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# Tools for Parents and Caregivers

Helping Families Impacted by Substance Use Disorders

# Tools for Parents and Caregivers

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*Family is everything to an elephant.  
just as it should be for us.*

*-Unknown*



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# A Message to Parents and Caregivers

There are millions of children in the United States who are growing up in homes hurt by addiction to alcohol or other substances. Experts estimate that millions of Americans suffer from a substance use disorder, otherwise known as addiction. As a direct result, there are countless confused and suffering children. **While most live with their parents, there are many being raised by grandparents, other family members, or in foster care. You are all important caregivers.** Many research studies suggest that these children are at great risk — both genetically and because of their family environment — for later problems. They, too, deserve significant attention, education about addiction, and support.

**These children are not alone, and neither are you.**

This resource will help you learn more about this disease and to provide information about resources others have found to be helpful.

**As you read, keep these things in mind:**

- Addiction affects every member of the family -including children in utero and infants, as well as children of all ages. **It is a family disease.**
- While all children are affected by growing up in a family dealing with addiction, many are able to bounce back, and learn to positively cope with life's difficulties (also known as resilience), especially if they are given a little help. **We can help children to be more resilient.**
- As a caregiver, you need support, too. Learning about addiction and its related problems and discovering the available resources in your community to help families cope with this disease are good beginning steps. With quality treatment and support, families can recover from the impact of a substance use disorder. Armed with knowledge about addiction, you can **reduce the risks and challenges children face, help them keep the focus on themselves, and nurture resilience.**

We hope that you will find this information useful. Please let us know: [nacoa@nacoa.org](mailto:nacoa@nacoa.org) or 888.55.4COAS. **We are here for you.**



# Understanding Important Terms

Understanding the disease of addiction, its clinical term substance use disorder, and other important terms is very important for families. Many discriminating words and myths are used by people who don't understand. It can be hurtful to families and contribute to confusion. When we gain an understanding of this disease, and how to talk about it in a respectful way, it helps families manage what is happening, minimize the shame and blame they feel, and empower them with hope and healing.

**Substance Use Disorder (SUD)** NIH (National Institutes of Health) defines substance use disorder as a treatable mental disorder that affects a person's brain and behavior, leading to their inability to control their use of substances like legal or illegal drugs, alcohol, or medications. Symptoms can be moderate to severe. Several disorders in this category reference the substance the person uses: alcohol use disorder, opioid use disorder, or cannabis use disorder. There are proven prevention, early intervention, and treatment options available.

**Addiction** A more general term for a substance use disorder is addiction.

**Substance Misuse** Using any psychoactive substances in high doses or in inappropriate situations can cause a health or social problem — immediately or over time — including addiction.

**Recovery** NIDA (National Institute on Drug Abuse) defines recovery as a process of change through which people improve their health and wellness, live self-directed lives, and strive to reach their full potential. Even people with severe and chronic substance use disorders can, with help, overcome their illness and regain health and social function.

## Age-Appropriate Discussions

When talking with children and young adults in families impacted by addiction, it is important to give them age-appropriate information - *in language they can understand* - to validate their experience and provide support. When too much information is provided, or using terms intended for older individuals, these children can end up confused and overwhelmed. Helping kids and teens understand what the disease of addiction is, and that it isn't their fault, can *lessen the impact of stigma*.

**For younger children, using the term addiction keeps it simple and concrete.** Older children benefit from using the clinical term substance use disorder (SUD), and more of an explanation about the disease and what recovery may be like. Addiction Policy Forum provides a wonderful resource to use to learn more about the disease: [www.addictionpolicy.org/addiction-a-z](http://www.addictionpolicy.org/addiction-a-z). NACoA provides a great explanation about abstinence, sobriety, and recovery for discussions about these changes with older children: [nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Abstinence-Sobriety-and-Recovery](http://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Abstinence-Sobriety-and-Recovery)

**Note:** Throughout this document, "addiction" and "substance use disorder (SUD)" are used interchangeably.



# Suggestions for Parents and Other Caregivers

Parents, caregivers, and other family members can get help for themselves and the children, even if the person with a substance use disorder doesn't. Although much of what parents and caregivers can do to assist and support their children depends upon the family conditions, **there are many helpful things they can do.**

