

Steps Six & Seven for the Adult Child

Adult Children of Alcoholics · The Recovery Files

Dropping the Rock: Releasing Defects & Transforming Survival

Step 6: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." Step 7: "Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings."

Your progress 0 of 5 parts done · REMOVE · Addiction defects that cause harm · TRANSFORM · Survival traits that now limit you · HONOR · The child's wisdom that kept you alive

In this workbook

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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 4 · READING

Step Six: "Were Entirely Ready" — The Willingness to Be Changed

Step Six states: "Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character." At first glance, it appears simple — of course you want your defects removed. Who would choose to keep the patterns that fuel addiction and destroy relationships? But Step Six is far more complex than it appears, and for the Adult Child of an Alcoholic navigating substance use disorder recovery, it contains layers that are rarely discussed in traditional treatment.

THE SUD PERSPECTIVE: RELEASING THE FUEL OF ADDICTION

In traditional SUD recovery, Step Six follows the inventory and disclosure of Steps Four and Five. You have identified the character defects that drove your addictive behavior — dishonesty, selfishness, resentment, fear, self-pity, grandiosity, manipulation. These are the fuel that kept the addiction engine running.

Step Six asks: are you ready to have them removed? The word "entirely" is the key. Alcoholics Anonymous describes Step Six as the step that "separates the men from the boys" — not because it requires perfection, but because it requires honesty about our ambivalence. We may genuinely want to stop lying, but we also recognize that lying has "worked" for us in countless situations. We may want to release resentment, but we also cling to it because it gives us a sense of righteous power.

Step Six does not demand instant transformation. It demands willingness — the readiness to be changed, even when the process is uncomfortable, even when we do not yet know what life looks like on the other side.

THE ACoA PERSPECTIVE: SURVIVAL TRAITS ARE NOT THE SAME AS DEFECTS

This is where Step Six becomes profoundly different for the Adult Child. ACoA literature makes a critical distinction that traditional SUD treatment often misses: there is a difference between character defects and survival traits.

Character defects are patterns we developed that cause harm — dishonesty, manipulation, rage, selfishness. These need to be removed.

Survival traits are adaptations the child developed to endure an impossible environment — hypervigilance, people-pleasing, emotional suppression, control, isolation, over-responsibility. These were not defects. They were brilliant, life-preserving strategies. A child who learned to read a parent's mood by the sound of their footsteps was not developing a "defect" — they were developing radar to survive danger.

The ACoA "Ready Set GO!!" workbook explicitly states that survival traits are "in a different category than defects of character." They "must be further lessened or integrated" — not simply removed. You cannot simply rip away a survival strategy without honoring what it did for you and replacing it with something that serves the same function in a healthier way.

THE INTEGRATED APPROACH: READINESS WITH DISCERNMENT

The integrated Step Six for the ACoA in SUD recovery requires a sorting process:

REMOVE: Defects that were developed in addiction and cause clear harm — dishonesty, manipulation, exploitation of others, and the selfishness that addiction demands.

TRANSFORM: Survival traits that were once necessary but now limit you — control that once protected you but now suffocates relationships; hypervigilance that once kept you safe but now keeps you in chronic anxiety.

HONOR: The child's wisdom in developing these strategies. Before you release control, thank the child who learned that the only safe thing in the house was what they could control. Before you release hypervigilance, honor the child who stayed awake listening for danger.

"Entirely ready" does not mean perfectly ready. It means willing — willing to begin the process of releasing what harms you and transforming what once saved you but now limits you.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you identify which of your patterns are genuine character defects (developed in addiction, causing harm) versus survival traits (developed in childhood, once protective)?

2. Which defects are you most reluctant to release? What benefit do they still provide that makes you cling to them?

3. Which survival traits feel most dangerous to let go of? What does your inner child fear will happen without them?

4. Have you ever been told to simply "remove" a behavior that was actually a survival adaptation? What was that experience like?

5. What does "entirely ready" mean to you — not perfection, but genuine willingness? Rate your willingness right now on a scale of 1-10 and explain.

