

# Help Available cont'd

If you grew up in an alcoholic home, or you are still living with an alcoholic parent, chances are good that you are feeling sadness, depression, or isolation which comes from some of the problems described. By asking for help, COA's can and do lead happier, healthier lives. People such as those listed previously can help COA's:

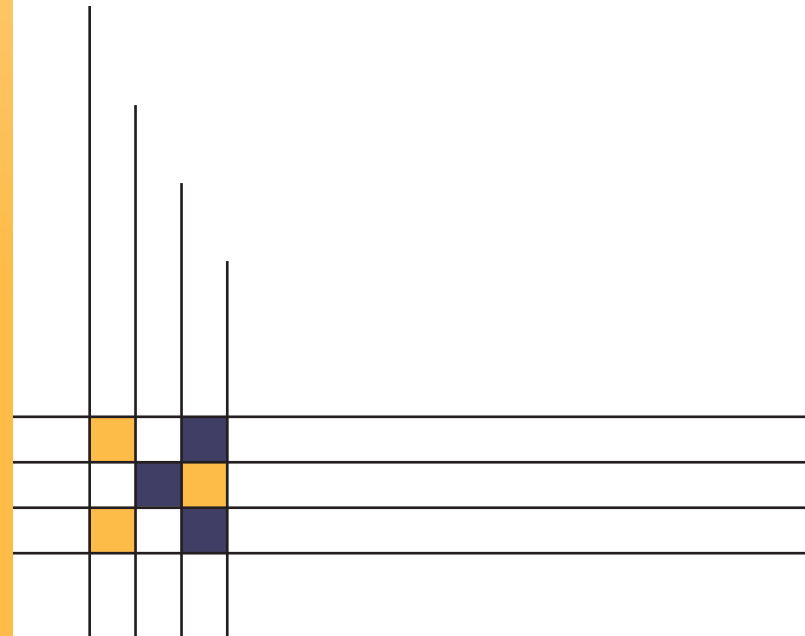
1. Accept that their parent is an alcoholic. For many COA's the first step toward a happier life is admitting to themselves that their parent is an alcoholic.
2. See their past realistically. COA's must accept the fact that they are in no way responsible for their parent's drinking.
3. Explore important issues. COA's may need help in handling emotions, trusting others, self-esteem, relaxing, and having a good time, and the need to be in control.
4. Express their needs and emotions. COA's must learn to ask for help and accept it when it's offered, allow themselves to make mistakes, let others know how they feel, to laugh and cry.
5. Live in the present. It's important to come to terms with the past and let go of it.

Adult Children of Alcoholics are special and they are not alone. If you need help, don't be afraid to ask. Counselors are available in 123 Linn Hall. You may make an appointment by calling 319-398-5471. They will be glad to talk with you and make the appropriate referral.

This handout is part of a Self-Help Information Series written by Kirkwood Community College Counselors, Cedar Rapids, Iowa. 319-398-5471 or 1-800-332-2055, ext. 5471.

Please share this information with family, friends and classmates.

# Adult Children of Alcoholics



Why Should  
You Be Concerned?

# Why Should You Be Concerned?

One out of every 4-6 people is a child of an alcoholic. If you grew up in a home where one or both parents were alcoholics, you face special risks of becoming an alcoholic too. Research shows that children of alcoholics (COA's) become addicted to alcohol at a rate four times greater than children from non-alcoholic homes. Many COA's also marry partners who are alcoholics or who have other addictions. Additionally, COA's may have emotional, psychological, or physical problems related to growing up in an alcoholic home.

## Symptoms

You may recognize some of the special rules and special roles that belong to children who grew up with an alcoholic parent:

1. **Try to protect the family image** - Many COA's try to keep the parent's drinking a secret.
2. **Keep feelings to themselves** - Some COA's feel responsible for their parent's drinking. Expressing guilt, fear, anger, loneliness, and other emotions isn't acceptable in some alcoholic families. This role is often called the "lost child."
3. **Work hard** - Some COA's try very hard to please others. Often seen as the "family hero."
4. **Misbehave** - Some COA's use negative behavior to attract attention. These kids usually have a poor self-image and may get bad grades, disrupt classes, or abuse alcohol and other drugs. This role is seen as the "scapegoat" and takes the focus off the real problem - the alcoholic.
5. **Try to make others feel better** - Some COA's may be especially sensitive to others' feelings. They may use fun and humor to ease the pain and embarrassment of difficult situations. This role may be defined as the "family mascot."

**Adult Children of Alcoholics often express problems such as:**

1. Trouble expressing feelings - if expressing anger, sadness, etc. was discouraged during childhood, it may be difficult to express such emotion as an adult.
2. Inability to relax.
3. Loyalty beyond reason - COA's may show unusual loyalty to people who don't deserve it.
4. Being overly responsible or overly irresponsible.
5. Inability to trust others.
6. Fear of losing control - the thought of losing control over situations or emotions is very frightening, even overwhelming to adult COA's who took charge of their families during childhood.
7. Constantly seeking approval or affirmation.
8. Having trouble developing intimate relationships.
9. Being overly self critical.
10. Experiencing difficulty in having fun.

## Help Available

Addictive behavior is common among many COA's. They may work compulsively, overspend, become addicted to a relationship, and may drink compulsively and become alcoholics themselves.

Help is available. There are many people who are able and willing to help COA's in their efforts to improve their lives. Some sources of help for Children of Alcoholics are:

1. Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is an organization of men and women who help one another stay sober.
2. Al-Anon is a self-help organization for adult relative and friends of people with drinking problems.
3. Ala-Teen is similar to Al-Anon but it is for young people (usually ages 12-19). You may reach these organizations by calling 319-365-5955.
4. The Area Substance Abuse Council (ASAC) is another organization which provides counseling and treatment for COA's. If you are interested in a group specifically for Adult Children of Alcoholics, call ASAC at 319-390-4611.
5. Counselors and therapists in private practice can provide help through individual and group therapy. Programs are also offered by local hospitals and churches.