



# Thoughts on Adult Child Recovery

By Claudia Black, Ph.D.

***“We became the late night regulars at the local hospital’s emergency room. For instance, one night Mom dropped a gin bottle on her foot and sliced one of her tendons. Another time she was washing dishes drunk, broke a glass, and sliced a tendon in her arm. Another night she threw a saltshaker at Dad, got him in the forehead, and he needed stitches. Once when I was alone with Mom, she fell through the window and was lying there in blood and broken glass, half on the patio, half in the family room. I phoned Dad and he yelled at me to pull her in from the window so she wouldn’t fall farther and slice herself in half. I got down on my hands and knees in the broken glass. I stuck myself through the hole she’d fallen through and moved enough glass away from her so I could pull her inside without cutting her up too badly. Then I cleaned her off and waited for Dad.”***

Somebody may ask, “What happened then?” Nothing happens then. Nothing. It is Tuesday night. Or it could be Wednesday, or maybe Thursday. But nothing in particular happens.

But something does happen — children learn to repress their fears, sadness, anger and humiliation. Yet somewhere in their bodies the depth of those experiences and feelings remain, typically dictating how they will perceive and respond

to themselves and others. They walk through life conditioned by years of helplessness and powerlessness. This young, 18-year old girl is already abusing alcohol and cocaine, is bulimic, sexually promiscuous and suicidal.

While the following experience may not be as extreme, Bill would also experience the consequences of living in an addictive family.

***“We didn’t know dad was addicted to drugs or alcohol until my parents separated. My mom kept it a secret, and my dad just didn’t come home much. He was a doctor and we thought all doctors worked a lot. When he was home we were to stay out of his way, not to be a problem. We learned to never question and never expect anything. We were just supposed to accept his absence and disregard for us. Mom vacillated between depression, being super-mother and having a short temper. We could see her stress but it was never discussed. I really thought I was not affected but then I began to have problems in my relationships. I always seemed to need one but didn’t know how to be close. I became anxious about everything and then that would end the relationship and sabotage my performance at school. I began to experience depression and still struggle with it today. I realize I missed out on a whole lot of basics, such as feeling I was worthy, or that my needs were of value or that I could talk about any of it.”***

Common emotional themes for adult children are difficulty identifying and expressing feelings; rigidity in their behavior and they often try to be controlling of people, places and things. Some find themselves overly dependent on others. As in Bill’s situation, they may feel no sense of power or choice in the way they live. A pervasive sense of fear and guilt often exists in their lives. Many experience depression and frequently lack the ability to feel close or intimate with another human being.

While it is true children growing up with addiction are at high risk to become addicted to substances, it is also common to see that they may modify their addiction to a different substance or process than the one they were raised with, such as eating disorders, sex addiction, money related or work addictions. They frequently marry someone who also has an addictive disorder. In addition, as complex as the outcomes are for many children, healing can begin by understanding the basics of recovery.

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