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 1 OF 5

Character Defect Awareness

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

1. I can clearly identify the character defects that fuel my addictive behaviors
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I understand how my defects (dishonesty, selfishness, resentment, fear) have damaged my relationships
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I recognize that some of my defects provided short-term relief but caused long-term harm
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I can distinguish between defects I chose to develop and patterns that were installed by my family
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I see how my character defects and my substance use fed each other in a cycle
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I understand that my defects are not WHO I am but WHAT I DO — patterns, not identity
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have attempted to manage my defects through willpower alone and failed
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I recognize defects operating in my life TODAY, not just during active addiction
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 2 OF 5

Willingness & Resistance

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

1. I am afraid of who I will be if my defects and survival traits are removed or changed
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I secretly enjoy or benefit from some of my defects and am reluctant to release them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I cling to certain patterns because they feel familiar, even though they cause harm
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

4. I distrust the idea that a Higher Power or any outside force can change deeply ingrained patterns

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

5. I struggle with perfectionism — believing I must remove ALL defects immediately or I have failed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

6. I resist change because I associate vulnerability with danger (learned in my family of origin)

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

7. I am afraid that without my armor (control, performance, independence), I will be destroyed

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

8. I have difficulty asking for help because self-reliance was my primary survival strategy

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

The Sorting

Defects vs. Survival Traits — The Critical Distinction

Why This Matters

ACoA literature makes clear that survival traits are 'in a different category than defects of character.' Defects need to be REMOVED. Survival traits need to be TRANSFORMED and INTEGRATED. This exercise helps you sort accurately.

Dishonesty / Lying

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Manipulation

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

People-Pleasing

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Hypervigilance

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Controlling behavior

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Resentment

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Selfishness / Self-centeredness

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Emotional suppression

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Fear of abandonment

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Anger / Rage

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Isolation / Withdrawal

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Over-responsibility for others

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Perfectionism

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Approval-seeking

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Self-pity

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Distrust of everyone

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Grandiosity / Arrogance

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Victim mentality

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Fear of authority figures

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Addiction to excitement/chaos

☐ Addiction Defect ☐ Childhood Survival ☐ Both ☐ Not Mine

Sorting Reflection

1. Looking at your sorting, how many items were PURELY addiction defects vs. childhood survival traits vs. BOTH? What does this ratio tell you?

2. For items marked "Both," can you trace the timeline? Did the childhood survival trait come first and then get amplified by addiction?

3. Which survival traits have been most mistakenly treated as defects in your recovery so far? How did that mislabeling affect you?

4. Write a statement of discernment: "The defects I am ready to RELEASE are _____. The survival traits I want to TRANSFORM are _____."

YOUR EXERCISE

Why I Cling

The Hidden Benefits That Keep You Holding On

The Payoff Problem

We don't hold onto defects because we're masochistic. We hold them because they WORK — at least in the short term. Every defect provides a payoff. Until you honestly name the payoff, you cannot become 'entirely ready' to release it.

Dishonesty

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Protects from consequences, maintains image, avoids conflict

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Control

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Creates illusion of safety, reduces anxiety, prevents being hurt

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Resentment

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Provides sense of moral superiority, justifies anger, avoids vulnerability

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

People-Pleasing

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Avoids rejection, maintains relationships, prevents abandonment

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Isolation

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Prevents being hurt, avoids emotional demands, feels safe

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Perfectionism

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Prevents criticism, earns approval, covers deep shame

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Self-Pity

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Attracts sympathy, justifies inaction, avoids responsibility

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

Grandiosity

COMMON HIDDEN BENEFIT

Covers inadequacy, commands respect, prevents vulnerability

What is YOUR specific payoff for this defect? What does it get you?

What is the COST of keeping it? What does it take from you and others?

Is the payoff worth the cost? Are you willing to find a healthier way to get this need met?

PART 2 OF 4 · READING

Step Seven: "Humbly Asked" — Surrender, Humility, and the Reparenting Process

Step Seven states: "Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings." If Step Six is the willingness, Step Seven is the action — the actual asking. And for the ACoA in SUD recovery, the act of "humbly asking" activates some of the deepest wounds from childhood.

THE SUD PERSPECTIVE: THE POWER OF ASKING

In traditional SUD recovery, Step Seven is about humility — the recognition that willpower alone cannot remove deeply entrenched patterns. The Big Book's Step Seven prayer states: "My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows."

