

Children of Alcoholics

By: Kristin Sarama



Bryan, a 15 year old high school sophomore, is at home watching TV in his room when he hears the front door slam shut. He automatically tenses up as he hears his mother and father arguing. He knows what they are arguing about: his father's drinking problem. Bryan quickly turns off the TV and gets in bed. He grabs his iPod so that he can drown out the noise downstairs. Bryan feels both depressed and scared because this in fact is not the first time this has happened. He has heard it all before.

Alcoholism is quite prevalent. According to the [National Institute on Alcohol Abuse \(NIAAA\)](#), "17.6 million people in the United States --about one in every 12 adults-- abuse alcohol or are alcoholic."

It's Not Your Fault!

Definition



According to the [U.S. Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health](#), alcoholism is an illness marked by drinking alcoholic beverages at a level that interferes with physical health, mental health, and social, family, or occupational responsibilities.

Alcoholism is divided into 2 categories: **dependence and abuse.**

People with alcohol dependence, the **most severe alcohol disorder**, usually experience tolerance and withdrawal. Tolerance is a need for markedly increased amounts of alcohol to achieve intoxication or the desired effect. Withdrawal occurs when alcohol is discontinued or intake is decreased. Alcohol dependents spend a great deal of time drinking alcohol, and obtaining it.

Alcohol abusers may have legal problems such as drinking and driving. They may also have problems with binge drinking (drinking 6 or more drinks at one sitting).

People who are dependent on or abuse alcohol continue to drink it despite evidence of physical or psychological problems. **Those with dependence have more severe problems and a greater compulsion to drink.**

You Are Not Alone!



Facts That May Interest You



According to the [National Association for Children of Alcoholics](#), **ONE** in **FOUR** youth under age 18 lives in a family where a person abuses alcohol or suffers from alcoholism. **You are not alone!**

It's not your fault! Alcoholism is a disease.

According to the National Association for Children of Alcoholics, young people with alcohol addicted parents are **four times** more likely to become addicted to alcohol themselves. However, this is **NOT** a guarantee that you will become an alcoholic. **You have a choice.**

According to a study conducted by the [National Epidemiological Survey on Alcoholism and Related Conditions \(NESARC\)](#), *alcoholism crosses racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic boundaries*. However, research has shown that **people who begin drinking at an early age are at a higher risk of developing alcoholism.**

It's Not Your Fault!



Why Does My Parent Drink?



Alcoholism is a **disease**. You **did not** cause the disease. Sometimes, people who live with alcoholics blame themselves for their loved one's drinking problem. If you feel this way you should understand that you **did not** and could not cause the person to drink.

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Why Do I Feel So Bad?



- Adolescence is a time in one's life where emotions are like a roller coaster. An alcoholic parent can add more twists and turns to your life. Some teens or alcoholics report being **guilty, anxious, embarrassed, confused, angry and depressed**.
- Many alcoholics behave in unpredictable ways. Children of alcoholics learn to feel responsible for their parent's mood. They believe they have to figure out how the parent will react to a situation ahead of time. If the parent feels bad, the child thinks it's their fault.
- You may feel as though you cannot trust anyone, but this is not true. Alcoholic parents may disappoint you and break promises, but this **does not mean that all adults will**.
- You may find yourself withdrawing from close relationships or lying. These defense mechanisms are commonly used among children of alcoholics. You are acting this way to protect yourself, but it ends up that you lose even more support when this happens

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Why Won't They Stop?



- The person may be in denial and not think they have a problem.
- The person may not want to stop. The person may like the “high” they get from drinking alcohol.
- The person may want to stop but does not know how.

It is important for you to understand the following:

- If your parent is an alcoholic you may try to get good grades, keep the house clean, or do things to please your parent and keep the family together. Although doing well in school and being responsible have a number of benefits for you these actions **will not** change your parent’s behavior.
- **Nothing** you can do will make the alcoholic stop drinking. **Alcoholics must help themselves.**

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What Can I Do?



Acknowledge the problem

- Being aware of how your parent's drinking affects you emotionally will help put things in perspective.
- Acknowledging that you are not the cause of your parent's drinking can help you cope.
- Know that by seeking help you are not betraying your parent. You still love them; you just need to help yourself.

Talk with an adult

- Find someone you trust (like a teacher) who will listen to you and help you cope with having an alcoholic parent.

Join a support group

- Remember there are others out there that are going through similar situations.
- To find a local support group ask your school counselor or social worker. There are groups such as [Alateen or Al-Anon](#) that can help you through this time in your life.
- Remember that even if your parent doesn't get help **you still can**.

Avoid underage drinking

- The risk for alcoholism is higher for those that begin drinking at an early age.

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The Seven C's



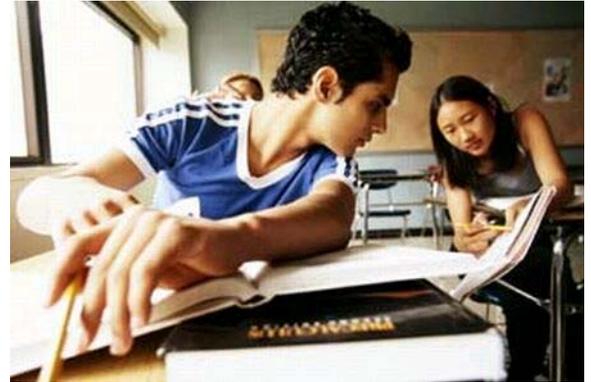
Just remember the Seven C's:

I didn't **C**ause it
I can't **C**ure it
I can't **C**ontrol it
I can take better **C**are of myself
By **C**ommunicating my
feelings,
Making healthy **C**hoices,
And **C**elebrating myself.

You Are Not Alone!



For More Information



Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters
(888) 4AL-ANON (425-2666)
<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org>

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) World Services
(212) 870-3400
<http://www.aa.org>

National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA)
(888) 55-4COAS or (301) 468-0985
<http://www.nacoa.net>

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)
(800) 622-2255
<http://www.ncadd.org>

National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
(301) 443-3860
<http://www.niaaa.nih.gov>

Kids Health
<http://www.kidshealth.org/>

Do It Now Foundation
<http://www.doitnow.org>

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