

Life with an Alcoholic Mom or Dad

Grades 5-8

Objectives

Students will learn about the common problems and feelings of youth living in families hurt by alcoholism. Students will learn important messages and strategies to empower children from alcoholic families to positively cope with the many challenges they face.

1. To understand the typical problems and feelings children face growing up in an alcoholic family.
2. To teach students important strategies and messages to successfully cope with the challenges children of alcoholics face.
3. To describe how a friend can help.

Materials

TV and DVD player

DVD of Nick News with Linda Ellerbee: *Under the Influence: Kids of Alcoholics*
It's Not Your Fault pamphlet *

National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA): Kit for Kids*

Alateen: Basic Questions and Answers*

NACoA: Questions and Answers about Alcoholism*

(* Free downloadable materials. Links are listed below.)

Prior to Viewing (5-10 minutes)

Ask the students one or two of the following questions:

1. How many children in America have an alcoholic parent?
One in four people under 18 lives in a family hurt by alcoholism.
2. What are some of the common problems these kids face?
Some of these problems may include:
 - *worry that the alcoholic parent might get sick, hurt or die;*
 - *embarrassed to bring friends over;*
 - *anxious and confused about their parent's inconsistent, unpredictable behavior;*

- frequent headaches and stomachaches from all the stress;
- taking care of the parent instead of the parent taking care of themselves.

3. What do you think are some typical feelings children of alcoholics experience?

- confusion – not understanding why the drinking and all the problems keep happening
- guilty – believing that it is their fault
- fear – something terrible might happen
- anger
- hurt

Show Program 22 minutes

Suggest the students take notes during the program for discussion afterwards. Have them key in to the feelings and problems each youngster faced with their alcoholic parent. Have the students especially focus on how each youth positively handled the difficulties in their families.

Activity 20 minutes

Here you have an option of five different activities to choose from for the remaining time. We suggest you pick one and focus on it.

1. Review the DVD with a focus on each youth's story.

Kate

- What were some of her problems?
 - "I kept Mom's drinking a secret"
 - Cooked dinner for herself
 - Cleaned the house
 - "I was the mom"
- How did she feel?
 - Worried
 - Scared
 - Angry
- What helped her cope?
 - "Friends helped me"; Talked to them and got great advice and support.

Matthew

- What were some of his problems?
 - Dad would get angry and mean
 - Couldn't concentrate at school - worried about Dad
 - Dad didn't come to his football games
- How did he feel?
 - Worried
 - Scared
 - Angry
- What helped him cope?
 - He joined a support group where he let his feelings out and learned that Dad's alcoholism wasn't his fault.

Sam

- What were some of his problems?
 - "I didn't have a dad." (he was drunk)
 - Couldn't understand what his dad was saying
 - Sam moved away and left his friends behind
- How did he feel?
 - Sad
 - Confused
 - Angry
 - Scared
- What helped him cope?
 - A counselor - Sam's family did an intervention.

Rian

- What were some of her problems?
 - Mom broke promises (Mom continued to drink when she promised to stop)
 - Worried that Mom might die
 - Beer cans all over the house
- How did she feel?
 - Scared
 - Confused
 - Worried

- What helped her cope?
 - Grandma. Going to Grandma's house for support.

Brittany

- What were some of her problems?
 - Mom slammed the door on her arm
 - Mom going out and drinking
 - Staying home and taking care of her mom
 - Thinking it was all her fault
 - "Mom loves drinking more than me"
- How did she feel?
 - Hurt
 - Guilty
 - Scared
 - Sad
- What helped her cope?
 - Church youth group - "I could talk to them."

2. Discuss Important Messages for Children of Alcoholics

1. You are not alone.
2. It is not your fault.
3. You can't fix the alcoholism.
4. You can't get alcoholism if you don't drink alcohol.
5. Talk with an adult you trust. This trusted adult could be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, a friend's parent or someone at school such as teacher, school counselor or nurse.

3. It's Not Your Fault: NACoA brochure

You can click here for a very helpful pamphlet about what every child of an alcoholic needs to know: http://nacoa.org/pdfs/ondcpbro_rev.pdf

This is a free downloadable that you can make copies and review with the students.

4. Kids' Kit

Go to www.nacoa.org Click on Kids' Kit. You can download it for free. It is filled with information, resources, and strategies specifically designed for youth from alcoholic families. Review this excellent resource and focus on one part of it during the discussion with students. You'll have many excellent options.

5. How Friends Can Help

Friends can make a really big difference in the lives of children hurt by family alcoholism. Here are some helpful hints from the National Association for Children of Alcoholics.

If it's your friend's mom or dad who drinks too much

Things you can say that might help:

- It's not your fault that your parent drinks or uses drugs;
- You're not alone - lots of kids come from families where this is a problem;
- There are people who can help.

Things you can do:

- Tell a school counselor or teacher that you are worried about your friend;
- Be a good friend - include your friend in your activities;
- Encourage your friend to talk to a trusting adult.

Closure

This may be an emotionally charged issue for students, so please keep the discussion brief and general. It has been our experience that the school counselor may be the best person to present this sensitive material. There are two other excellent resources you may include here, if time allows.

1. Alateen is a support group for teens who are concerned about a loved one's drinking. Go to: <http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/newcomer.html>
2. The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACoA) is an excellent resource for youth. Go to: <http://nacoa.org/addictqa.html> and explore their Just 4 Kids page. It provides a wealth of helpful, age-appropriate information and resources for youth, especially a Questions and Answers about Addiction page.