This prayer represents a fundamental shift from the addict's default position of self-reliance, control, and willful manipulation of outcomes. The addict has spent years trying to manage everything — their mood, their image, their supply, their consequences. Step Seven says: stop managing. Ask for help.

THE ACoA PERSPECTIVE: WHY "HUMBLY ASKING" IS TERRIFYING

For the Adult Child, every word in Step Seven carries weight that the traditional reading does not capture.

"HUMBLY" — The ACoA grew up in a system where humility was often confused with humiliation. Being "humble" in the alcoholic home meant being invisible, submissive, compliant, small. But genuine humility is not humiliation. Humility is seeing yourself clearly — neither inflated by grandiosity nor deflated by shame. It is "right-sized" — the accurate perception of both your strengths and your limitations.

"ASKED" — The ACoA may have never learned how to ask. In the alcoholic home, asking was either futile (no one was listening), dangerous (asking triggered rage), or manipulative (the only way to get needs met was through indirect strategies). Many ACoAs learned to demand, to perform, to earn, to manipulate, to plead — but never to simply ask.

"GOD" — For many ACoAs, the concept of a Higher Power is complicated by their experience of the highest powers in their childhood: their parents. If the most powerful beings in your world were unpredictable, punishing, absent, or incapacitated, the idea of surrendering to a Higher Power can feel like returning to the very dynamic that wounded you.

THE REPARING DIMENSION

ACoA recovery introduces a concept absent from traditional SUD treatment: reparenting. In the context of Step Seven, reparenting means approaching your shortcomings with the same compassion a good parent would show a struggling child — not with the harsh criticism, punishment, or neglect that your actual parents demonstrated.

Reparenting in Step Seven looks like: "Dear little one, I see that you learned to control everything because nothing in your world was safe. That was so smart of you. You kept us alive. Now we are safe enough to learn a different way. I am going to ask for help in loosening that grip — not because you were wrong, but because you deserve to rest."

HUMILITY AS STRENGTH

The deepest work of Step Seven is the transformation of humility from a weakness into a strength. For the ACoA who learned that asking for help meant being taken advantage of, Step Seven is the revolutionary act of saying: "I am strong enough to be vulnerable. I am courageous enough to need help. I am worthy enough to ask."

Step Seven, done with this integrated awareness, becomes an act of self-love rather than self-punishment — a request for wholeness rather than a confession of brokenness.

Reflection Questions

1. Do you confuse humility with humiliation? When you hear "humbly asked," what does your nervous system feel — safety or threat?

2. In your family of origin, what happened when you asked for help? How has this shaped your ability to ask today?

3. What is your current relationship with a Higher Power? Has your childhood experience of parental figures affected your ability to trust a power greater than yourself?

4. Can you distinguish between the shortcomings you want REMOVED and the survival traits you want TRANSFORMED? Write your list for each.

5. Write a reparenting statement to your inner child about one survival trait you are working on:
"Dear little one, I see that you learned to ____ because _____. That was so wise. Now we can learn to ____ instead."

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 3 OF 5

Humility vs. Humiliation

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

1. I confuse humility with humiliation — being humble feels like being weak or degraded
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. My family of origin taught me that asking for help is a sign of failure
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I associate being "right-sized" with being small, invisible, or unimportant
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I oscillate between grandiosity ("I can fix myself") and shame ("I'm beyond help")
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I struggle to simply ASK for help without demanding, manipulating, or performing
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I have difficulty accepting that I cannot change my own deeply rooted patterns alone
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. The concept of surrendering defects to a Higher Power feels passive rather than powerful
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I understand that humility means seeing myself clearly — neither too big nor too small
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Reparenting Each Survival Trait

The Compassionate Approach to Transformation

Becoming Your Own Loving Parent

ACoA recovery teaches that we must 'reparent ourselves with gentleness, humor, love, and respect.' Before you can release a survival trait, you must first honor what it did for you. A good parent does not punish a child for developing coping mechanisms — they validate the child's experience and then gently guide them toward healthier responses.

Reparenting: Control

What did the child learn? Why did they develop this trait? What was the danger they were adapting to?

Write a gratitude statement to this trait: "Thank you for _____. You helped me survive by _____."

Now write a gentle release statement: "I am safe enough now to _____. I no longer need to _____ because _____."

