of ____ was installed by _____. Today I choose ____ instead."

PART 5 OF 5 · READING

From Inventory to Integration: Making Step Four Transformative

Many people complete a Step Four inventory and experience a brief sense of relief followed by a return to old patterns. This happens because the inventory was treated as a document rather than a process — a list to be completed rather than a foundation for transformation. For ACoAs in dual recovery, the stakes are too high for a merely informational Step Four.

Integration means understanding that your resentment toward your partner is not just about what they did last Tuesday — it is about what your father did when you were seven, filtered through the attachment wound that taught you "people who are supposed to love you will hurt you," amplified by the shame-based self-worth that addiction reinforced, and triggered by the emotional vulnerability that early recovery demands. When you see the full chain, you have something the simple inventory cannot provide: understanding.

The traditional Step Four often emphasizes "my part" — the portion of each resentment or conflict for which the individual bears responsibility. This is essential, and ACoA identity cannot be used to avoid it. However, for ACoAs, "my part" must be understood in developmental context. Your "part" in a toxic relationship may be your inability to set boundaries — but that inability was developed in a childhood where boundaries were neither modeled nor permitted.

Your "part" in your addiction may be your continued use despite consequences — but the drive to medicate pain was born in a childhood that provided no other tools for managing unbearable emotion.

This context does not eliminate your part. It illuminates your part. And illuminated accountability is infinitely more useful than blind accountability, because it provides not just a list of wrongs but a map of the system that produced them. With that map, you can begin to change the system — not just apologize for its outputs.

The integrative Step Four also includes something traditional inventories often skip: the assets inventory. ACoAs developed remarkable strengths alongside their wounds. The hypervigilance that exhausts you also makes you perceptive and empathic. The self-reliance that isolates you also makes you competent and resourceful. An inventory that catalogs only deficits without acknowledging strengths is incomplete and dispiriting.

The final dimension of integrative Step Four work is preparation for Step Five — sharing the inventory with another human being. For ACoAs, this means selecting someone who understands developmental trauma, who can hold the complexity of dual recovery, and who will not use the traditional "keep the focus on yourself" approach to dismiss the legitimate examination of what was done to you as a child.

Step Four, done with this level of depth and integration, is not a single writing assignment. It is a sustained practice of self-examination that may take weeks or months and that benefits enormously from clinical support. The goal is not speed. The goal is truth — the full truth, on both sides. Both sides set you free.

Reflection Questions

1. Have you done Step Four before? If so, what was included and what was missing? What would a more integrative inventory include that previous attempts did not?

2. Can you trace a current problem (resentment, fear, harmful pattern) through its full chain — from childhood origin through adult development through substance use through present-day recovery? What does the full picture reveal?

3. What strengths and assets have your ACoA experiences given you? How might these strengths serve your recovery if acknowledged and intentionally developed?

4. Who would be an appropriate person to share your Step Five with, given the complexity of your dual recovery? What qualities would this person need to have?

5. If this Step Four could produce one transformative insight — one truth that, once fully seen, could change the trajectory of your recovery — what do you suspect that insight might be?

YOUR EXERCISE

Daily Inventory Practice (7 Days)

Seven Days of Real-Time Self-Observation

Part 1

1. Day 1: Resentments — Notice every time resentment arises. At end of day, write about the strongest resentment and its childhood connection.

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 2

2. Day 2: Fears — Notice every time fear drives a decision. Ask: "Is this fear about right now, or about then?"

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 3

3. Day 3: Your Role — Notice when your family role activates.

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 4

4. Day 4: Shame — Notice shame. Ask: "Is this inherited or earned?"

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 5

5. Day 5: Relationships — Notice your relationship patterns in action.

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 6

6. Day 6: Strengths — Notice your strengths, especially strengths born from struggle.

Morning Intention:

Evening Inventory:

Part 7

7. Day 7: Integration — Bring it all together. What patterns have become clearer?

Morning Intention:

Week Integration Summary:

YOUR EXERCISE

The Dual Harm Inventory

What Was Done TO You & What You Have Done

Part 1

1. Harms Done TO You — What did the addicted/dysfunctional parent do (or fail to do) that harmed you?

Part 2

2. Harms Done TO You — What did the other parent/enabler do (or fail to do)?

Part 3

3. Harms Done TO You — What were you robbed of? (Childhood, safety, innocence, trust...)

Part 4

4. Harms YOU Have Caused — Who have you harmed through your substance use?

Part 5

5. Harms YOU Have Caused — Who have you harmed through your ACoA patterns?

Part 6

6. Integration — Write a statement: "I was harmed by _____, and this contributed to my harming _____ by _____. I am responsible for my part. I am not responsible for theirs."

YOUR EXERCISE

Assets Inventory — Strengths from Struggle

Naming What Is Right Alongside What Went Wrong

Part 1

1. Resilience & Endurance — You survived things that would have destroyed many people.

How does this strength show up?

How can you develop and deploy it in recovery?

Part 2

2. Empathy & Emotional Intelligence — Growing up reading the room taught you to understand human emotions.

How does this strength show up?

How can you develop and deploy it in recovery?

Part 3

3. Self-Reliance & Competence — Learning to take care of yourself created genuine capability.

How does this strength show up?

How can you develop and deploy it in recovery?

Part 4

4. Recovery Itself — Choosing to examine your life and heal is a profound strength.

What does your commitment to recovery reveal about who you really are?

Write a statement of identity: "I am someone who was wounded by ____ AND who carries the strengths of ____."

YOUR EXERCISE**Step Four Summary & Step Five Preparation**

Integrating Your Inventory & Preparing to Share It

Part 1

1. Core Themes — What are the 3-5 most important themes or patterns that emerged from your inventory work?

Part 2

2. What was the most surprising discovery — something you did not fully see before this process?

Part 3

3. What is the central ACoA wound that runs through your resentments, fears, shame, and relationship patterns?

Part 4

4. Step Five Preparation — Who will you share your Step Five with? What qualities does this person need?

Part 5

5. What part of your inventory most NEEDS to be spoken aloud — the part that loses its power when it is no longer a secret?

Part 6

6. Your Step Four Declaration — Write a personal statement capturing the essence of what you have learned: "I have taken a searching and fearless moral inventory of myself... What I have discovered... What I am accountable for... What I am releasing... My commitment going forward is..."

Write your full declaration here (take your time — this is sacred work):
