
Parenting for Prevention

Student Assistance Services Corp., 660 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, New York, 10591; Feb/March, 2015

February/March



A week in February is designated as a time of celebration and hope for children of alcoholics.

Although this newsletter will go out after the designated week, I have included the poster that was used to publicize this celebration, along with some information from their website.

There is a lot of help for children of alcoholics or drug abusing parents. However, the child needs to be able access that support. The good news is that many school staff, clergy and members of the helping professions are more aware of these resources and can direct a child to the best place to access information.

Other sources of support are Nar-Anon, Al-Anon and Alateen, all amazing organizations for families and friends that can be a true lifesaver to someone who is involved with an individual who is abusing alcohol or using other drugs.

Editor: Patricia Murphy Warble,
LCMS, CPP

Addiction

Impact on Families

Alcoholism and other drug addictions are often referred to as a “family” disease. There may only be one person abusing alcohol and other drugs but their actions usually impact everyone else in the family as well.

How a parent with a drug or alcohol problem affects the whole family

If a parent has an alcohol or other drug problem this will usually have many serious repercussions for other family members. The impact can have far reaching negative affects in terms of a parent losing a job or being so preoccupied with accessing and using the substance that they are often unable to meet the needs of their children or spouse. In some cases, the substance abusing parent can become verbally or physically abusive and scare, hurt, or injure another member of the family.

Also, when family members confront or share their concerns with the substance abuser, they, in their efforts to help, can begin a negative spiral because too much of their focus and energy is spent on trying to get the person to stop using. As a result family members may ignore their own needs and not take care of themselves.

One of the best things that a family member can do when they are concerned about someone drinking too much or using drugs is to attend a Nar-Anon, Al-Anon or Alateen meeting and/or seek help from a knowledgeable professional. In these supportive environments family members will learn that taking care of their own needs is the best thing they can do for themselves and for the person with the substance use disorder.

The following information is from the National Association for Children of Alcoholics website. Additional information can be accessed at the site, www.nacoa.org.

How a partner with a drug or alcohol problem affects the other partner

It is not easy to live with a person whose drinking or drug use is causing problems. The drinker or drug user is often full of conflict, torn between wanting their drug or alcohol and not wanting the harm that always seems to follow. They often blame others when things go wrong. The partner or spouse of the person with the substance use disorder is often filled with self doubt and asks, "Am I not a good enough partner? How can I get them to stop taking that drug? How can I protect my children? How can I hide this from my family and neighbors?"

The partner often feels hurt, ashamed, afraid, and has an overwhelming sense of failure. Unfortunately, many partners then work even harder to 'fix' the situation, taking on extra chores, trying to cover up the mess and the truth is the person is fighting a losing battle.

The best thing that a partner can do towards putting things right is to take some time for themselves and get the support you need. A good friend or a counsellor can be a great help

How a parent's addiction may affect their son or daughter

According to an article written by Ellen Morehouse for NACoA, school-aged children of parents with substance use disorders, often

- feel responsible, directly or indirectly for their parent's substance use;
- equate their parents use with not being loved;
- feel angry with the non-using parent for not protecting them or for causing the other parent's substance use;
- fear that the substance abusing parent will get hurt, sick or die.
- are embarrassed by the parent's inappropriate behavior which can include criminal or sexual behavior;
- do not know what to expect because of the inconsistency;
- are confused by the difference between "dry" behavior and impaired behavior;
- sometimes want their parents to drink or use other drugs because they are often nicer but then feel guilty.

According to Sharon Wegscheider-Cruse, a nationally recognized consultant, educator, author and family therapist, school aged children of parents with substance use disorders often feel sad and depressed. Those children often adopt a role which helps the family, but the child may get stuck in one of the following roles and neglect their own needs.

The Family Hero

- This child is responsible, works hard for approval, and often appears successful. But inside, this person often feels insecure, as if things are always going to go wrong, and feels incompetent, confused and angry.

The Scapegoat

- This child feels blamed when things go wrong. Everyone focuses on this person's faults, which provides the family with a distraction from the real problem. This child often seems rebellious, tough and troublesome. Inside, this child is often full of fear, hurt, rejection and loneliness, and feeling angry at the unfairness of how they are treated.

The Lost Child

- This child is quiet and tries to stay out of the way and not be the focus of attention. Inside they are quietly hurt, angry, lonely, with a feeling of being inadequate.