What will replace this trait? What is the healthier version you are growing into?

Reparenting: People-Pleasing

What did the child learn? Why did they develop this trait? What was the danger they were adapting to?

Write a gratitude statement to this trait: "Thank you for _____. You helped me survive by _____."

Now write a gentle release statement: "I am safe enough now to _____. I no longer need to _____ because _____."

What will replace this trait? What is the healthier version you are growing into?

Reparenting: Emotional Suppression

What did the child learn? Why did they develop this trait? What was the danger they were adapting to?

Write a gratitude statement to this trait: "Thank you for _____. You helped me survive by _____."

Now write a gentle release statement: "I am safe enough now to _____. I no longer need to _____ because _____."

What will replace this trait? What is the healthier version you are growing into?

Reparenting: Hypervigilance

What did the child learn? Why did they develop this trait? What was the danger they were adapting to?

Write a gratitude statement to this trait: "Thank you for _____. You helped me survive by _____."

Now write a gentle release statement: "I am safe enough now to _____. I no longer need to _____ because _____."

What will replace this trait? What is the healthier version you are growing into?

Reparenting: Isolation

What did the child learn? Why did they develop this trait? What was the danger they were adapting to?

Write a gratitude statement to this trait: "Thank you for _____. You helped me survive by _____."

Now write a gentle release statement: "I am safe enough now to _____. I no longer need to _____ because _____."

What will replace this trait? What is the healthier version you are growing into?

YOUR EXERCISE

Humility vs. Humiliation

Reclaiming Right-Sized Seeing

The ACoA Confusion

Most ACoAs confuse humility with humiliation because in their family of origin, being 'humble' meant being invisible, submissive, or accepting mistreatment. Genuine humility is the accurate, compassionate perception of yourself — your real strengths AND your real limitations.

- ✓ Sees self clearly — strengths AND weaknesses
- ✗ Sees self as small, worthless, invisible
- ✓ Asks for help as an act of courage
- ✗ Pleads for help from a position of degradation
- ✓ Recognizes limits without shame
- ✗ Experiences limits as proof of defectiveness
- ✓ Values self AND others equally
- ✗ Puts self below everyone else
- ✓ Open to learning and feedback
- ✗ Accepts all criticism as deserved punishment
- ✓ Surrenders control as wisdom
- ✗ Surrenders agency as defeat

HUMILITY (left) vs. HUMILIATION (right)

Your Personal Humility Inventory

1. In your family of origin, was "being humble" associated with being submissive, invisible, or accepting mistreatment? Give specific examples.

2. Do you oscillate between grandiosity ("I can handle everything alone") and shame ("I am worthless and beyond help")? Where are you today?

3. What does genuine humility — accurate self-perception without inflation or deflation — feel like in your body? Have you ever experienced it?

4. What specific act of genuine humility could you practice this week?

5. Write your personal definition of humility that separates it from the humiliation you experienced in childhood.

YOUR EXERCISE

Learning to Ask

The Practice of Step Seven's Core Action

Asking Is the Action

Step Seven's power is in the asking itself. For many ACoAs, asking was never safe. You learned to demand, perform, earn, manipulate, or do without — but never to simply ask. This exercise builds the muscle of genuine asking.

Your Asking History

1. In your family of origin, what happened when you asked for what you needed?

2. What strategies did you develop INSTEAD of asking directly?

3. In active addiction, how did your asking skills deteriorate further?

4. Right now, what is the hardest thing for you to ask for?

Asking Practice Ladder

Build your asking capacity gradually. Write a specific, genuine ask at each level:

Level 1 — Easy Ask

Ask someone for something practical with low emotional risk

Level 2 — Moderate Ask

Ask someone for something that requires mild vulnerability

Level 3 — Vulnerable Ask

Ask someone for something emotionally meaningful (forgiveness, patience, support in recovery)

Level 4 — Deep Ask

Ask your Higher Power for help with a specific defect or survival trait

Level 5 — The Step Seven Ask

Write your full Step Seven request — asking for the removal of defects and the transformation of survival traits

PART 3 OF 4 · READING

The Neuroscience of Character Change: How the Brain Releases and Rebuilds

Understanding what happens in the brain during the process of releasing character defects and transforming survival traits is not optional knowledge — it is the foundation for realistic expectations and sustained motivation in Steps Six and Seven.

