Addiction in the Family
A Guide for Caring Adults

Alcoholism and drug addiction takes a toll on the family. Many families have at least one parent who needs treatment for alcohol or drug dependency. Many children are exposed to illegal drug use in these families. Children of addiction (or COA's) are at great risk for:

- Mental illness or emotional problems, such as:
  - Depression.
  - Anxiety.
- Physical health problems.
- Learning problems.
- Children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are almost three times more likely to be abused. The abuse can be verbal, physical, or sexual. They are four times more likely than other children to be neglected. Strong scientific evidence suggests that addiction runs in families. Children of alcoholics are four times more likely than non-COA's to develop alcoholism or other drug problems.

RESEARCH

Research shows that many children with drug or alcohol dependent parents can benefit from adults who help and encourage them. Those children may cope well with the trauma of growing up in families affected by addiction. They often say that success is due to the support of:

- A non-alcoholic parent.
- Relative.
- Teachers

Other trusted adult in their lives that can help include:

- Doctors.
- Teachers.
- Guidance counselors.
- Community-based program personnel.
- Social workers.
- Athletic coaches.
- Faith/spirituality leaders.

UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN AND ADDICTION

Children in alcohol or drug dependent homes often live with denial, shame, and silence about their family problems. The chaos in the family may lead to a painful, unsafe setting. COA's often take on the parent's responsibilities. For many, this results in a loss of childhood. Without help these children grow into adults (Adult Children of Alcoholics or ACOA's) who spend much of their time trying to make up for hidden fears, shame and denied anger from childhood. Without treatment, these adults experience ongoing problem with interpersonal relationships and daily functioning.

Some COA's display negative behaviors that may warn adults of a problem at home. Others work hard to succeed and please in spite of the stress at home. The unstable home life may have a negative impact on their future. Children of alcoholics are more likely to have substance abuse problems.

WHEN PARENTS RECEIVE TREATMENT

Living with an active alcohol or drug dependent adult is hard for the whole family. Even having a parent go through treatment can be painful for children. This change can confuse children. When a parent receives treatment, each family member should also receive appropriate services. That way all members of the family can recover from the impact of addiction.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Adults can support COA's in these ways.

- Provide children with information about addiction. Tell them:
  - Alcohol/drug dependency is an illness. You did not cause it. You cannot fix it.
  - Take care of yourself by talking with a trusted person.
  - Make good choices in your own life.
  - Addiction treatment can help your parent get well.
  - You are not alone. You need and deserve help. There are safe people and places that can help you.
- Teach children how to share their feelings in healthy ways. One way is by speaking with "safe" adults. Guide them to support programs at school or in your community. Such programs can help them develop coping skills.
- Take the time to develop a healthy relationship with a COA who needs you. Children who live in addicted families learn not to trust adults. Listening to and supporting these children can change much of that mistrust. You can have a positive impact on a child's life.
- If you can, guide the adults in the family to a qualified professional. He/she can help them get the treatment they need to begin recovery. One way to begin recovery is through an intervention. Only a qualified professional should lead an intervention.

WHERE YOU AND COA'S CAN TURN FOR HELP

Many resources can help adults identify and support COA's. Learn about local support groups such as Alateen and Al-Anon. School programs can assist COA's, too. Contact national organizations that can provide resource materials to caring adults as well as COA's. Just showing an interest in the child and offering support can make a difference in his/her life. For more information about how you can help children who live in alcohol or drug dependent families, please contact any one of the following organizations.

Organizations for COA's and ACOA's

The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA)
888-55-4COAS (2627)
nacoa@nacoa.org www.nacoa.org

Al-Anon/Alateen
For Families and Friends of Alcoholics
888-4AL-ANON/888-425-2666
WSO@al-anon.org www.al-anon.org
800-ALCOHOL for information and referrals

Adult Children Of Alcoholics
World Service Organization
www.adultchildren.org

Resources for information on substance abuse and treatment

Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT)
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
CSAT's National Helpline 800-662-HELP (Toll-Free)
800-487-4889 (TDD) 877-767-8432 (Spanish)
info@samhsa.gov www.samhsa.gov
SAMHSA's National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)
800-729-6686 800-487-4889 (TDD)
info@samhsa.gov www.samhsa.gov

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, Inc. (NCADD)
800-NCA-CALL
national@ncadd.org www.ncadd.org
Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP)

800-666-3332
ondcp@ncjrs.org www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov

Freevibe: www.freevibe.com is an educational entertainment website for youth 11-18 focusing on drug-specific information in an entertainment setting.

Adults can get drug-specific information and tips for children by visiting the multilingual website, www.theantidrug.com, designed by the National Youth Anti-Drug Campaign to help adults keep kids healthy, safe and drug-free.

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