



National Association for Children of Addiction

Tools for



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National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA)

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Letter to Kids

Hello:

I'll bet you feel alone when your mom or dad drinks too much or uses drugs, because maybe you think that no one else's mom or dad does that. Or maybe you think that no one knows how you feel. Do you know that there are plenty of kids your age who feel exactly like you, because their parents drink too much? I know how you feel, because one of my parents suffers from addiction to alcohol and drugs.

It's not easy. When I was your age, I felt so alone. Every time my parent started drinking, or using drugs, I had that funny feeling in my stomach that something wasn't right. I was scared to tell anyone. I wondered why I had a parent who did that.

I always wondered if I did anything to make my parent drink or use drugs. None of my friends could spend the night at my house because I never knew when it would start. I didn't want my friends to know what went on in my house; besides, when my parent started to drink I never knew what would happen. I didn't want anyone to know what a mess it was in my family. I felt ashamed, and I believed my house was REALLY different from everybody else's.

When I grew up I moved away from my confusing house, and I began to meet other people who had parents trapped by addiction. I talked a lot to these people about how it was in my house, and I didn't feel embarrassed because they talked about what went on in their homes when their parents were also trapped. I realized that other people had the same kinds of confusing things happen to them.

Some people came from homes that were more messed up than mine, and other people came from homes that didn't have as many problems as mine did. Many thought it was their fault, even though it really wasn't. But I realized one thing: that all the time when I was a kid, when I thought I was alone and the only one with parents who drank too much or used drugs, I WASN'T.

You aren't the only one with parents who drink too much or use drugs. There are a lot of us here.

I want to tell you some things about addiction that I wish someone had told me when I was a kid. Maybe these things will help you understand a little bit better, and maybe you won't blame yourself the next time your parents drink too much or use drugs.

Your Friend,
An adult who grew up in a family trapped by addiction



Questions and Answers about Drug and Alcohol Problems

Question: What is addiction?

Answer: Addiction to alcohol or drugs is a brain disease. People who have the disease have lost control over their drinking and drug use and are not able to stop without help. They also lose control over how they act when they are trapped by addiction.

Question: How does addiction start?

Answer: Doctors don't know all the reasons why people become addicted. Some start drinking a little bit or use drugs to forget problems or to calm their nerves, but then they end up needing the alcohol or drugs to feel okay. Once a person loses control over drinking or drug use, he or she needs help to stop.

Question: If someone is trapped by addiction why doesn't he or she just go to the doctor?

Answer: At first the trapped person is not aware that he or she is ill. Addiction to alcohol or drugs is a disease of the brain that convinces people they don't have it. Even when the person becomes aware that something is wrong, he or she may not believe that drugs or alcohol is the problem. The person might keep blaming things on other people, or might blame their job, or the kids/family, or whatever. But, really, it's the alcohol or drug use that's the biggest problem.

Question: Does addiction only trap certain people?

Answer: No. People trapped by addiction can be young, old, rich, poor, male, or female.

Question: What is the cure for addiction?

Answer: There is no cure for addiction. People can stop the disease by not drinking or using drugs. Individuals trapped by addiction who have completely stopped are called "recovering." They can lead healthy, happy, and productive lives.



Question: Can family members make a person trapped by addiction stop drinking and using?

Answer: No. It is important to know that this person needs special help to stop drinking or using drugs, but no one can be forced to accept the help, no matter what you do or how hard you try. It is important to know that family members by themselves cannot provide the help that a person trapped by addiction needs. He or she needs the help of people trained to treat the disease.

Question: How many children in the United States have at least one parent trapped by addiction?

Answer: More than 1 in 4 children under age 18 is growing up with at least one such parent. There are probably a few in your class at school. And remember, lots of adults grew up with parents trapped by addiction.

Question: I know I can't make my parent stop drinking or using drugs, so what can I do to make myself feel better?

Answer: Talk to someone you trust about the problem. Talk to a teacher, a scout leader, a coach, a school counselor, or someone you trust at your church. Also, there is a group for kids who have parents trapped by addiction called "Alateen." Alateen has meetings, like a club, and the kids share tips on how to make life easier. Some of these meetings are in person, and some kids meet online. Visit the Al-Anon Teen Corner (<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/>) online to learn about Alateen meetings in your area and to learn more about Alateen. Ask at school if there are any Alateen groups or school-sponsored support groups.