WHY DEFECTS AND SURVIVAL TRAITS ARE SO HARD TO RELEASE

Character defects and survival traits are not abstract moral categories. They are neurological realities — deeply worn neural pathways that fire automatically, often without conscious awareness. The brain operates on a principle of efficiency: behaviors that are repeated become automated. A neural pathway that has been traveled thousands of times becomes a superhighway — fast, effortless, and the default route the brain takes whenever a familiar trigger appears.

For the person in SUD recovery, defects like dishonesty, manipulation, and resentment have been practiced extensively during active addiction. These are not just "bad habits" — they are neurological structures.

For the ACoA, survival traits have an even deeper foundation. They were installed during the critical period of brain development — childhood. The hypervigilance of a child raised in an alcoholic home is not a thought pattern — it is wired into the brainstem, the amygdala, and the autonomic nervous system. This is why willpower alone fails.

THE CONDITIONS FOR NEUROPLASTIC CHANGE

Research has identified several conditions that promote genuine neural pathway change:

1. **Safety:** The brain does not change in environments it perceives as threatening. For the ACoA, feeling safe enough to release survival traits requires first establishing safety in the present.
2. **Repetition:** New neural pathways are formed through repeated practice. Every time you practice the new behavior (honesty instead of deception, vulnerability instead of control, asking instead of demanding), you are literally building new brain architecture.
3. **Emotional Engagement:** Change that is accompanied by genuine feeling — grief for the old pattern, hope for the new, compassion for the child who developed the survival strategy — is encoded more deeply than change that is purely intellectual.
4. **Social Connection:** Having a sponsor, a therapist, a recovery community — people who witness your change and support it — provides co-regulation that your nervous system uses as scaffolding while new pathways are being built.
5. **Self-Compassion:** Dr. Kristin Neff's research demonstrates that self-criticism activates the brain's threat response system, which actually inhibits change. Self-compassion creates the safety needed for neuroplastic change. This is why the ACoA reparenting approach is neurologically superior to the harsh self-criticism many people bring to Step work.

WHAT "REMOVAL" AND "TRANSFORMATION" LOOK LIKE IN THE BRAIN

When Step Seven asks for "removal of shortcomings," the neuroscience suggests this is more accurately described as weakening of old pathways and strengthening of new ones. The old pathway does not disappear — it atrophies from disuse while new pathways grow.

For survival traits, the transformation involves retaining the core competency while changing its expression. The ACoA who developed hypervigilance does not lose the capacity for acute awareness — they learn to channel it into appropriate contexts (professional excellence, empathic attunement) rather than applying it indiscriminately (scanning every room for threat). The pattern is redirected, not erased.

This understanding transforms Steps Six and Seven from magical thinking into evidence-based recovery work: "I am creating the conditions — safety, repetition, emotional engagement, connection, self-compassion — that allow my brain to build new pathways while the old ones gradually weaken."

Reflection Questions

1. Does understanding character defects as neural pathways rather than moral failures change how you think about your own patterns? How?

2. Which of the five conditions for change (safety, repetition, emotional engagement, social connection, self-compassion) is most present in your current recovery? Which is most absent?

3. Have you experienced a moment of reverting to old patterns under stress? Can you reframe this not as failure but as a temporarily reactivated pathway?

4. How does understanding that childhood survival traits are neurologically deeper than addiction-era defects change your approach to self-compassion?

5. What one new pathway are you actively building right now? How are you practicing it with enough repetition for it to become automatic?

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 4 OF 5

Survival Trait Recognition (ACoA)

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

1. I can identify behaviors I developed as a child to survive my dysfunctional family
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I understand that my people-pleasing, hypervigilance, or control are survival strategies, not character flaws
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I recognize that some behaviors labeled "defects" were actually brilliant adaptations to an impossible childhood
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I can distinguish between traits that need to be REMOVED and traits that need to be INTEGRATED or TRANSFORMED
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I carry Laundry List traits (isolation, approval-seeking, fear of authority) that still operate in my adult life
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I understand that my survival traits served me as a child but now limit me as an adult
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I have confused my survival adaptations with my identity — "I AM controlling" vs. "I LEARNED to control"
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I recognize that addressing survival traits requires compassion, not just willpower or surrender
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Laundry List Transformation Map

From Survival Trait to Spiritual Asset

Integrate, Don't Amputate

ACoA recovery teaches that Laundry List traits can be 'transformed into spiritual assets when possible.' This is not about removing parts of yourself — it is about redirecting the energy that

was once devoted to survival into capacities for healthy, fulfilling living.

