

MYTH:

This family is so (nice, well-to-do, religious, clean-cut, average, proper, etc.) they couldn't be having an alcohol problem.

REALITY:

The family where alcohol dependency is an issue does everything to shield the drinker and hide the truth from neighbors, friends, and employers or co-workers.

MYTH:

The family of the alcoholic is aware that the problems the family is having are because of the alcoholism.

REALITY:

The family often does not recognize the alcoholism themselves because of the process of denial. If an alcoholic parent is from a family where alcoholism prevailed, they may not see themselves as an alcoholic because they "hold down a job" or "drink only beer" etc. The spouse may not relate behavior to the drinking, not realizing alcoholism affects the entire life of the family.

Community Resources

- Alcoholics Anonymous..... 438-5214
- Ala-Non, Ala-teen..... 477-9662
- Lincoln Council on Alcoholism and Drugs..... 475-2694
- Lincoln Medical Education Partnership 483-4581
- National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.....1-800-622-2255

Books for Adults

- Adult Children of Alcoholics* by Janet Woititz.
- Another Chance: Hope and Health for the Alcoholic Family* by Sharon Wegscheider.
- Breaking the Cycle of Addiction* by Patricia O'Gorman and Philip Oliver-Diaz.
- Broken Bottles, Broken Dreams* by Charles Deutsch.
- How to Talk to Children About Really Important Things* by Charles Schaefer.

Books for Kids

- An Elephant in the Living Room* by Hastings and Typpo.
 - Different like Me* by Evelyn Leite and Pamela Espeland.
 - I Wish Daddy Didn't Drink So Much* by Judith Vigna.
 - Living with a Parent who Drinks Too Much* by Judith Seixas.
 - My Body Belongs to Me* by Baird.
 - My Dad Loves me, My Dad has a Disease* by Claudia Black.
 - My House is Different* by Di Giovanni.
 - Sometimes My Mom Drinks Too Much* by Kenny and Krull
- A resource provided by LPS School Social Workers.*

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Alcoholism and the Family

Alcoholism is a disease that is not easily recognized. Family members may see its effects on themselves but not on the rest of the family. However, the stress of living in an unpredictable and chaotic home deeply affects the children and the spouse of the alcoholic. This is why alcoholism is called the "family illness".

Chemical dependency (alcohol or drug addiction) is a disease. Many people look at dependency related behaviors as chosen. Often by the time the behaviors are recognized as a problem, there is no longer a choice on the part of the addicted person. The addict may believe his/her use is a choice, even saying "I can quit anytime", however, it is not.

Alcoholism is not a weakness of character or a mental illness. It is an illness recognized by the medical profession that is chronic, progressive, and potentially fatal. Alcoholism is defined as loss of control over drinking which results in serious problems in any of the following: job, school, or finances; relationships with family and friends; or physical health. (*World Health Organization, 1951*)

Facts for Families

- ☞ A classroom of 25 students, averages four to six students with a parent who has an alcohol problem.
- ☞ Fifty to 60 percent of all family violence occurs in alcoholic homes.
- ☞ Seventy percent of children of alcoholics develop a pattern of compulsive behavior as an adult, such as alcoholism, over-eating, or drug abuse.
- ☞ COA's (children of alcoholics) are three to four times more likely to become alcoholic than other people.
- ☞ Families can take positive steps to help themselves, even if the alcoholic does not stop drinking. The alcoholic can be helped and the earlier the intervention, the greater the chance of recovery.
- ☞ Just because a child comes from an alcoholic home doesn't mean he/she will be scarred for life. It means that some tasks will be harder, such as learning to trust.

The Emotional Effects on Children



Tips that Help

- ✓ Accept that alcoholism is a disease and not a character fault.
- ✓ Help the child acknowledge the parent's alcoholism by giving information and being a willing listener.
- ✓ Learn as much as you can about alcoholism so you will be comfortable in sharing information in a caring way.
- ✓ Seek and use community resources and professional help.
- ✓ Share your feelings with someone you trust.

Key Ideas for Children

- "You are not alone." COA's feel shame about their families and struggle to keep secret the alcoholism, never dreaming that their own friends and classmates share the problem.
- "It's not your fault." Kids' natural belief that the world centers around them causes deep guilt about their parent's drinking. Blame is part of the illness of alcoholism and children may be blamed for the alcoholic's behavior.
- "It's not the alcoholic's fault either." It is hard to accept that alcoholism is a disease, not willful behavior by a "bad" parent. Reassurance that the parent is not bad, but ill, and loves them, is important for the child.

- "Alcoholics can and do recover." However, the child cannot stop the alcoholic from drinking any more than they can cause it.
- "The child and family need and deserve help for themselves." Admitting that the parent's drinking disturbs and affects the family may be difficult, and this leads to the belief that only the alcoholic parent's sobriety will make a difference in the family.

Myths and Realities of the Alcoholic Family

MYTH:

My child is doing well in school, so I know the drinking problem is not affecting him/her.

REALITY:

Many children take solace in excelling in school or sports to help them cope with the drinking and to take the focus off the family. They still share feelings of loneliness, isolation, and inadequacy or shame.

MYTH:

The child who is misbehaving, skipping school, getting into trouble with the law, etc. is the real problem in the family, and the parent's alcohol abuse is a result of the child's out of control behavior.

REALITY:

Children who are angry, hurt, and feel abandoned by their parents often act out these feelings. It is often a subconscious effort on their part to get help for the entire family. The problems the disease causes take up so much energy, time, and emotional strength, there is little left for parenting and the child often reacts negatively.