

...fact is...

We are the forsaken children of the world. Although we come from various ethnic

and religious backgrounds and seemingly have little in common *...fact is...* there is a common thread woven through us. As children we stood by and watched helplessly as our worlds crumbled apart, depending on strangers to come to our rescue and decide our fate, a fate which many times was worse than what we were delivered from. We have a variety of stories to tell--some of appreciation for the caring people who took us into their homes, some of seeming indifference to our circumstances, and some of hatred toward foster parents who cared not for us, but only for the monetary and personal gain. Even though some of us were fortunate enough to have been placed in a better

environment *...fact is...* many of us were placed in homes with people who simply were not equipped to deal with our special emotional needs stemming from the trauma we suffered from having been ripped away from our homes and families, however abusive and neglectful they may have been. Though our experiences are diverse, we share the same basic feelings of loss, isolation, shame, and pain. Our childhood wounds have left us feeling stigmatized. Many of us feel as though we have been nothing but a burden--unwanted by our parents and dumped off on society's doorstep to be still a further burden.

Though we may strive mightily to belong in life's mainstream *...fact is...* we find ourselves more often on the fringes of life--homeless, incarcerated, and generally bankrupt. It may appear we walk the same roads as everyone else, but our shoes show the difference. Try as we may to find our home in this world, the search has often seemed futile. It is this search that has drawn us toward another path, a path of our own choosing...

We are tired of being angry, ashamed, and alone. We want to end our isolation. **F.A.C.T.** brings us together to share our experiences, face our past, and walk a new path that will build a bridge to healing.

F.A.C.T.
FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER

OUR MISSION

F.A.C.T. is an alliance of adults who as children lived in foster care We seek support and mutual understanding of our unique problems in coping with life and learning how to find our place in the world. There are no dues or fees for membership. The only requirement for attendance at a F.A.C.T. meeting is a desire to heal from our past by sharing our experience, strength and hope. F.A.C.T. is not a replacement for individual counseling and strongly encourages people to seek additional help if necessary.

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

We believe we are the children of a loving God, however we understand Him to be.

We believe and accept that we were powerless over the circumstances of our past.

We believe the injuries of our childhood can be healed.

We believe we can be reconciled with those who injured us.

We believe releasing those who injured us leads to healing.

We believe we have a rightful place in the family of man.

We believe we are neither slaves of the past nor masters of the future.

We believe our isolation ends when we share our pain.

We believe that in finding others who are lost we find ourselves.

We believe God has a higher purpose for all of His children.

It is our hope that we can come to embrace all of these beliefs.

F.A.C.T.
FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER
OUR UNIQUE ISSUES

Many of us have found that as former foster children we have several characteristics in common. Having been separated from our biological parents, we developed many emotional problems that have complicated our relationships with other people. We have trouble trusting others; therefore we find it extremely difficult to bond with people. Much of this is due to the fact that we were moved around so often from home to home. This instability causes other emotional difficulties.

As adults many of us have become isolated individuals who are terrified of intimacy. We feel very different and alone. For many of us this leads to an unhealthy sense of self-sufficiency and independence. We adopt the attitude that we don't need others because of fear, due to our childhood experiences, which taught us that we could not depend on other people. Because many of our dependency needs were not met as children, we also tend to go to the other extreme and become overly dependent adults. Many former foster children suffer from the turmoil of either desperately wanting relationships (and doing anything to hold on to them) or being too independent out of fear of emotional investment and possible rejection.

As former foster children we never developed a strong sense that we belonged anywhere, that we had a home. Many of us live unsettled lives as a result of this instability. We want to feel as if we fit in somewhere but have a hard time feeling comfortable anywhere. We tend to alternate between the extreme of being terrified of change and feeling as if we must have change. Many of us compulsively seek change in order to survive the past trauma of having had the foundation of our lives repeatedly ripped out from beneath us at a moment's notice.

Our experiences as foster children left us with an overall sense of insecurity about ourselves and the world around us. We feel alienated in our own world, a world that is rightfully ours but from which we feel separated. As former foster children we feel the stigma of that label and have much shame.