We became isolated and afraid of people and authority f...

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We became isolated and afraid of people and authority figures.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

Healthy boundaries with genuine connection. Discernment about safety without blanket distrust.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

The capacity for independence and self-sufficiency — channeled into healthy autonomy.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the...

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We became approval seekers and lost our identity in the process.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

Internal validation and authentic self-expression. Caring about others' perspectives without being controlled by them.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

Empathy and attentiveness to others — channeled into compassion rather than self-erasure.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

We are frightened by angry people and any personal crit...

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We are frightened by angry people and any personal criticism.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

The ability to distinguish between dangerous anger and healthy expression. Receiving feedback without experiencing it as threat.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

Emotional sensitivity — channeled into therapeutic attunement rather than hypervigilance.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility....

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

Appropriate responsibility — for your own actions, feelings, and choices, without carrying others' burdens.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

Strong work ethic and reliability — channeled into sustainable service rather than burnout.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves....

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We get guilt feelings when we stand up for ourselves.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

The capacity to assert needs without guilt. Understanding that self-advocacy is not selfishness.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

Awareness of others' feelings — channeled into respectful assertiveness.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

We became addicted to excitement....

SURVIVAL TRAIT

We became addicted to excitement.

↓ Transform into ↓

HEALTHY EXPRESSION

The ability to tolerate calm, to find peace stimulating, and to create healthy excitement through meaningful pursuits.

SPIRITUAL ASSET

High energy and intensity — channeled into passionate purposeful living.

How does this survival trait currently show up in YOUR life?

What would the TRANSFORMED version look like in your daily life?

YOUR EXERCISE

Defect-to-Principle Replacement

What Replaces What You Release

Nature Abhors a Vacuum

Releasing a defect without replacing it creates a void that the old pattern will rush to fill. Every defect removed must be replaced with a spiritual principle practiced daily.

Dishonesty → Honesty

Dishonesty

→

Honesty

DAILY PRACTICE

Tell one truth today that you would normally avoid.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Selfishness → Generosity of spirit

Selfishness

→

Generosity of spirit

DAILY PRACTICE

Do one thing for someone else with no expectation of return.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Resentment → Forgiveness / Acceptance

Resentment

→

Forgiveness / Acceptance

DAILY PRACTICE

Pray for someone you resent. Release one grievance.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Fear → Courage / Faith

Fear

→

Courage / Faith

DAILY PRACTICE

Do one thing today that fear tells you to avoid.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Control → Surrender / Trust

Control

→

Surrender / Trust

DAILY PRACTICE

Intentionally allow one outcome you cannot control.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Self-Pity → Gratitude

Self-Pity

→

Gratitude

DAILY PRACTICE

List 5 genuine things you are grateful for right now.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Grandiosity → Right-sized humility

Grandiosity

→

Right-sized humility

DAILY PRACTICE

Honestly acknowledge one limitation without shame.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

Isolation → Connection

Isolation

→

Connection

DAILY PRACTICE

Reach out to one person today — not to fix or be fixed, just to connect.

How does this defect specifically show up in YOUR life?

What would practicing the replacing principle look like in a specific situation this week?

YOUR EXERCISE

Body-Based Release

Where Defects and Survival Traits Live in Your Body

The Body Holds the Pattern

Character defects and survival traits are not just thoughts — they are physical patterns stored in muscle tension, posture, breathing, and nervous system activation. Releasing them involves the body as much as the mind.

