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Alcoholism in the Family

Contributed by Wendy DiMatteo

Why does the drinking behavior of the alcoholic in my family affect me so strongly?

- The rules are always changing. What may be all right today, angers them tomorrow.
- Promises may be broken. They may not remember telling you they would do something for or with you.
- You may feel protective of the other parent/family members or they may try to get you to take sides, putting you in an awkward position.
- They might deny that they have a problem, which can be frustrating, as you would like them to seek help.
- Many children of alcoholics (COAs) feel that their parents are being distant and non-communicative. This may be an even stronger reality for families when effective communication is poor to begin with.
- Adult Children frequently suffer from co-dependency. This is a condition in which the family becomes involved in the illness of alcoholism.

Am I likely to become an alcoholic if someone in my family is?

- Children of alcoholics are more at risk for alcoholism than children of non-alcoholics.
- The way a family interacts with each other can influence how you solve your own problems. If you see that alcohol can change your mood, you may choose to drink to “feel better”.
- Children’s perceptions of parental drinking patterns appear to influence their own drinking frequency.
- Since there may be a decrease in parental supervision, you may tend to drink more with your friends.
- Because alcohol is available at home, you may feel more tempted to drink than someone who is underage and can’t buy it legally.

Sometimes I think my family member drinks due to communication barriers, which often exist. As a result, I feel left out and insecure. Is it my fault that they drink?

- You are not responsible for the choices they made which led to their addiction.
- Alcoholism is a disease. Genetics and environmental factors may have contributed to their drinking behaviors.
- Their coping mechanisms are not well developed and so they may have turned to alcohol for a solution, which ended up compounding the problem.
- Attend a support group meeting in your area and discuss your feelings with others who may be experiencing the same thing. You are not alone.
- There are many other children of alcoholics that can relate to your situation. Check the SAISD web site www.rit.edu/sa/coun/saisd for a listing of deaf

accessible 12 step programs, which include Alanon, Alateen and AA (Alcoholics Anonymous).

Do I have any control over the alcoholic in my family? Isn’t it my responsibility to help them get sober?

- They are responsible for their own recovery.
- You can suggest that they seek counseling as their drinking is affecting you.
- Give them a list of the AA meetings.
- Detach with love.

How can I feel better about the situation?

- Try not to judge yourself too harshly.
- Do not isolate, but reach out to others for support.
- Attend Alanon or Alateen meetings.
- Maintain your independence by setting goals and feeling good about your decisions.
- If you notice prolonged feelings of anxiety or depression, seek counseling for yourself.
- Contact the Rochester Adult Child and Co-Dependency Center (716) 473-0730.
- Go to the Children of Alcoholics Foundation web site for more help www.coaf.org.



From a Kids Perspective:

It’s NOT your fault

Written by Adrian - Age 10

It’s not your fault if your parents drink. Alcohol is an addictive product, and if they drink it, they may not be able to stop. For example, every Saturday, when cartoons are on, you don’t want to stop watching, right? Well, with some people, when there’s beer in the house, they don’t want to stop drinking it.

I am sure that your family member has tried numerous times to quit, not only for them but for you too. Your parents do love you. I know that sometimes it may not seem that way. That is because the alcohol is affecting their attitude therefore causing them to act strange and abusive. Be careful not to overreact. One or two beers are fine and are no danger to you or your family, but four or five in an hour or so is something to take caution about.

If you are concerned, and your family member is getting to be violent, abusive, or out of control, there are people you can talk to about your household problems (teacher, police-call 911, an adult you know as a friend, or a relative) and the sooner you tell, the sooner you can feel safe.

If your parent threatens you in any way, get out of the house, go to a neighbor and tell your story. Just remember that in the worst of times, you are not alone.