Foster children have suffered many losses during their childhood and therefore have serious grieving issues. Many former foster children have problems with depression, largely because of our unresolved grieving issues.

F.A.C.T.
Fostered Adult Children Together
OUR COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCE

There are currently about 500,000 in the foster care system in the U.S. and 88,000 in Canada.

Many former foster children:

Have problems with stability because we were moved so many times, usually from town to town and sometimes from state to state

As adults change vocations on average every six months and change types of vocations far more often than the general population

Work at low-paying minimum-wage jobs

Don't get high-school diplomas but obtain G.E.D. certificates five to ten years later

Report cases of sexual abuse, usually by relatives and friends of the foster parents

Report cases of physical and emotional abuse

Suffer from low self-esteem and confidence, especially between the ages of eighteen and twenty-eight

Have stress disorders that appear around twenty-eight years of age

Often have poor social interactions; friendships, even long-term ones, are usually on and off due to instability, moving around a lot, changing vocations and psychological stress

Have difficulty bonding with other people

Have emotional turmoil with personal relationships

Question their parenting abilities

Have trouble managing their finances and budgeting their money

Haven't had solid role models and therefore lack a good understanding of social roles and social expectations

Struggle with guilt and shame because we feel as if we must be bad people in order for our parents and foster parents to have seemingly rejected us

Suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D.) and feel frozen in the past, afraid to move forward and strive for a better life

Have problems with depression, largely because of our unresolved grieving issues

Are homeless (currently at least 25% of the homeless population are former foster children)

Are at least 30% more prone to alcohol and substance abuse than the general population

Are inmates in our prison systems (at least two out of three according to conservative estimates)

Are 50% more likely to have a history of domestic violence than the overall population

As heads of households have already lost at least one child to foster care

Are four times more likely to be sexually abused than children in the general population

If you are a former foster child you could benefit from F.A.C.T.

F.A.C.T.

FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER

HEALING

The mission of F.A.C.T. is to help former foster children walk a new path that will build a bridge to healing. The **First Stepping Stone** on this path is to recognize we have been injured from our foster care experience, that we are powerless over our past and our lives are unmanageable. The **Second Stepping Stone** is to come to realize we can not heal alone, that only a Power greater than ourselves could restore order, hope, and sanity to our lives. The **Third Stepping Stone** is to make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him. The **Fourth Stepping Stone** is to make a searching and fearless emotional inventory of our foster care experience to discover the nature of the damage. The **Fifth Stepping Stone** is to share this inventory with God and another human being. The **Sixth Stepping Stone** is to work through our anger and pain. The **Seventh Stepping Stone** is to become aware of how our injuries hurt others and accept responsibility for our responses to the trauma we suffered. The **Eighth Stepping Stone** is to continue to take personal inventory and become willing to let go of our resentments. The **Ninth Stepping Stone** is to seek through prayer and meditation to improve our relationship with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. The **Tenth Stepping Stone** is to have a spiritual awakening as a result of these stepping stones and to reach out to other former foster children and practice these principles in our lives.

GOALS OF RECOVERY

As former foster children, we believe there are certain goals we need to pursue in order to secure a better future. These goals are:

1. Make better decisions in our lives by becoming aware of how the past affects our decisions today
2. Become more patient and tolerant
3. Achieve better self-esteem
4. Cut the cords of shame that binds us by realizing that the abuses of the past are not our fault
5. Improve the quality of our life and our standard of living
6. Enhance the quality of our social and intimate relationships
7. Be able to reach out to others who feel lost or abandoned

It is our hope that as we endeavor to reach these goals, we will begin to cast our own shadow rather than live in it.

F.A.C.T.

FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER

HEALING SUGGESTIONS

These are suggestions that could be helpful on your path to healing:

1. **JOURNALING:** Keep a private journal, and when you feel the need to vent feelings or get a perspective on a troubling issue in your life, just begin writing and you will be able to make more sense out of whatever is troubling you.

2. **WRITING LETTERS:** Write letters to people in your past who you feel harmed you. This is an excellent way to constructively deal with anger. You can burn the letter after you're done if you wish.