Jaw / Teeth

PATTERN HELD HERE

Clenching, grinding — holding back words, suppressing anger, maintaining control

RELEASE PRACTICE

Conscious jaw release. Let the tongue float free from the roof of the mouth. Speak the truth you are holding.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

Shoulders / Upper Back

PATTERN HELD HERE

Carrying weight — over-responsibility, carrying others' burdens, hypervigilance

RELEASE PRACTICE

Shoulder drops. Deliberately lower shoulders. Physically practice putting down what is not yours to carry.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

Chest / Heart

PATTERN HELD HERE

Tightness, armoring — fear of vulnerability, guarding against hurt, closed to love

RELEASE PRACTICE

Chest-opening breath. Inhale into the center of the chest. Practice allowing the heart area to soften.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

Stomach / Gut

PATTERN HELD HERE

Nausea, knots — anxiety, dread, unprocessed fear, anticipation of danger

RELEASE PRACTICE

Belly breathing. Let the belly expand fully. Trust that the body can hold difficult feelings without crisis.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

Throat

PATTERN HELD HERE

Constriction, lump — unsaid words, suppressed truth, childhood silence rules

RELEASE PRACTICE

Humming, singing, speaking aloud. The throat opens when it is used for truth rather than closed for protection.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

Hands

PATTERN HELD HERE

Clenching, gripping — control, refusal to let go, holding on tight

RELEASE PRACTICE

Palm-opening practice. Physically open hands, palms up. Practice the posture of receiving rather than gripping.

What do you notice in this area right now? What defect or survival trait is stored here?

Try the release practice for 30 seconds. What shifted? What did you feel?

PART 4 OF 4 · READING

Dropping the Rock: The Integrated Metaphor for Steps 6 & 7

One of the most powerful metaphors in recovery literature is "Dropping the Rock." A person is swimming toward a boat filled with their recovery community. They are determined to reach safety. But they are sinking — slowly, inexorably — because they are clutching a massive rock beneath the surface. The rock represents character defects and shortcomings. Eventually, the swimmer must make a choice: hold the rock and drown, or drop it and live.

This metaphor is powerful for traditional SUD recovery. But for the ACoA, it needs expansion, because the ACoA is not carrying one rock. They are carrying two.

THE FIRST ROCK: ADDICTION-ERA DEFECTS

This is the rock of lies, manipulation, self-centeredness, resentment, and the willful behaviors developed during active addiction. This rock was picked up consciously (even if unconsciously driven by the disease). Dropping this rock follows the traditional Step Six and Seven process: become willing, ask for help, practice new behavior, repeat.

THE SECOND ROCK: CHILDHOOD SURVIVAL ARMOR

This is different. The ACoA did not pick up this rock by choice. This rock was cemented to them in childhood — by parents who were incapacitated, by a family system that demanded the child sacrifice their authentic self to maintain the family's fragile equilibrium.

You cannot simply "drop" armor that was welded to you in childhood. It must be carefully, compassionately, gradually removed — with the understanding that removing it will feel dangerous, because the child who built it believed it was the only thing standing between them and annihilation.

THE INTEGRATED METAPHOR

In the integrated approach, Steps Six and Seven involve:

- IDENTIFYING which rocks you are carrying (defects vs. survival traits)
- BECOMING WILLING to release what can be dropped (addiction defects)
- BECOMING WILLING to gradually, compassionately remove what must be disassembled (survival armor)
- ASKING for help with both processes — because neither can be accomplished alone
- REPLACING what is released with something healthier — not just dropping the weight but building strength in the empty hands

The swimmer who drops both rocks does not emerge from the water weak and defenseless. They emerge lighter, free, and able to swim powerfully toward the people who are calling their name.

THE PARADOX OF LETTING GO

The deepest paradox of Steps Six and Seven is this: what you are most afraid to release is usually what you most need to release. The defect you cling to most fiercely is the one that most threatens your recovery. The survival trait you are most terrified to soften is the one that most limits your capacity for genuine connection and joy.

Steps Six and Seven ask you to do the counterintuitive thing: to release what feels protective and discover that you are safer without it than you ever were with it. To ask for help and discover that vulnerability is strength. To let go of the familiar pain and discover that what lies on the other side is not the emptiness you feared but the fullness you always craved.

Reflection Questions

1. Can you identify your "two rocks" — the addiction-era defects and the childhood survival armor? Name the heaviest items in each category.

2. Which rock are you more willing to drop? Which one do you cling to most tightly? Why?

3. What are you most afraid will happen if you release your most valued survival trait? Is this fear based on present reality or childhood programming?

