

CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

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Here's a test. True or false:

- * Kids are going to drink anyway, so they might as well do it at home, under adult supervision
- * Restricting teenagers makes no sense when they'll be on their own in college soon enough
- * You'd rather be your child's friend than an authority figure

If you answered "true" to any of the above, you are not alone. But that doesn't mean you're right.

- At least 7 million children today are growing up with alcoholic parents
- Child and adolescent psychologists know these children are at greater risk for having emotional problems than children who are not alcoholics
- Alcoholism runs in families and children of alcoholics are four times more likely than other children to become alcoholics
- Over 675,000 children are seriously maltreated every year by an alcoholic parent or caretaker
- The cost of alcoholism to society is estimated at approximately \$166 billion each year

What is the Impact of Alcoholism on the Family and Children?

1. *Alcoholism Affects the Entire Family:*

- Living with a alcoholic in the family can contribute to stress for all members in the family
- Children living with an alcoholic parent score lower on measures of family cohesion, intellectual-cultural orientation and independence and experience higher levels of conflict in their lives

- Children of alcoholics may be hampered in their ability to grow in developmentally healthy ways
2. *There is Evidence that Alcoholism Tends to Run in Families:*
 - Alcoholics are more likely to have an alcoholic father or mother in the family of origin
 - In most research studies, 75% of alcoholics had at least one family member who was an alcoholic
 3. *There is a Strong Relationship Between Parental Alcoholism and Child Abuse:*
 - Research has shown that there is a strong relationship between alcohol use in the family and child abuse
 4. *Alcoholism has a Strong Negative Effect on Marital Relationships:*
 - Separated and divorced men and women are found to be 3 times more likely as married men and women to say they had been married to an alcoholic or problem drinker
 - Almost 2/3 of separated and divorced women, and almost 1/2 of divorced and separated men, under age 45, have been exposed to alcoholism in the family at some time
 5. *Alcoholism is Associated with a Large Proportion of Domestic Violence and Perpetrators are Often Under the Influence of Alcohol:*
 - Alcohol is a key factor in 68% of manslaughter's, 62% of assaults, 4% of murders and attempted murders, 48% of robberies and 44% of burglaries
 - Studies of domestic violence frequently document high rates of alcohol and other drug abuse
 6. *Children of Alcoholic Exhibit Symptoms of Depression and Anxiety More Than Children of Non-Alcoholics:*
 - Young children often show symptoms of depression and anxiety such as crying, bed wetting, not having friends, being afraid to go to school and having nightmares
 - Older children may stay in their rooms for long periods of time and not relate to other children claiming they have "no one to talk to."

- Teenagers may show depressive symptoms by being perfectionist in their endeavors, hoarding, staying to themselves, and being excessively self-conscious
7. *Children of Alcoholics Experience Higher Health Care Costs Than Children from Non-Alcoholic Families:*
- Inpatient admission rates for substance abuse is triple that of other children
 - Inpatient admission rates for mental disorders are almost double that of other children
 - Injuries are more than 1 _ times greater than other children
 - The rate of total health care costs for children of alcoholics is 32% greater than children from non-alcoholic families
8. *Children of Alcoholics Score Lower on Tests Measuring Verbal Ability:*
- Children of alcoholics score lower on tests that measure cognitive and verbal skills
 - These children have difficulty with their ability to express themselves, which could impede school performance, peer relationships, ability to develop and sustain intimate relationships and hamper performance on job interviews
9. *Children of Alcoholics Often Have Difficulty in School:*
- Children of alcoholics often believe that they will be failures even if they do well academically
 - Children of alcoholics are more likely to be truant, drop out of school, repeat grades, or be referred to a mental health professional
10. *Children of Alcoholics Have a Greater Difficulty with Abstraction and Conceptual Reasoning:*
- Abraction and conceptual reasoning play an important role in problem solving whether the problems are academic or are situations related to the problems of life
 - These children may require more concrete instructions

A Child in an Alcoholic Family May Have a Variety of Problems:

1. *Guilt:*
 - The child may see himself or herself as the main cause of the mother's or father's drinking

2. *Anxiety:*
 - The child may worry constantly about the situation at home
 - They may be fearful that the alcoholic parent will become sick or injured, and may also fear fights and violence between the parents

3. *Embarrassment:*
 - Parents may give the message that there is a terrible secret at home
 - The ashamed child does not invite friends home and is afraid to ask for assistance from anyone

4. *Inability to have close relationships:*
 - Because the child has been disappointed by the drinking parent many times, he or she often does not trust others

5. *Confusion:*
 - The alcoholic parent will change suddenly from being loving to angry, regardless of the child's behaviors
 - A regular daily schedule, which is very important for a child, does not exist because bedtimes and mealtimes are constantly changing

6. *Anger:*
 - The child feels anger at the alcoholic parent for drinking, and may be angry at the non-alcoholic parent for lack of support and protection

7. *Depression:*
 - The child feels lonely and helpless to change the situation and thus becomes depressed

- Although the child/adolescent tries to keep the alcoholism a secret, teachers, relatives, other adults or friends may sense something is wrong
- Child and adolescent mental health professionals advise that the following behaviors may signal a drinking problems at home:
 - ✓ Failure in school; truancy
 - ✓ Lack of friends, withdrawal from classmates
 - ✓ Delinquent behavior, such as stealing and violence
 - ✓ Frequent physical complaints such as headaches or stomachaches
 - ✓ Abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
 - ✓ Aggression towards other children