

A.C.E.S. – Adult-Child Entitlement Syndrome

INTRODUCTION

As a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, my primary responsibility is to help people work through relationship issues of all kinds. In my private practice I support a client population consisting of individuals, couples, families, and groups (which are made up of individuals working together to overcome shared issues). I help people who are struggling to manage emotional or psychological issues that are directly or indirectly affecting their relationships at home, with friends, or in their careers.

Individuals may seek counseling to help them manage psychological problems such as depression, anxiety, bereavement, stress, addictive disorders, anger management, thought disorders, a wide range of adjustment disorders, and more. Couples and families usually present with issues such as communication problems, incidences of infidelity, adolescent behavioral problems, childhood disabilities that are affecting the family as a whole, grief and loss, financial incompatibility, sexual/intimacy problems, and blended family matters that often necessitate the need for counseling.

Over the last several years, however, I have become aware of yet another problem that occurs in modern families which, until now, has gone unnamed. I have treated over 100 of such families, and many times the number of married couples, for a condition I have termed A.C.E.S. - Adult-Child Entitlement Syndrome.

Usually, the spouses in a family with A.C.E.S will come in for routine marriage counseling, having only minimal awareness that their at-home adult-child (adult-child to be defined as anyone 24 or older) could be a principal factor in their marital disturbance. However, a simple review of the clinical symptoms of A.C.E.S. facilitates their understanding that they are experiencing an occurrence of A.C.E.S. in their family-system.

The A.C.E.S. Recovery Program addresses and remedies the family dilemma of A.C.E.S. The process of A.C.E.S. recovery, as outlined in this book, teaches miserable couples how to restructure their marriages into healthy, satisfying relationships. And they learn how to launch their adult-children into the world of world of personal responsibility once and for all.

As previously stated, while clients may initiate therapy to help manage symptoms of anxiety or depression, chronic interpersonal problems, or addictive disorders, I often discover that these clinical issues, at least in part, stem from A.C.E.S. To that end, it is likely that many other psychological and emotional disorders develop as a result of A.C.E.S. and these disorders frequently distract from the need to address A.C.E.S. directly.

In families with A.C.E.S., there is at least one able-bodied, underproductive adult-child living at home. In these families, adult-children maintain dependency upon their parents for housing, food, car expenses, other living expenses and even medical care. Many of these adult-children continue to live with their parents long past the college years, whether they attended college or not, subsisting as unemployed dependent adult-children. Many are chronically under-employed, working part-time jobs in order to have extra spending money. It is important to note that when A.C.E.S. is present most adult-children do not consider using the money they earn, or otherwise obtain, to pay their parents for their

living expenses. Nor do A.C.E.S. parents consider requiring their adult-children to support themselves financially which is equally dysfunctional and disturbing.

As the A.C.E.S. dilemma continued to present itself in my work, I came to identify very specific symptom patterns in both the parents and their adult-children. The consistency of the aforementioned symptom patterns allowed me to recognize what I consider to be a full-blown syndrome, the route of which is two-fold. First, the adult-children maintain a fully entrenched sense of entitlement to be cared for by their parents, financially and otherwise, indefinitely. Secondly, the parents believe they are powerless to change the situation and are paralyzed by guilt and fear over what could happen to their adult-children if they were forced to take responsibility for their own welfare. In my experience, this syndrome is not exclusive to any particular cultural or socioeconomic population. I believe that Adult-Child Entitlement Syndrome (A.C.E.S.) can be present in any family that shares certain characteristics.

This book fully outlines the characteristics exhibited by families grappling with A.C.E.S. It also delineates the formula for creating an occurrence of A.C.E.S. It details the impact of A.C.E.S. on the family as a whole and particularly, on the marital-unit of the family. If you are able to recognize the presence of A.C.E.S. in your own family, you are likely to suspect the case studies contained within this book are about you and your own adult-child! The symptom profile of A.C.E.S. is truly that consistent among families who share the disorder.

Part II is devoted to detailing the A.C.E.S. Recovery Program. It outlines the step-by-step process of launching your adult-child into the world to care for himself independently. Part II also addresses how to reorganize your family, renovate your marriage during the A.C.E.S. Recovery Process, and teaches you how to greatly reduce the potential for an A.C.E.S. relapse.

In order to ensure confidentiality of past and present clients, the names and identifiable characteristics of each case study have been changed or modified.