**Here are some proven strategies to make a difference:**

- **Educate yourself about substance use disorders.** Much of the frustration in families affected by addiction arises from fear. Knowledge can prepare you and positively help you cope with the many challenges at home.
- **Become involved with community resources and self-help groups for family members impacted by addiction.** NACoA provides an education and discussion group for this very purpose called *Recovery – What Does It Mean to You?* Organizations such as Al-Anon and Alateen will greatly benefit the family. These groups help people to learn about how addiction impacts the family. You can also listen to other people in similar situations. It also allows you an opportunity to share your experiences. This is an important way for you to take care of yourself and learn strategies from others.
- **Consider the process known as Community Reinforcement and Family Training (CRAFT), Invitation to Change, or other strategies that improve family dynamics and facilitate involvement in treatment,** Search the words “Community Reinforcement” and “Family Training” to find these resources in your state. Also, consider the process known as **intervention**. There are trained professionals who specialize in convincing individuals with SUDs to get help. The sooner the person gets help, the better the chances are for successful recovery. You can get a referral to one of these professionals through The Association of Intervention Specialists (AIS) at [associationofinterventionspecialists.org](http://associationofinterventionspecialists.org).
- **Become involved as a family in the treatment and recovery process.** Addiction affects the entire family. Each member of the family deserves an opportunity to heal and live a healthier, more fulfilling life. Family participation in services designed to support them gives everybody a support structure for recovery. Not all treatment programs offer developmentally appropriate resources for children. Ask a counselor at the treatment program or a school counselor/social worker for a referral to such services if they are not provided, or check with local organizations like Boys and Girls Clubs.
- **When the home situation is excessively disruptive or verbally abusive, seek the children out and comfort them.** Many children isolate because they are upset, afraid, or confused. Find them, talk to them, and comfort them. Try to avoid letting them go to sleep or to school under these upsetting conditions. If this occurs, talk with them at the first opportunity. Remind them that it's not their fault, and that you will be there to provide support.

- **Break the unspoken rules that often live in families: Don't Talk, Don't Trust, Don't Feel.** By talking about what is happening in the family, how everyone feels about it, and respecting what is said, children begin to feel safe. As they become comfortable, they begin to trust. When children begin to talk, trust, and feel, healing begins.
- **Encourage and support your children to become involved in school and community activities.** These activities give them outlets and opportunities to develop relationships with other safe people in activities outside of your home. These activities can help them accomplish many things on their own, as well as support their independence and sense of worth.
- **Arrange times for the children to hang out with their friends.** This can be done at home or in activities away from it. If things are not safe at home, going to the park, community center, taking a walk in the community, or getting a snack can be great alternatives. Have the kids brainstorm other fun things to do.
- **Avoid pressuring the children to take sides in conflicts** you may have with the family member with an active SUD. Pressuring them to do so causes additional stress.
- **Don't put the children in the middle of family conflicts by using their opinions to "get back at" the person with a SUD.** Using your children against that person might cause your child not to share feelings with you in the future. Validate a child's perceptions and feelings, and when possible, explain how the parent's substance use or withdrawal might be related to the upsetting behavior.

*\*Modified with permission from NACoA Co-Founder Robert J. Ackerman, Ph.D.*

**Remember:** If your children are to grow up and have healthy and satisfying lives, they will need help from people in their community, **but most of all, they need you.**



# How to Find Help: Treatment for Addiction

If you have had difficulty identifying a satisfactory community resource for diagnosing and treatment addiction, or if there is not an appropriate service in your area, you may wish to contact the following state and national resources for more information.

**SAMHSA's National Helpline - National Helpline of the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration** is a free, confidential, 24/7, 365-day-a-year treatment referral and information service - in English and Spanish - for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders. **Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357), TTY: 1-800-487-4889 or TEXT your zip code to 435748 (HELP4U).** You can also visit the online treatment locator at [www.findtreatment.gov](http://www.findtreatment.gov).

**NIAAA Alcohol Treatment Navigator** - The Navigator helps adults find alcohol treatment for themselves or an adult loved one. The Navigator will steer you toward *evidence-based* treatment, which applies knowledge gained through decades of carefully designed scientific research. Learn more by visiting [alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov](http://alcoholtreatment.niaaa.nih.gov)

**Your State Agency** — Each state has a department of alcohol and drug addiction services, a governmental agency that is responsible for alcohol and drug related programs, resources, and initiatives offered throughout the state. States vary widely in the titles of their alcohol and drug agencies and in their organizational affiliations within state government structures. In some instances, these agencies are combined with mental health. To locate your state's agency, look up your government website and find the behavioral services department. Or contact the **National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors**, at [www.nasadad.org](http://www.nasadad.org) or call (202) 293-0090.

**Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** is a voluntary fellowship open to anyone who wants to achieve and maintain sobriety from alcohol and is an important adjunct to many treatment programs. AA is the oldest of the organizations designed to help individuals with alcohol use disorders help themselves. It is estimated that there are over two million members in local AA groups worldwide. For further information, visit [www.aa.org](http://www.aa.org)

**Narcotics Anonymous (NA)** is a fellowship open to anyone who wants to achieve and maintain recovery from substance use disorders. It is an important adjunct to many treatment programs across the United States and beyond. It's a self-help program for individuals for whom drugs have become a major problem and health issue. Through meetings, working the Twelve Steps, reading NA literature, and being of service to others, the fellowship helps people find a path to recovery, healing, and hope. You can find information about meetings by visiting [www.na.org](http://www.na.org) or calling 818 773 9999.



# Important Messages for You

Parents, grandparents, and other caregivers sometimes tend to over explain things, especially to younger children. Keeping it simple, and consistently sharing one or two of the messages below at appropriate times, works well.

- It is not your fault.
- You are not alone.
- Everyone in a family gets hurt by a person's substance use disorder.
- You can't make your family member start or stop using alcohol or other substances.
- You deserve help just for yourself.
- It's okay to ask for help.
- There are safe people and safe places that can help.
- It can be helpful to talk with trusted adults about your thoughts and feelings.
- Loved ones with a substance use disorder can and sometimes do get better.
- Despite all the problems and stress in your family, you can learn information and skills to feel better.
- It is OK to love your Mom or Dad, even though you don't like the disease.

**These messages also apply to you.**

## Safe People

Safe people listen to you, care about you, and are trustworthy. They could be a family member, teacher, coach, religious leader, the parent of a close friend, or neighbor. Help your child(ren) think about who the safe people are in their lives. Give some thought to who are the safe people in your life, too. Make a list of them below and have the child(ren) take a picture with their cell phone to keep the list handy. *If appropriate, make sure they have phone numbers in their cell phones.*

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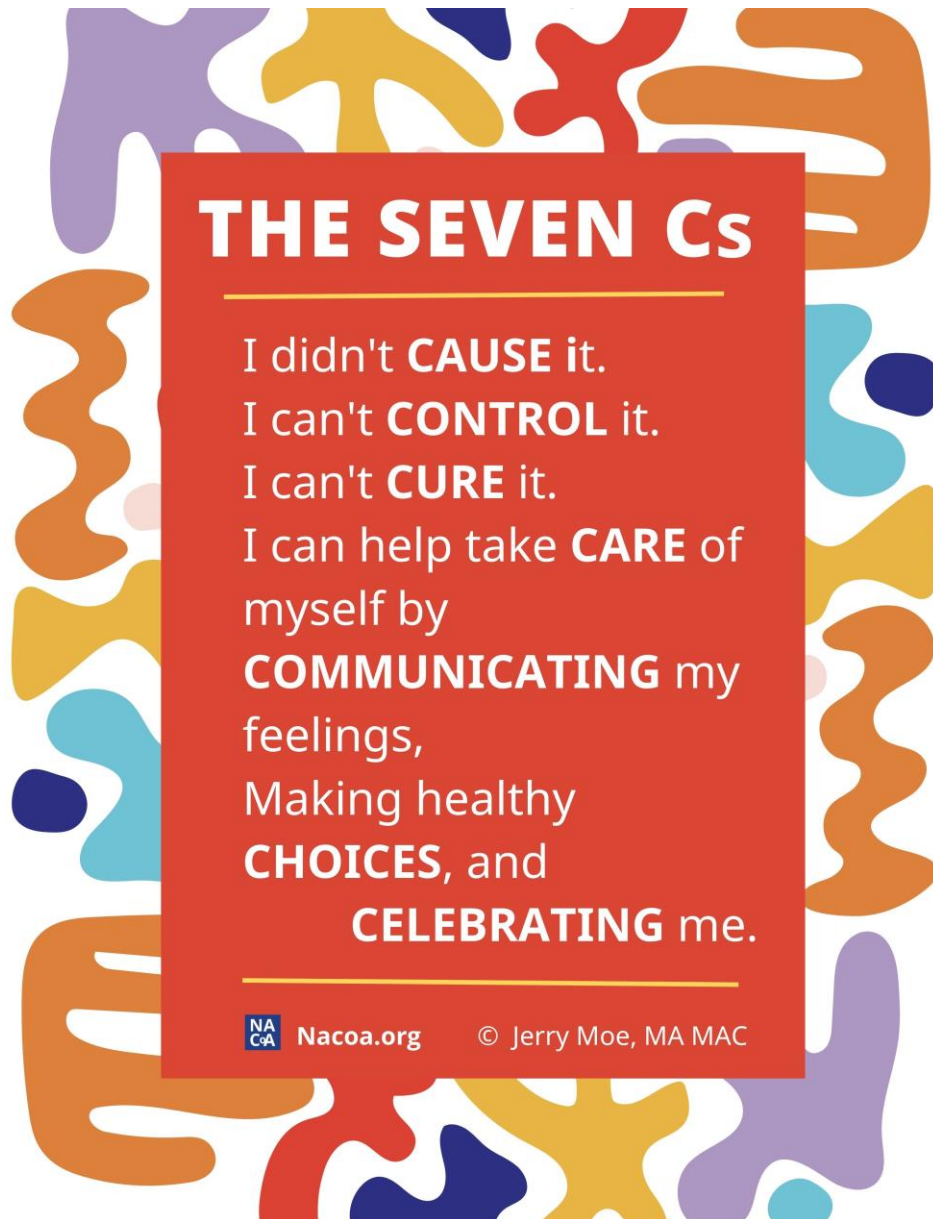