3. **INVENTORY:** Do a thorough inventory of your past, including the people who harmed you, how you were affected by it and how you may have retaliated. Share this inventory with someone you trust, such as a good friend, a therapist, or a priest or minister.

4. **THERAPY:** Seek additional help in therapy if you feel you need it. It is a good way to get new insights about yourself.

5. **EXCHANGE PHONE NUMBERS:** It is important to have people who you feel comfortable with when things come up from day to day for which you need support.

6. **SELF-WORTH AFFIRMATIONS:** This can be very beneficial for your self-esteem. As you begin to declare some positive things about yourself, you may begin to believe them. Here are a few suggestions for self-affirmations:

I am a good person with a good heart.

I am worthy of all the blessings I receive.

I am an attractive person.

I am worthy to be loved.

I am a loving person.

7. **PRAYING:** When we pray we are talking to our Higher Power. When we begin to see our prayers answered, it increases our faith and also our self-esteem, as we begin to feel worthy of God's blessings.

8. **MEDITATING:** Meditating is listening to our Higher Power, which has a calming effect and builds a closer relationship with God, however we understand Him to be. Listening to meditation tapes is also very relaxing.

9. **NURTURE YOUR INNER CHILD:** It is very important to nurture your inner child, as our inner child was wounded when we were little and suffered much trauma. Our inner child was neglected years ago and we need to give him or her recognition, validation and love. Here are ways to nurture your inner child:

Hug a teddy bear when you feel insecure.

Tell your inner child you love him and will never abandon him or her.

Take a warm bubble bath.

Give your inner child a pet to love, such as a dog or cat.

Go for a walk and enjoy nature.

Be silly and laugh. Watch a funny movie or act goofy. It is a good way to lighten up and not be so serious.

10. **SEEK SUPPORT FOR SEXUAL ABUSE:** If you were sexually abused, we encourage you to seek additional help for this, either in F.A.C.T. with someone else who was sexually abused, in a sexual abuse support group, or with a qualified sexual abuse counselor.

11. **WORK THROUGH EMOTIONS:** As we begin to feel our feelings that many times have been buried, we need to find ways that will be helpful in venting them. One of our strongest emotions is anger and many of us will have a tremendous amount of it about the unfair circumstances of our past and the people who harmed us. It is very important to work through our anger and we need to have healthy ways to do this. Working through anger can be a bridge to healing and can even lead us to the beginnings of forgiveness. Here are some constructive ways to work through anger:

Punching pillows

Throwing rocks outside or kicking rocks while you are walking

Yelling in your car

Talking to an empty chair and pretending it is whoever hurt you

Writing your anger down on paper

Crying--Allow yourself to cry when you need to-- not only is it a healthy way to release emotions, but it also has a tranquilizing affect.

Exercising--Doing anything physical, especially running or walking.

Exercise releases bottled up energy and will raise your endorphin level, which has a calming, yet uplifting effect.

Make a gratitude list of all the things for which you can be grateful. Try to see your cup as half full instead of half empty. This helps a person to feel happier.

Become more health conscious--More and more evidence suggests that nutrition affects our mental and emotional states; so learning proper nutritional habits is essential in maintaining a healthy body, mind and spirit.

12. **GRIEVING:** As foster children we suffered many losses and we therefore have serious grieving issues. Grief is the process of withdrawing psychological attachments from events, persons, or objects which reality says no longer exist for us. Unresolved grief can lead to a multitude of problems, including depression and even suicidal tendencies.

It is crucial that we allow ourselves to grieve because this will bring about healing.

As former foster children, many of us remain stuck in the depression, but we aren't even aware that we have denial and anger. In order to begin grief work, we need to recognize what we have lost. It could be helpful to make a list of all of your losses and then write down how you think each loss has affected you, emotionally and otherwise. Since much of our depression is repressed or suppressed anger, working through anger in constructive ways will alleviate it. Venting our anger with safe people will also be beneficial and will be validating and releasing at the same time. It is important that we express our emotions and accept the confusion that these emotions generate.

An additional place besides F.A.C.T. to work through grief could be a grief group or with a qualified therapist. As we work through our grief, we will begin to discover deep underlying sadness over all of the losses we suffered as fostered and abandoned children. Many unshed tears will accompany this sadness and we should allow ourselves to cry when we need to cry. Nurture your inner child a lot when you are working through intense grief because your inner child will be especially vulnerable at such times.