The Mascot

- Sometimes also referred to as the clown, the child in this role is often charming, cute, fun and quick to make a joke. They can be easily hurt but are good at hiding the hurt and other feelings of loneliness, fear, insecurity, and low self esteem.

If you recognize any of these roles as being "you" or your child the first step to putting things right is to get help. Stop thinking about the addicted person and pay attention to your own needs.

How a teen with a substance use disorder affects the whole family

A family unit can be impacted in a profoundly negative way when there is a son or daughter using drugs or alcohol. Parents can disagree with each other over how to handle the situation and other siblings can get blamed for causing the child to use because they set a bad example. The drug user gets so much attention that others are neglected and then they act out to get attention. In this environment it is not unusual for there to be fights and disrespectful words used as the family struggles to deal with all the attending issues associated with having a child who has a problem with alcohol or other drugs.

In an airplane, if the oxygen masks are released, parents are supposed to put on their own masks before attending to their children's masks. The same is true here. Parents and siblings must look after their own needs before helping the one causing the problem. Nar-anon, Al-Anon and Alateen are very helpful organizations that can help the family survive the addiction of a loved one and move forward in their daily life. It can also be helpful to get support from a counselor who is familiar with the dynamics that can occur in a family as a result of having a substance abuser.

Also, many substance abuse treatment agencies offer individual and group sessions for family members even if the person with the substance use disorder is not participating in treatment. Even if you are the only person in the family who recognizes the alcohol or drug problem, it is helpful to get support for yourself.

Another initiative that can be used by a family with a substance abusing member is called an intervention. An intervention is a planned and orchestrated attempt by one or many people, usually family and friends to get someone to seek professional help with an addiction.

Trained professionals at Student Assistance Services provide free or low cost interventions for Westchester families with a substance abuser who is under 21. For more information call 914-332-1300.

Strength and Hope for Friends and Families

At Nar-Anon, Al-Anon and Alateen Family Group meetings, the friends and family members of substance abusers share their experiences. These programs are referred to as "Twelve Step" programs because Twelve Steps, Twelve Traditions and Twelve Concepts of Service provide the philosophical basis of the meetings. Participants learn how to apply these concepts to their individual situations. At these meetings, everyone learns that they are not alone in the problems they face, and that they can make choices that can lead to greater peace of mind, whether the person with the substance use disorder continues to use or not.

Sponsorship gives members an opportunity to get personal support from someone more experienced in the program. These relationships are voluntary. Members ask another member to be their Sponsor when they believe that person will be suitable as a mentor in applying the program.

Here are a few things to keep in mind at your first meeting

- Nar-Anon and Al-Anon are mutual support groups. Everyone at the meeting shares as an equal. No one is in a position to give advice or direction to anyone else. Everyone at the meeting has experienced a problem with someone else's substance use.
- You are free to ask questions or to talk about your situation at your first meeting. If you'd rather just listen, you can say "I pass," or explain that you'd just like to listen.
- Every meeting is different. Each meeting has the autonomy to be run as its members choose, within guidelines designed to promote Nar-Anon and Al-Anon unity. It is recommended that you try at least six different meetings before you decide if these groups will be helpful to you.
- These are not religious programs. Even when the meeting is held in a religious center, the local Al-Anon or Nar-Anon group pays rent to that center and is not affiliated in any way with any religious group. Your religious beliefs or lack of

them are not a subject for discussion at these meetings, which focus solely on coping with the effects of someone's substance abuse.

- It will take some time to fully understand the significance of anonymity in the meeting. Anonymity means that the people in the room will respect the confidentiality of what you say and won't approach you outside the room in a way that compromises your privacy or the privacy of anyone who attended the meeting.
- The meeting will likely begin with a reading of the Twelve Steps of Nar-Anon or Al-Anon. It will take some time to fully understand how the Twelve Steps can be a helpful tool in recovering from the effects of someone's substance abuse. But you have the opportunity to grow at your own pace.

For more information contact **National Association for Children of Alcoholics**, 888-55-4COAS or visit their website at www.nacoa.org. Additional information about **Al-Anon** and its value is at www.al-anon.org and information about **Nar Anon** can be accessed at www.nar-anon.org.



Practice the 7 Cs

If you, or a hurting child near you, has a parent that drinks too much....Remember, it is NOT your fault, and you can't control it. During COA week practice the Seven Cs, and share them with a child who may need your help.

I didn't Cause it

I can't Cure it

I can't Control it

I can help take better Care of myself by

**Communicating my feelings,
making healthy
Choices & Celebrating me.**