# The Seven Cs

The Seven Cs were created to provide invaluable guidance to kids and teens impacted by the disease of addiction in their family. It reminds them that they are not to blame for what the disease is doing to the person they love. Further, it focuses on healthy coping skills, communication, and self-care that is important for these children.

Post the Seven Cs somewhere in the house. Consider having children take a picture of it with their cell phone so they can review it wherever they are.

*Every child who has been affected by a loved one struggling with a substance use disorder in their family should receive a copy of the Seven Cs.*



# What Can You Do to Help the Children?

The following is a list of "Do's and Don'ts" that may guide you in helping the kids.

- DO** make sure that children understand three basic facts. First, they are not alone; there are millions of children with family members who have problems with alcohol and other drugs. Second, the children are not responsible for the problem and cannot control their loved one's behavior. Third, each child is a valuable, worthwhile individual.
- DO** maintain a list of resources and/or a small library of books and pamphlets on alcohol and substance related problems that have been written for children.
- DO** find out who the helping professionals are in your community. Knowing which organizations have resources to help children will make it easier when your child comes to you.
- DO** follow through after a child asks for help. You may be the only person the child has approached. Courses of action you might choose include: 1) Help children twelve or older to contact an Alateen group where others who understand and share the problem of family addiction are available for support. See if educational support groups or other resources are available at school for your child; 2) Assist your child in "thinking through" all the sympathetic adults who play significant roles in his/her life (a favorite aunt or uncle, grandparent, religious leader, school counselor) who might be able to help; and 3) Refer your child to an appropriate helping professional.
- DON'T** act embarrassed or uncomfortable when a child wants to talk, and don't minimize the child's fears and concerns. It may be discouraging for the child and increase his or her sense of shame, isolation, and hopelessness.
- DON'T** criticize the family member with a substance use disorder or be overly sympathetic. The child may gain the greatest benefit just by having you listen and be understanding..
- DON'T** make plans with the child if you can't follow through. Stability and consistency in relationships are necessary for the child to develop trust and feel valued.
- DO** celebrate holidays and special occasions. The absence of parents during holidays and special occasions such as birthdays, graduations and school performances are especially difficult for children. Plan for these occasions by discussing options with the children and allowing them to provide input. Prepare them for questions from others and some possible sadness.
- DO** be a healthy role model. Talk to children about your day and the feelings associated with different things that happened. Demonstrate healthy behaviors for coping with stress. And when you can't, let your children know that sometimes it's difficult to make a healthy choice. This will make it easier for them to discuss their challenges.

**DO** introduce essential methods for children to calm down, cope, and take good care of themselves when feelings become overwhelming. This can include, but not limited to, breathing techniques, mindfulness exercises, yoga, walking in nature, journaling, or arts/crafts. Help remind children to consider these methods when they are overwhelmed, anxious, or sad.

**DO** remind children how much you care. Most assume they are all alone, and having someone care and be available to them may be a new and uncomfortable situation. Help them remember that you are there for them, and that you love them.

**DO** foster an attitude of gratitude. So often a great deal of attention has been focused on everything that has gone wrong. These children are conditioned to be hyper-focused on the next bad thing that might take place. Gratitude is healing, empowering, and uplifting. Help them see and look for small everyday beauty like a red cardinal, the smell of freshly baked cookies, or how fun it can be to sing your favorite song when doing a chore you dislike. Share your own gratitude for the everyday things to help create new attitudes. Point out special things the child does, and help them hear you say, "Thank You!"

**DO** be silly or fun. Most of the children in these families are far too serious. Many of them have no idea how to just be a kid because they have been burdened with responsibility for the family or fears beyond their years. Help them be a kid with lots of jokes, funny faces, and fogginess. Laughter really is one of the best healers!