4. What do you imagine is waiting for you on the other side of letting go? Can you envision the "lighter swimmer"?

5. Write a statement to each rock: "I am willing to release you because..." or "I am not yet ready to release you because..."

CHECK YOURSELF · CHECK-IN 5 OF 5

Steps 6 & 7 Readiness

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

1. I have completed a thorough Fourth Step inventory and shared it in Step Five
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
2. I have identified specific defects of character from my inventory work
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
3. I have a relationship with a Higher Power (however I define that) that I trust enough to ask for help
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
4. I understand that "entirely ready" means willing, not perfect
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
5. I am willing to release defects even when I do not yet know what will replace them
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
6. I am willing to approach my survival traits with compassion and integration rather than self-punishment
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
7. I understand that Steps 6 and 7 are ongoing processes, not one-time events
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5
8. I have hope that change is possible — that I can live differently than I have lived
☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

YOUR EXERCISE

Writing Your Integrated Prayers

Personalized Step 6 & 7 Prayers for the Adult Child

Two Prayers, One Wholeness

ACoA's 'Ready Set GO!!' workbook offers TWO Step Seven prayers — one for defect removal and one for survival trait integration. You will write personalized prayers for each in your own words, to your own Higher Power.

Reference Prayers

TRADITIONAL STEP 7 PRAYER (Big Book)

"My Creator, I am now willing that you should have all of me, good and bad. I pray that you now remove from me every single defect of character which stands in the way of my usefulness to you and my fellows. Grant me strength, as I go out from here, to do your bidding."

ACoA DEFECT REMOVAL PRAYER

"God, I am now ready that you should remove from me all 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."

ACoA SURVIVAL TRAIT INTEGRATION PRAYER

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

Write Your Defect Removal Prayer

Address your Higher Power and ask for the removal of your specific addiction-era defects. Name them. Be specific. This is YOUR prayer in YOUR words.

[Higher Power], I am willing to release the defects that fuel my addiction and harm those I love. Specifically, I ask you to remove my...

Write Your Survival Trait Integration Prayer

Address your Higher Power and ask for the transformation and integration of your childhood survival traits. Honor what they did for you.

[Higher Power], I honor the survival strategies that kept me alive as a child. I am ready for you to transform my...

Write Your Reparenting Prayer

Address your inner child and commit to being the loving parent they never had — especially during the difficult work of character change.

Dear little one, as I do this difficult work of releasing what no longer serves us and transforming what once kept us alive, I promise you...

YOUR EXERCISE

Who Am I Becoming?

The Post-Rock Vision — Life After Steps 6 & 7

The Lighter Swimmer

After dropping the rocks — releasing the addiction defects and transforming the survival armor — who emerges from the water? Steps Six and Seven are not about becoming empty. They are about becoming free.

Who I Was — The Weighted Swimmer

1. Describe the person you were during active addiction, weighed down by your defects. What was life like?

Remember honestly...

2. Describe the child you were, armored by survival traits. What did that child sacrifice to stay safe?

Remember honestly...

3. What has carrying both rocks cost you — in relationships, health, joy, authenticity, purpose?

Remember honestly...

Who I Am Becoming — The Lighter Swimmer

1. As your addiction defects weaken, what is emerging in their place? Describe the honest, humble, connected person who is being revealed.

2. As your survival traits transform, what healthy capacities are developing? How is the armor becoming strength?

3. What relationships become possible when you are no longer performing, controlling, or hiding?

4. What does your inner child experience when they realize they are finally safe — not through armor, but through genuine connection and self-love?

5. Write a vision statement: "Through the work of Steps Six and Seven, I am becoming a person who..."

My Steps 6 & 7 Living Commitment

Steps Six and Seven are not one-time events. They are daily practices. Write your commitment to the ongoing work.

I commit to the daily practice of Steps Six and Seven. Today, the defect I am most willing to release is... The survival trait I am most ready to transform is... I will ask for help by... I will practice the replacing principle of... I trust that this process will...

Remember

You are not broken. You are a person who developed survival strategies that brilliantly kept you alive as a child, who then developed addictive patterns that caused real harm, and who is now courageous enough to sort the two, release what causes harm, honor what once saved you, transform what limits you, and build something genuinely new. You are dropping the rock — not to be empty, but to swim free. The boat is waiting. Let go. Swim. You are ready.