



Patrons: Mr Tony Adams MBE, Ms Geraldine James OBE, Mr Fergal Keane OBE, Ms Elle Macpherson, Dr D Samways MB BS, Mrs S Stafford-Nolan CQSW

INFORMATION FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

I am a grown up now. I grew up with an alcohol-dependent parent. My Dad drank. When he drank he changed.

I felt so alone. Although no one talked about alcoholism or the other problems – money and job worries, fights, shouting, locked doors, broken promises, lies, not talking – I always knew there was something wrong.

I thought it had to be me. If I asked what was wrong, why Dad was lying in the middle of the kitchen floor with his eyes shut, I was told ‘nothing, everything’s fine’. I wondered if I could see something they couldn’t or perhaps this was normal. I guessed at what normal was.

I thought I was the reason he drank. I thought that if I tried harder, was nice enough or clever enough, he wouldn’t need to drink. But however hard I tried, I was never good, nice or clever enough because he always drank.

When Dad was drunk, Mum yelled or cried, sometimes at him, sometimes at me. If something went wrong at school, I kept all of my worries inside.

I never told anyone about the family secret – alcoholism. I thought it was wrong to talk about your family. But we didn’t talk to each other either, so things would go around in my head and I thought I was going crazy.

I promised myself that it would never happen to me. I would never drink and frighten my children. And when I thought that, I felt guilty. Guilty because there were times when Mum and Dad did lovely things for me. It was confusing to have both feelings together – loving them and hating the situation all at the same time.

I felt so alone. I was alone in that I could never take friends home. I never knew what to expect – Dad drunk, Mum screaming. It would have been too embarrassing.

And so I grew up a lonely frightened girl. Looking back now I can see that there were grown ups in my life who wanted to help but I couldn’t let them.



I was afraid that they would tell my parents that I was 'telling on them' or, worse still, I was afraid that they would take me away from home.

It was only years later when I moved a long way from my family house, and when my brother became an addict and the whole merry-go-round started again that I found I was not alone.

I found Al-Anon who run groups for people who have been affected by someone else's drinking. There are many groups and helplines now in the UK and there is Nacoa.

There are at least 2.8 million adult children of alcohol-dependent parents in the UK today. I am one of those 2.8 million. I was alone because I followed the family rules which exist in homes where alcoholism or addiction are being hidden:

Don't talk
Don't trust
Don't feel

But how I wish I had found someone I could trust to talk to then. I just wanted someone to listen for a while to help me to sort out what I could do to help myself.

Today I am not alone and nor are you. According to the NSPCC, there are at least one million children in the UK living with one or two alcohol-dependent parents.

You can find help for you, even if your parent does not want to stop drinking yet.

Here are some facts, which helped me to understand the problem of alcoholism:

Fact 1: Alcoholism, and addiction, is a disease. Your parent is not a bad person; he or she has a disease that makes him or her lose control when drinking. Alcohol does that; when you drink too much, you do and say things that you normally wouldn't. Sometimes alcoholism makes them do things that they would not normally do if they didn't drink.

Fact 2: You cannot control your parent's drinking. It is not your fault. Don't hide the bottles, or try to be perfect; you can't do anything about your parent's drinking. You are not the reason why your parent drinks. **You did not cause the disease.**



Fact 3: You are not alone. There are lots of young people just like you. There are probably some children of alcohol-dependent parents in your class at school – kids you would never think might have a parent who drinks or uses drugs like yours. Maybe you know some of them because you've seen what goes on in their house. In fact, from a survey done in the United Kingdom in 2000, we know there are about 920,000 children and young people growing up with alcohol-dependent parents living in our country today. The **NSPCC** believes that there are up to 1 million children living with parents experiencing serious drink problems. You really aren't alone, although sometimes it may feel like it.