Here is a list of self-help books that could be helpful in your healing process:

HEALING THE SHAME THAT BINDS YOU--by John Bradshaw

THE COURAGE TO HEAL--by Ellen Bass and Laura Davis (For survivors of sexual abuse.)

TRAUMA AND RECOVERY--by Judith Herman, M.D.

GENESIS--by Julie Bowden and Herbert Gravit

LETTING GO OF SHAME--by Ronald Potter and Patricia Potter-Efron

SELF-PARENTING--by Dr. John K. Pollard, III

THE FEELING GOOD HANDBOOK--by David D. Burns

THE SURVIVOR PERSONALITY--by Al Siebert, PH. D.

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELED--by M. Scott Peck, M.D.

F.A.C.T.

FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER

10 STEPPING STONES AND THE BRIDGE TO HEALING

1. We recognize we have been injured from our foster care experience, that we are powerless over our past and our lives are unmanageable.
2. Come to realize we can not heal alone, that only a Power greater than ourselves could restore order, hope, and sanity to our lives.
3. Make a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understand Him.
4. Make a searching and fearless emotional inventory of our foster care experience to discover the nature of the damage.
5. Share this inventory with God and another human being.
6. Humbly ask God he help us work through our anger and pain.
7. Become aware of how our injuries hurt others and accept responsibility for our responses to the trauma we suffered.
8. Continue to take personal inventory and become willing to let go of our resentments.
9. Seek through prayer and meditation to improve our relationship with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out.
10. Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these stepping stones, we reach out to other former foster children and practice these principles in our lives.

Each stepping stone on this bridge to healing is an integral part of the healing process. In each meeting we will focus on one particular stepping stone and discuss related issues.

RELATED DISCUSSION ISSUES

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| 1. isolation and loneliness | 14. financial problems |
| 2. loss and grief | 15. guilt |
| 3. anger | 16. independence versus dependence |
| 4. sense of failure | 17. sense of being failed by the foster-care system |
| 5. abandonment | 18. alcohol and substance abuse problems |
| 6. poor social interaction | 19. how to break the cycle |
| 7. poor parenting skills | 20. difficulty with emotions |
| 8. instability (moving a lot) | 21. trust |
| 9. vocational problems | 22. shame |
| 10. educational problems | 23. depression |
| 11. sexual abuse | 24. difficulty believing in and/or trusting God |
| 12. self-esteem | 25. domestic problems |
| 13. stress disorders | 26. criminal behavior |

F.A.C.T.

FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION

Hello everyone and welcome to F.A.C.T. We would especially like to welcome any newcomers. If you feel comfortable telling us your name, please do so. We would like to acknowledge you and encourage you to keep coming back.

MISSION STATEMENT

OUR MISSION

F.A.C.T. is an alliance of adults who as children were separated from their parents and lived in foster care. We seek support and mutual understanding of our unique problems in coping with life and learning how to find our place in the world. There are no dues or fees for membership. The only requirement for attendance at a F.A.C.T. meeting is a desire to heal from our past by sharing our experience, strength and hope. F.A.C.T. is not a replacement for individual counseling and strongly encourages people to seek additional help if necessary.

If everyone is comfortable doing so, we'd like to hold hands and say a short F.A.C.T. prayer.

As we unite, no longer is there a sense of isolation. By reaching out to one another, we hope to find strength in recovering from our unique issues as former fostered and abandoned children, for the purpose of moving into a brighter future.

(Ask one person to read HEALING)

HEALING

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our relationship with God as we understand Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. The **Tenth Stepping Stone** is to have a spiritual awakening as a result of these stepping stones and to reach out to other former foster children and practice these principles in our lives.

(Ask one person to read STATEMENT OF BELIEFS)

STATEMENT OF BELIEFS

We believe we are the children of a loving God, however we understand Him to be.

We believe and accept that we were powerless over the circumstances of our past.

We believe the injuries of our childhood can be healed.

We believe we can be reconciled with those who injured us.