**DO** enjoy each other. Being a caretaker for a child when the parent can't be is at times a difficult task. Model how everyone gets to take a break from the responsibilities of the day, unplug, and enjoy the people they love! Play a video game, listen to music you both like, teach something new, or go for walks together. Find ways to celebrate each day.





# Messages To Give the Children

You can tell children the following things:

**Sharing your feelings is not being mean or disloyal to your family.** You might feel better when you talk to someone you trust. Talking to someone about your feelings can help you feel less stressed and alone.

**Get involved in doing enjoyable things at school or in the community like the school activities, Y's or Boys' or Girls' Clubs, town or city recreation programs, or other fun activities.** Doing these things can help you forget about the problems at home. You could learn new things about yourself and about how other people live their lives.



**When you live with someone with a substance use disorder, feeling afraid, embarrassed, confused, guilty, or alone is normal.** It is confusing to hate the substance use disorder at the same time that you care about your loved one. All people have confusing feelings: many different feelings at the same time. This is the way many kids feel about addiction in their family.

**Remember to have fun!** Sometimes children worry so much that they forget how to just 'be a kid.' Find a way to let yourself have fun.

**DON'T ride in a car, if you can avoid it, when the driver has been drinking or using drugs.** It is not safe. Agree to help protect your child from having to ride with someone under the influence. If your child must get in a car with such a person, he or she should sit in the back seat in the middle. Lock the door. Put his or her things on the floor, put on a seat belt, and try to remain calm.

**You have no control over the adult's substance use.** You didn't make the problem start, and you can't make it stop — or start again. What adults do is not your responsibility or your fault.

**Don't think that because your loved one has a substance use disorder that you will have problems too.** It is a family problem to be cautious of, but you can't get this disease if you don't drink or use these addictive substances. It is important to wait until you are 21 years old before considering.

<b>Remember to have fun!</b>	<b>Share your feelings with safe people</b>	
	<b>Get involved in doing enjoyable things at school or in the community!</b>	
<b>You have no control over someone else's addiction</b>		

# Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Grand families, are those where the kids are raised by grandparents. Kinship families could involve grandparents or include other relatives or even older siblings as caregivers. Research suggests parental substance use disorders are often a major reason for this. Grandparents can play an essential role in providing loving, safe, and stable homes for children who can't remain in the care of their parents. Here are a handful of suggestions that may be helpful.

**Practice Self-Care** Take good care of yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Your health and stability are crucial to the children's well-being. If they see you practicing self-care, they can begin to learn to and do the same. Be kind, gracious, and loving to yourself. You've taken on some huge responsibilities and missteps will inevitably take place. The key is your response — a calm, caring, and positive demeanor will make it safe for them.

**Seek Counseling** Finding emotional support, for both the kids and you, is critical in this time of transition for everyone. For the children, the loss of a parent as a main caregiver is traumatic. Moreover, the children need help in dealing with life's daily challenges, with school, friends, and activities. You may need extra support and guidance in dealing with the child's parent who is struggling with addiction. The Al-Anon Program might also be helpful in this regard. Family counseling may also assist in building and strengthening your relationship with the grandkids.

**Provide Structure and Consistency** To meet your grandchildren's everyday needs, develop consistent routines and rituals. Set times for chores, homework, play, and bedtime for comfort and security. Create and establish clear rules, realistic expectations, and consistently enforced consequences. Walk with these kids on this new and challenging journey. Structure and consistency create a predictable and safe environment for everyone.

**Open and Honest Communication** Be open and honest with grandchildren, when it's age-appropriate, about their parents' challenges. Use teachable moments to explain substance related behaviors and teach them positive coping strategies to deal with this reality. Use developmentally appropriate language and examples and create a safe atmosphere for them to ask questions and express feelings. Always remind them that it's not their fault nor their job to make it better. When you talk about their parents, please do so with respect and care. This is so important for youth's well-being on many levels.

**Build a Support System** Explore and utilize multiple supports to help with healthy family functioning. Look for Grandparents Raising Grandchildren support groups. Ask about respite programs that provide coordinated, community-based respite care services for family members who provide care for children. Are there extended family members and friends who can create a support network for the kids? Ask at their school about community organizations and after-school programs which provide activities and support to help them to grow and develop.



**Celebrate Holidays and Special Occasions** The absence of parents during holidays and special occasions such as birthdays, graduations and school performances are especially difficult for children. Plan for these occasions by discussing options with the children and allowing them to provide input. Prepare them for questions from others and some possible sadness.