Fact 4: You CAN talk about the problem. Find someone you trust who will listen to you. It could be a teacher, a friend's parent, a brother or sister, or someone else who will listen to you. These are the 'safe people' in your life. Keep a list of people you can call if you feel like talking. We also have a list of phone numbers you can call if you need someone to talk to, or for help of any kind. Keep them in your wallet or other safe place.

You can call **Nacoa on 0800 358 3456** just to talk.

Here is what one young person said:

'Finding someone who I felt comfortable talking to was the beginning of everything changing for me. Speaking to someone who listened without interruption and who understood the suffocation of keeping secrets was brilliant. Things could have been very different for both of us. Without your help and support, Mum could have drunk herself to death and I could have spent the rest of my life watching her. Now I know there is help for Mum and for me. Now I can get on with my life.'

Please don't forget these four facts. They come in handy when you least suspect it and may help when things are difficult at home.

You need not be alone. There are people who can help you.

An adult-child of an alcohol dependent parent and Nacoa Volunteer



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Question: What is alcoholism?

Answer: Alcoholism is a disease. People who have the disease have lost control over their drinking and are not able to stop without help. They also lose control over how they act when they are drunk.

Question: How does alcoholism start?

Answer: Doctors don't know all the reasons why people become dependent on alcohol. Some start out drinking a little and end up addicted to alcohol. A person might drink to forget problems or calm nerves, but then they end up needing the alcohol to feel normal. Once a person loses control over drinking, he or she needs help to stop drinking.

Question: If the alcohol-dependent person is sick why doesn't he or she just go to the doctor?

Answer: At first, someone who is alcohol-dependent is not aware that he or she is ill. Even when they become aware that something is wrong, he or she might not believe that alcohol is the problem. An alcohol-dependent person might keep blaming things on other people, or might blame their job, or the family etc. But, really, it's the alcohol that's the biggest problem.

Question: Is there an "average" alcohol-dependent person?

Answer: No. There is no average alcohol-dependent person. Alcohol-dependent people can be young, old, rich, poor, male or female.

Question: What is the cure for alcoholism?

Answer: There is no cure for alcoholism except stopping the disease process by stopping the drinking. Some people drink socially at a later date. Others can't. Alcohol-dependent people who have completely stopped or controlled their drinking are called "recovering alcoholics". Those in recovery can lead healthy, happy, productive lives.

Question: Can family members make an alcohol-dependent person stop drinking?

Answer: No. It is important to know that an alcohol-dependent person needs help to stop drinking, but no one can be forced to accept the help, no matter how hard you try or what you do. It is also important to know that family members by themselves cannot provide the help that an alcohol dependent needs. An alcohol-dependent person needs the help of people trained to treat the disease.

Question: How many children in the United Kingdom have at least one alcohol-dependent parent?

Answer: There are 920,000 children and young people under the age of 18 in the United Kingdom today growing up with alcohol-dependent parents. The **NSPCC** believes that there are up to 1 million children living with parents experiencing serious drink problems.

Question: I know I can't make my alcohol-dependent parent stop drinking, so what can I do to make myself feel better?

Answer: Talk to someone you trust about the problem. Talk to a teacher, a friend's parent, brother or sister or someone at Nacoa.

People at Nacoa are here to help you in confidence. The Nacoa Helpline is free. Call 0800 358 3456 and you will not be charged for the call and it will not appear on the phone bill if you are calling from a landline. If you are calling from a mobile, you may be charged depending on your network provider, but it is always free from public phone boxes. Speak to someone you can trust and who will understand your problems. There is no need to tell anyone else about the call, unless you choose to do so.

You can talk about anything, not just your parent's drinking or using. We may be able to help you to find fun things to do in your area, too.

WHAT SHOULD YOU DO IF YOU THINK SOMEONE IN YOUR FAMILY DRINKS TOO MUCH?

If you think someone in your family drinks too much or uses drugs, these suggestions are important, because drinking or drug use can affect everyone in the family - including the children. If you don't have this problem at home, you may have a friend whose family has a problem with alcohol or drugs - talk to your friend. Let him or her know that you care and show them this page of information.