Fact Sheet Just For You

Fact #1 Addiction is a disease. Your parent is not a bad person; he or she has a disease where they can't stop drinking or using other drugs. Addiction does that; when you drink too much, or use drugs, you do and say things that you normally wouldn't. People trapped by addiction often don't act like themselves. They think that alcohol and drugs will make them feel okay, when they actually make them sick.

Fact #2 You cannot control your parent's addiction. It is not your fault. You can't make it better. Hiding bottles, throwing drugs away, or trying to be perfect, doesn't work. You can't do anything about your parent's disease. You are not the reason why your parent drinks or uses drugs. You did not cause the disease.

Fact #3 You are not alone. There are lots of kids just like you. I'll bet there are some in your class at school - kids you would never think of 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 all the surveys done in the United States, we know that more than 1 out of 4 children in our country is living with parents trapped by addiction. You really aren't alone.

Fact #4 You CAN talk about the problem. Find someone you trust who will talk to you. It could be a teacher, a friend's parent, a big brother or sister, or someone else who will listen to you. These are the 'safe people' in your life. You can make a list of safe people in your life on page 8. Also, there is a group for kids called "Alateen." This group has meetings, like a club, and the kids there share tips on how to make their lives easier. Some of these meetings are in person, and some kids meet online. Some schools even have Alateen meetings on the school grounds during the day or after school. Maybe your teacher could help you find one. You can also visit the Al-Anon Teen Corner (<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/>) online to learn about Alateen meetings in your area and to learn more about Alateen. Maybe a grownup you can trust can help you learn more about Alateen.

Please don't forget these four facts.

What Can Kids Do?

Here are a few suggestions for you when a parent is trapped by addiction:

DO talk about how you feel. You can talk with a safe person in your life - maybe a close friend, family member, school counselor, teacher, minister, or others. Sharing your feelings is not being mean to your family. Talking to someone about your feelings can help you feel less alone.

DO try to get involved in doing enjoyable things at school or near where you live - the school band, softball, Boy or Girl Scouts, or other fun activities. Doing these types of things can help you forget about the problems at home, and you could learn new things about yourself and about how other people live their lives.

DO remember that feeling afraid, guilty, or alone is normal when you live with addiction in your family. It's confusing to hate the disease of addiction at the same time that you care about your parents. All people sometimes have confusing feelings: different feelings at the same time. This is the way many kids feel about a parent trapped by addiction.

DO remember to have fun! Sometimes children with families affected by addiction worry so much that they forget how to just "be a kid." If things are bad at home, you might not have anyone who will help you have fun. But don't let that stop you! Find a way to let yourself have fun.

DON'T ride in a car when the driver has been drinking or using drugs, if you can avoid it. *It is not safe.* Walk or try to get a ride with a trusted adult who has not been drinking. If you must get in a car with a drinking driver, sit in the back seat in the middle. Lock your door. Put all your stuff on the floor. Put on your seat belt. Remain calm.

DON'T pour out or hide your parent's alcohol or drugs. The plain fact is that it won't work. You have no control over the drinking or drug use. You didn't make the problem start, and you can't make it stop. What your parent does is not your responsibility, nor your fault. It is up to your parent to get help.

DON'T think that because your parent is trapped by addiction that you will be in trouble with alcohol or drugs when you get older. Remember, you can't get this disease if you don't drink or use drugs.

REMEMBER The Seven Cs

The

SEVEN CS



I didn't **cause** it.

I can't **control** it.

I can't **cure** it, *but*

I can help take **care**
of myself by

Communicating

My feelings,

Making healthy **choices**,

and

celebrating me.



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Important Messages to Remember

1. It is not your fault.
2. Everyone in a family gets hurt by addiction.
3. You can't make your family member start or stop using alcohol or other drugs.
4. You deserve help just for yourself.
5. It's okay to ask for help.
6. There are safe people and safe places that can help.
7. It can be helpful to talk with trusted adults about your thoughts and feelings.
8. You are not alone.
9. Loved ones with addiction can and sometimes do get better.
10. Despite all the problems and stress in your family, you can learn information and skills to feel better.