We believe releasing those who injured us leads to healing.

We believe we have a rightful place in the family of man.

We believe we are neither slaves of the past nor masters of the future.

We believe our isolation ends when we share our pain.

We believe that in finding others who are lost we find ourselves.

We believe God has a higher purpose for all of His children.

Each stepping stone on this bridge to healing is an integral part of the healing process. It is our hope that as we work through these stepping stones we can come to embrace all of these beliefs.

(Ask one person to read GOALS OF RECOVERY)

GOALS OF RECOVERY

As former foster children, we believe there are certain goals we need to pursue in order to secure a better future. These goals are:

1. Make better decisions in our lives by becoming aware of how the past affects our decisions today
2. Become more patient and tolerant

3. Achieve better self-esteem
4. Cut the cords of shame that binds us by realizing that the abuses of the past are not our fault
5. Improve the quality of our life and our standard of living
6. Enhance the quality of our social and intimate relationships
7. Be able to reach out to others who feel lost or abandoned

It is our hope that as we endeavor to reach these goals, we will begin to cast our own shadow rather than live in it.

Are there any announcements concerning F.A.C.T.?

On the tables are lists of F.A.C.T. discussion issues that relate to the 10 Stepping Stones. In each meeting we will focus on one particular Stepping Stone and discuss Related Issues, Goals of Recovery, and Statement of Beliefs.

The **Stepping Stone** that will be discussed tonight is _____.

Since F.A.C.T. is a new support group, things may not be perfected yet. We want everyone here to feel a part of F.A.C.T. and we encourage anyone who might have any new ideas for F.A.C.T. to share them with us after the meeting. We value your input and respect your opinions.

As stated in the group rules, there is no cross-talking allowed during the meeting. If you desire feedback from someone, wait until the meeting is finished. It is also crucial that what we discuss in these meetings remain confidential. We also ask that you be considerate of how much time you spend talking so that everyone has a chance to share.

There are refreshments on the counter for everyone. Feel free to help yourself. The meeting will last 1 and 1/2 hours. At the end of the meeting, all who are comfortable doing so will hold hands and say the Serenity Prayer. Enjoy your meeting.

ENDING PRAYER FOR F.A.C.T. MEETING
SERENITY PRAYER

God grant me the...
Serenity to accept the things I can not change
Courage to change the things I can, and the
Wisdom to know the difference
Patience for the things that take time
Appreciation for all that we have, and
Tolerance for those with different struggles
Freedom to live beyond the limitations of our past ways, the
Ability to feel your love for us and our love for each other and the
Strength to get up and try again even when we feel it is hopeless.

F.A.C.T.
FOSTERED ADULT CHILDREN TOGETHER
GROUP RULES

1. F.A.C.T. is a self-help support group, not a reference agency or resource center, but we do not discourage individual members from assisting others.
2. F.A.C.T. is for anyone who is a former foster child.
3. No alcohol or drugs allowed in F.A.C.T. meetings. We will not turn away those who are currently abusing drugs or alcohol, but because your addiction can only interfere with your recovery from F.A.C.T. issues, we strongly recommend you seek additional help for your addiction.
4. Each person should be allowed (but not required) to speak.
5. No one should get up to leave while a F.A.C.T. meeting is in progress unless it is an emergency.
6. We are free to express our emotions as long as it isn't done violently.
7. No feedback or cross-talking is allowed during F.A.C.T. meetings. If feedback is desired, wait until the meeting is over.
8. Do not have side communications--it is discourteous to whoever is talking.
9. No hugging or touching is allowed unless it's desired.
10. If someone is crying, don't offer him or her a tissue or pat the person on the back (this could suggest to them that they shouldn't be crying, which is non-validating and could interfere with their emotional healing).
11. Never ridicule someone for his or her feelings. Be validating towards other people's pain.
12. We listen and express our feelings. We do not prescribe, diagnose, judge or give advice. We offer suggestions if they are sought.
13. What we share is confidential and we have a right to remain anonymous if we so choose.
14. We each share responsibility for making the group work. We have no group leader.
15. F.A.C.T. meetings will be limited to 1 & 1/2 hours.