◆ **DON'T** feel guilty or ashamed about the problem at home. Alcoholism and addiction is a disease and diseases are nobody's fault. Anybody who makes fun of alcohol-dependant people or addicts just doesn't understand the facts.

◆ **DON'T** try to convince your parent to stop drinking or using, or argue when he or she is drunk or stoned. He or she is not thinking clearly and may forget what you say.

◆ **DON'T** water down or pour away your parent's alcohol or hide drugs. It won't work. You have no control over someone else's drinking or using. You didn't make the problem start and you can't make it stop. It is up to your parent to get treatment. What your parent does is not your responsibility or fault.

◆ **DO** talk about your feelings with a close friend, relative or teacher. Call the **Nacoa helpline free on 0800 358 3456**. Other helplines are available too. Talking about your feelings is not about telling on your family - it's about taking care of yourself. Talking to someone about your feelings can help you feel less alone and that person might be able to help you.

◆ **DO** get involved in doing fun things at school or near where you live - school clubs or sports activities, Scouts or Guides, Youth Clubs etc. Sometimes children from homes with an alcohol-dependent parent worry so much that they forget how to have fun. If things are bad at home, you may not have anyone there who can help you have fun but that doesn't have to stop you. Doing outside activities can help you forget about the problems at home for a while and can help you feel better about yourself.

◆ **DO** remember that your thoughts and feelings are normal. It's ok to hate the problem of alcoholism or addiction and love the person who is drinking or using - both at the same time. All people have self-doubt and mixed-up feelings - it's part of growing up and being human.



◆ **DO** go to Alateen meetings if you can. You can call Al-Anon on 0207 403 0888. Meeting new friends who understand will help. There are at least 2 million adults in the UK who grew up with parental alcoholism. Imagine how many children are living with the problems that alcoholism and addiction can bring into the family today. Although it may sometimes feel that way, **YOU ARE NOT ALONE** .

REMEMBER THE SIX “C”s:

I didn't **CAUSE** it.

I can't **CONTROL** it.

I can't **CURE** it.

I can take **CARE** of myself.

I can **COMMUNICATE** my feelings.

I can make healthy **CHOICES**.

**There are many phone numbers that you can call for help.
Here are some useful helplines to remember:**

Nacoa	0800 358 3456
Childline	0800 1111
AlAnon	020 7403 0888
NSPCC	0800 800 500
Drinkline	0800 917 8282
Samaritans	08457 90 90 90

There are other helplines too. Call Nacoa to help you to find someone who can help you in the area where you live.

BOOKS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

These books may be available in your local library. If not, ask the Librarian if they can be ordered for you from another library. They are also available from **Eurospan**: Tel. 01767 604972, www.eurospangroup.com

- The Brown Bottle Penny Jones
- Different Like Me Evelyn Leite & Pamela Espeland
A book for teens who worry about their parents' use of alcohol or drugs
- An Elephant in the Living Room Jill Hastings & Marion Typo
- The Secret Everyone Knows Cathleen Brooks
Help for you if alcohol is a problem in your home

Al-Anon publish some really good books and pamphlets for young people. Here are some of them - for a full list, contact **Al-Anon** on **020 7403 0888**.

Courage to be Me
If your parents drink too much
Hope for Children of Alcoholics
What's "Drunk", Mummy?

USEFUL INTERNET ADDRESSES

Nacoa

www.nacoa.org.uk

Email: helpline@nacoa.org.uk

Nacoa provides information, advice and support to children of alcohol-dependent parents through its free confidential helpline.

Al-Anon

www.al-anonuk.org.uk

Email: enquiries@al-anonuk.org.uk

Al-Anon Family Groups provide understanding, strength and hope to anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking.

ChildLine

www.childline.org.uk

ChildLine is the UK's free, national helpline for children and young people in trouble or danger.