Adult Children of Alcoholics

Introduction
Many adolescents believe that they are escaping from the emotional and social problems of their alcoholic parent by leaving home and going to college. However, they eventually realize that these problems continue to affect them, even as an adult.

Definition of an Alcoholic Parent
When excessive drinking interferes with a parent’s health, social, and economic functioning, then that parent is an alcoholic parent.

Home Environment for Children of Alcoholic Parents
* The family bears the burden of coping with the alcoholic parent and assisting him/her with facing the problem.
* The family experiences feelings of:
  a) helplessness
  b) confusion
  c) fear
  d) guilt
  e) self-pity
* The family feels anger and resentment towards an alcoholic parent who cannot maintain responsibility.
  a) Alcoholic parents may lose their jobs due to inefficient performance and absenteeism.
  b) Alcoholic parents constantly break promises made to their children.
* Older children experience role confusion:
  a) taking care of younger siblings
  b) worrying about their parents
* Life is unpredictable and inconsistent:
  a) Parents are fighting
  b) Alcohol produces mood fluctuations in the alcoholic parent.
  c) Children make excuses for their alcoholic parents when they have not fulfilled their obligations.
* Children have fantasies of running away.
* Children are afraid to confide in anyone about their family situation. They have difficulty identifying and expressing their feelings.

Why the Family Will Not Speak Out
* Denial that this is happening to their family.
* Embarrassment about the reality of the situation.
* Lack of knowledge about the impact of alcohol abuse.

How Adult Children of Alcoholics are Affected in the Long Run
* Low self-esteem.
* No frame of reference for a normal life.
* Difficulty expressing feelings.
* Difficulty building a healthy, intimate relationship.
* Feelings of isolation and aloneness.
* Difficulty having fun.
* Constant seeking of approval and affirmation.
* Being extremely responsible or irresponsible.
* Difficulty completing projects.
* Judging oneself harshly.
* Difficulty solving problems.
* Lying unnecessarily.
* Showing extreme loyalty, even when it is not necessary.
* Acting impulsively.
How to Cope and Break the Cycle

* Learn skills and techniques for relating to others in a comfortable and responsible manner.
* Become aware of your bad habits and try to change them, for example, do not judge yourself harshly.
* Become aware of the things you do well and build on them:
  a) Reward yourself for your accomplishments.
  b) Whenever someone gives you a compliment, think positively.
  c) Take time out to become socially active.
  d) Find time to consider the consequences of your actions.
  e) Join a support group.

Help! Where to Find it????

* Bolton Refuge House: 715-834-0628
* District 12: 715-833-1878

UWEC Counseling Services
Division of Student Affairs
2122 Old Library
Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004
Phone: 715-836-5521

Check out our web site virtual pamphlet collection at:

www.uwec.edu/counsel

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