**Be a Healthy Role Model** Talk to children about your day and the feelings associated with different things that happened. Demonstrate healthy behaviors for coping with stress. And when you can't, let your children know that sometimes it's difficult to make a healthy choice. This will make it easier for them to discuss their challenges.



# When Parents are in Recovery

By Stephanie Abbott, M.A.

Acknowledgment of children's pain is one of the most poignant aspects of recovery. Such pain can be so difficult to face that parents may try to deny that it is there. The children, sensitive to parental grief, may also deny it.

I knew a man, sober for many years and working in the field, who pronounced that concern for children of alcoholics was a "fad" that wouldn't last very long. I suspected that he didn't want to look very hard at the special difficulties that his sons had with their marriages. Acceptance would mean that the children need healing, and that it doesn't come about "...recovering family. It can sound simply because very much like self-parents can be the parents are justification and the now sane and very intrusive..." children may want sober.

In the early years of recovery, many people find enormous challenges in changing those responses to people and events that got them into trouble. They work at being more responsible, letting go of problems they can't solve, and people they can't change, and making amends to those they have harmed. Many think making amends consists only of explaining why they were the way they were, saying they were sorry, and changing behavior.

Some adult children, whose parents are still sick, would be relieved to have that admission, as they struggle with the realities of painful family systems which revolve around active addiction. Or their parents are dead, and the children know some things will never be resolved.

But others cope with their anger about the past, even when their present relationship with their parents is fairly good. Mothers and fathers then have to deal over a period of years with hurt and resentful children with few guidelines. Some have resolved the matter in their own minds with the Amends Step (Ninth Step of AA and Al-Anon), and can't understand why it doesn't heal the resentment. They don't know that this step is mainly for their own benefit and healing.

Listening to many parents and adult children, I have come to understand some of the barriers to forgiveness and letting go of the past. It doesn't seem to be enough to acknowledge the way it was in the family. What they often do want is for the parents to listen to how it was for the children without interrupting and explaining.

Another complaint I hear is that recovering parents can be very intrusive with their own recovery programs. In their anxiety to repair the damage to the children they may be very critical.

Comments such as "you are headed down the path I followed" or "you are very codependent" are rarely appreciated. Another intrusion may be giving more information about their own private life than is appropriate.

There are many good support groups in most areas that can help teenagers and adult children with their struggles; these groups can be found at school, at AlAnon or Alateen. Going to these groups does not mean there is something wrong with the person who goes, or that attending means the problems are the fault of the child.

Sometimes nothing seems to be enough. The parent has made amends, listened to how it was without self justification and worked at respectful communication. Yet the relationship still is not as good as the parents hope it to be. It may be time "to accept the things we cannot change."

## Recovering parents and their children today can:

- Accept what happened, and separate from it, until the grief loses its power over today.
- Remember there is more to their history than alcoholism.
- Make today a new past that will feel good to remember.
- Cherish their hard-won depth and understanding.

# Books for Kids, Teens, Adults and Families

## For Children:

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

*Daddy Goes to Meetings.* Johanna O'Flaherty and Hortensia Dejesus. This story explores the positive changes in a family after a parent enters recovery and starts going to meetings.

*Kids' Power Too! Words To Grow By.* Cathey Brown, Elizabeth D'Angelo LaPorte and Jerry Moe. 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. [www.lambilearns.com](http://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. 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 Ph. D 4th Edition, 2018. 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.* 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. <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/parental-addiction/>

*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](mailto:HPhotias@hazeldenbettyford.org)

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

*When Someone in the Family Drinks Too Much.* Richard C. Langsen and Judy Monnelly. Presents a young reader's guide to the signs of alcoholism and the emotions one might feel living in a home where someone suffers from this addiction, while giving advice on how to cope with the disease and suggesting ways to get outside help.

*The Dragon Who Lives at Our House.* Elaine Mitchell Palmore. Al the Dragon is a welcome and festive visitor at family events, but soon his relationship with Dad becomes all consuming, forcing the rest of the family out of the house. Through "treatment" Al becomes smaller and the family gains new hope.

*An Elephant In the Living Room: The Children's Book* Jill M. Hastings and Marion H. Typpo

A classic workbook that helps children understand addiction, encouraging them to express their feelings through activities and discussions.

*Mommy's Gone to Treatment* Denise D. Crosson This book explains what happens when a parent goes to rehab, providing comfort and understanding for children during a difficult time.

*The Kissing Hand* Audrey Penn. Does not reference addiction, but a heartwarming story, especially at times of separation between children and their parents.

