

# CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

Alcoholism in the home has long-lasting effects. Children of alcoholics often learn to cope with unhappy childhoods in ways that cause problems for them much later in life. Learning about how alcoholism affected your past can help you to make sure your future is better.

## Childhood Characteristics, Beliefs, & Patterns

Children of alcoholics often act in one of the following ways:

- Become super-responsible, like a miniature adult.
- Become a trouble-maker.
- Become able to adjust to any change, without noise or fuss.
- Become a family clown or peace-maker, smoothing over troubles.

Children of alcoholics often believe that they are all alone, that no other families have these problems, or that it is up to them to cure the parent. A child may take the blame for a parent's alcoholism—or the parent may blame the child. As a result, many children of alcoholics not only feel unloved, but unlovable. Some of them suffer physical or sexual abuse, which reinforces this feeling. And because life at home is full of disappointments, broken promises, and lies, the child learns not to trust, not to get too close to anyone, and not to communicate in healthy ways.

## Problems In Adult Life

Adult children of alcoholics often retain their childhood patterns. The

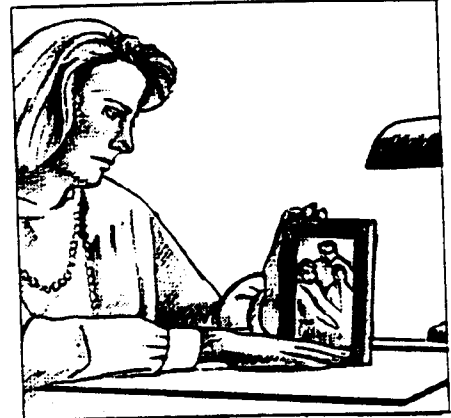
super-responsible child may grow into an adult who demands perfectionism. The child who was the family's scapegoat may have legal or financial troubles throughout life. The child who used to adjust to anything may be passive and withdrawn as an adult. And the family clown may grow up to be entertaining, but irresponsible.

An adult child of an alcoholic may be anxious, may try to control events and relationships, may have trouble being intimate, may be chronically depressed, or have stress-related health problems. Tragically, many children of alcoholics either become chemically dependent themselves or marry alcoholics.

## How To Help Or Get Help

If you know a child living in an alcoholic home, try doing these things:

- Gently encourage the child to talk about life, and listen well.
- Invite the child to an outing, or offer a quiet place to do homework.
- Encourage the child to think of people who would be understanding and helpful in hard times—perhaps a teacher, friend, relative or neighbor.
- If the parent drinks and drives, give the child your phone number, and offer to come pick him up.
- Suggest checking the library for books about alcoholism, or attending Alateen. Give the child



Growing up with an alcoholic parent is a difficult, lonely experience that can affect a lifetime.

the phone number and offer a ride to the first meeting.

- Tell the child that he or she cannot cause, control or cure the parent's drinking.
- Tell the child that alcoholism is a disease, and it's okay to love the parent but hate the disease.

If you grew up with an alcoholic parent:

- Find out more about alcoholism and its effects on family members of alcoholics. Contact Al-Anon for information on special groups for Adult Children of Alcoholics, or ask your employee assistance program for referrals to other helpful programs.
- Talk about your feelings and experiences with friends, relatives, people in 12-step programs or health professionals.
- Remember, you didn't cause your parent's drinking, and no one but the parent had any chance of controlling it or curing it.

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