Safe People

Safe people listen to you, care about you, and are trustworthy. They could be a family member, teacher, coach, minister, or neighbor. Make a list of your safe people.

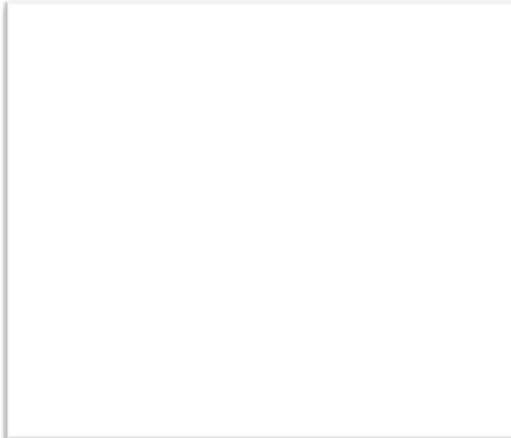
Kids' Artwork



Kids' Artwork



You can draw your picture in the frame below:



Books for Kids to Read

You can take this list to the library, and ask the librarian if they have any of these books. If they haven't, you might ask if they are at another library. Some of these books can be purchased through online book distributors. You can find more books, booklets and pamphlets especially for you by visiting <https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/alateen-literature/>

Addie's Mom Isn't Here Anymore. Genia Calvin. Independently published. 2019. This book is designed to help parents, caregivers and professionals through the process of educating children about addiction, treatment and recovery.

Alateen-Hope for Children of Alcoholics. Virginia Beach, VA: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. <https://al-anon.org/blog/alateen-hope-for-children-of-alcoholics/>

Daddy Goes to Meetings. Johanna O'Flaherty and Hortensia DeJesus. Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press; 2015. This story explores the positive changes in a family after a parent enters recovery and starts going to meetings.

Easter Ann Peter's Operation Cool. Jody Lamb. Jody Lamb Communications, Inc. Michigan, 2017. Here's a sensitive look at how addiction affects the entire family, particularly the kids. A message of hope and the possibility of healing makes this a powerful read.

Kids' Power Too! Words To Grow By. Cathey Brown, Elizabeth D'Angelo LaPorte and Jerry Moe. Dallas, TX: Imagin Works. 2017. This is a book of daily affirmations to help children, one day at a time, face life's challenges in healthy and balanced ways.

Lambi Learns About Addiction. Trish Luna. Go to www.lambilearns.com; 2023. This excellent resource helps children understand addiction and offers a variety of coping skills.

Mommy's Disease: Helping Children Understand Alcoholism. Carolyn Hannan Bell. CreateSpace Independent Publishing. 2014. This book simply and sensitively explains alcoholism in an age-appropriate way. It especially emphasizes how it's not a kid's fault and how they can't make it better.

My Dad Loves Me, My Dad has a Disease. Claudia Black. Las Vegas, NV: Central Recovery Press. Revised 4th Edition, 2018. Here is a workbook designed to help young children learn about themselves, their feelings, and the disease of alcoholism in their families through art therapy. Children between the ages of six and fourteen share what it is like for them to live in a family hurt by addiction.

Play, Talk, Imagine. Sesame Street Parental Addiction Initiative. New York, New York. 2019. This digital storybook explores the issues and challenges Karli faces as her mom is about to come home from treatment. The website offers many excellent resources for children and their families. Go to <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction/> for more details.

The Beamer Series. Tom Drennon and Jerry Moe. Rancho Mirage, California: Betty Ford Center, 2019. Beamer faces many challenges due to addiction in his family. In this series of six books, each containing three chapters, Beamer learns that he's not alone and addiction is not his fault. Contact Helene Photias: HPhotias@hazeldenbettyford.org

Timbi Talks About Addiction. Trish Luna and Janet Hellier. Moon Star LLC. 2018. This book teaches children about addiction and emphasizes the importance of connecting with trusted adults and doing self-care.

Internet Addresses That Can Help You

Alateen

<https://al-anon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen>

National Association for Children of Addiction

www.nacoa.org

Sesame Street Parental Addiction Initiative

<https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction>