### **For Pre-Teens and Teenagers**

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

*Courage To Be Me: Living with Alcoholism*. Al-Anon Family Groups. 2018. This is Alateen's most comprehensive book, filled with shared recovery stories, helpful hints, and related literature from grateful Alateen members. It includes workshop ideas for group discussions.

*Easter Ann Peter's Operation Cool*. Jody Lamb. 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.

*Drinking: A Love Story* by Caroline Knapp. Recommended for older teens and adults, this memoir offers a personal look at alcohol addiction and recovery, providing insight into the emotional aspects of AUD.

*Hey, Kiddo*. Jarrett Krosoczka. 2018. Here is a candid, emotional memoir about life with a mom addicted to heroin and rough but loving grandparents. This is a powerful portrayal of the family disease of addiction.

*Beneath a Meth Moon*. Jacqueline Woodson. 2013. Here is a novel which explores the dark journey of addiction and family trauma, as well as the challenges and difficulties of recovery.

*You'd Be Home Now*. 2022 This is a riveting look at how addiction hurts everyone in the family. It's a journey of a sister, brother and family dealing with the heartbreaking story of the opioid crisis.

*L.E.A.P. (Linn's Emerging Adult Plan)* Toni Bellon. This is 14-year-old Linn's secret story of survival while growing up with a mother who struggled with an alcohol use disorder. While waiting for her alcoholic mother and codependent father to grow up, Linn becomes known as the family liar, despite the Don't Talk rule about her mother's addiction. This is a comical take on a very real situation that many teens – and even adults – can identify with and find comfort.

### **For Parents**

*It Will Never Happen to Me: Growing Up with Addiction as Youngsters, Adolescents, and Adults*. Claudia Black, PhD 2020. This classic book captures the rules, roles, and dynamics of families hurt by addiction. Through personal stories, thoughtful explanations, and helpful exercises, a clear path to healing is illuminated.

*Kids' PowerToo: Words to Grow By.* Cathey Brown, Elizabeth LaPorte and Jerry Moe. 2017. This is a book of daily affirmations to help children, teens, and parents, one day at a time, face life's challenges in healthy and balanced ways.

*Positive Discipline for Parenting in Recovery.* Jane Nelsen. 2007. Here is a book with great strategies and tools, easy to understand exercises, and relatable for all parents. It explores balancing recovery and raising children in positive ways.

*Straight Talk: What Recovering Parents Should Tell Their Kids About Drugs and Alcohol.* Claudia Black, PhD. 2019. This book provides clear direction and gentle support for discussing alcohol, drugs, and your addiction with your children. Dr. Black also addresses practical prevention strategies for raising resilient children.

*Understanding Addiction and Recovery Through a Child's Eyes.* Jerry Moe. 2008.

Here is a book of poignant stories and humorous anecdotes about children and teens who are navigating their way through the healing process from family addiction.

### **Books on Family Addiction**

*Addict in the Family: Support Through Loss, Hope, and Recovery.* Beverly Conyers. 2021.

Here is a revised and updated work to offer parents and other family members support when faced with the reality of a loved one's addiction.

*Addiction in the Family: Helping Families Navigate Challenges, Emotions, and Recovery.* Louise Sanger. 2020. This book is a guide which offers practical tools to take on the challenges from navigating addictive behaviors to considering treatment and moving forward.

*How Al-Anon Works for Families and Friends of Alcoholics.* 2008. This book features the steps, traditions, and slogans which have allowed family members to begin, strengthen, and deepen their recovery journey.

*It Takes a Family: Creating Lasting Sobriety, Togetherness, and Happiness.* Debra Jay. 2021. Here's a book that celebrates the unique and powerful role families play in successful long-term recovery from addiction.

*The Alcoholic Family in Recovery.* Stephanie Brown and Virginia Lewis. 2002. Based on case studies and interviews with recovering family members, this book features a developmental model of recovery, explores the trauma of early recovery, and demonstrates how families can be helped to regroup after abstinence, weather periods of emotional upheaval, and find ways to establish a more stable and flexible family system.

*Unspoken Legacy: Addressing the Impact of Trauma and Addiction within the Family.* Claudia Black, PhD. 2018. Dr. Black presents a portrait of a broken family system, exploring how addiction and trauma develop in families, their damaging repetition, and offers a roadmap for healing.

*The Lowdown on Families Who Get High: Successful Parenting for Families Affected by Addiction.* Patricia O'Gorman, PhD and Philip Diaz, MSW. 2004. An easy-to-use book on a complex subject: how to break the cycle of addiction in high-risk families.



# Supportive Apps for Kids and Teens



I am Me – Positive Mental Health for Young People



Alateen



Kooth Online Mental Wellbeing Community



Mindshift CBT – Anxiety Relief



Insight Time – Meditation and Mindfulness



Smiling Mind – Daily Mental Health Workout



Tellmi – Peer Support

# Health Information Resources:

## **Al-Anon Family Groups**

This is a self-help organization for family members and friends of a person with a substance use disorder. Alateen, a program specifically for adolescents, operates under the auspices of Al-Anon.

1 888 425 2666

[www.alanon.org](http://www.alanon.org)

## **Alcohol and Drug Helpline**

This is operated by the Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (see page 10). This 24-hour helpline is available in both English and Spanish.

1 800 662 HELP

(treatment locator) [www.findtreatment.gov](http://www.findtreatment.gov)

## **CHILDHELP/National Child Abuse Hotline**

Here is an excellent resource for help about cases of suspected child abuse and neglect.

1 800 442 4453

[www.childhelpline.org](http://www.childhelpline.org)

## **The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

The Federal Agency provides up to date information on preventing youth substance use and enhancing mental health as well as resources for treatment and recovery.

877-SAMHSA-7 (726-4727); TTY: 800-487-4889

[www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)

## **Medline Plus**

MedlinePlus is an online health information resource for patients and their families and friends. It is a service of the National Library of Medicine (NLM), the world's largest medical library, which is part of the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

[Medlineplus.gov](http://Medlineplus.gov)

## **Addiction Policy Forum**

The Addiction Policy Forum is a nationwide nonprofit organization dedicated to eliminating addiction as a major health problem.

[Addictionpolicy.org](http://Addictionpolicy.org)

# Grief Support

It is an unfortunate reality, but sadly substance use disorder robs some children of their parents due to overdose, influence-related accidents, or an eventual burden on the body after years of substance use. When these parents die, the children are so often overlooked and stigmatized. They face a unique set of challenges that can make their grief especially burdensome.

While the loss of a parent is always a profound and life-altering event, the death of a parent due to the chronic illness of addiction carries additional layers of complexity and pain. Children often find their grief underacknowledged, or even dismissed, by society. These children are often forgotten or ignored - and sometimes even blamed - when parental death involves alcohol, drugs, or other substances. These children need the support of safe adults to help identify and manage their grief, as well as heal from the layers of trauma they have endured. **These resources help families and other caring adults be there for these children and help them at such a delicate time.**

## **Grief by Age: Development Stages and Ways to Help**

<https://elunanetwork.org/resources/developmental-grief-responses>

## **Sesame Workshop: Grief**

<https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/grief/>

## **Responding to Change & Loss: In Support to Children, Teens & Families**

[https://cgcmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/5.20-NAGC Activity Booklet-Responding to Change Loss.pdf](https://cgcmaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/5.20-NAGC_Activity_Booklet-Responding_to_Change_Loss.pdf)

## **Signs of Grief in Children and How to Help Them Cope: Children Grieve Differently than Adults**

<https://www.parents.com/signs-of-grief-in-children-and-how-to-help-them-cope-8643690>

## **Camp Erin – an Educational Support Camp Experience for Grieving Children**

<https://elunanetwork.org/camps-programs/camp-erin/>

## **The Center for Grieving Children Community Webinars**

<https://www.cgcmaine.org/service/community-webinars/>

## **Book List for Supporting the Loss of a Parent**

<https://www.allinahealth.org/health-conditions-and-treatments/grief-resources/suggested-books/books-for-grieving-children#parent>

# Letter to Kids

*\*Taken from Tools for Kids, a NACoA resource designed for children 7 – 14 years old.*

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? 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 impacted by addiction*



# Questions and Answers about Drug and Alcohol Problems

**Question:** What is a substance use disorder?

**Answer:** A substance use disorder, sometimes called addiction, is a brain disease involving the use of alcohol or other drugs or both. 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 and what they say when they are using or need to use alcohol or drugs.

**Question:** Can family members make a person with a substance use disorder 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 themselves cannot provide the help that a person with a substance use disorder 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 with a substance use disorder?

**Answer:** More than 1 in 8 children under age 18 are 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 a substance use disorder.

**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 place of worship. Also, there is a group for kids who have parents with a substance use disorder called "Alateen." Alateen has meetings, like a club, and the kids share advice 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://alanon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/> 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 with a substance use disorder often don't act like themselves. They think that alcohol and drugs will make them feel ok or act a certain way, when instead they actually make them unpredictable and often 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. Some are in your class at school - kids you would never think of might have a parent who has a substance use disorder 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 parent with a substance use disorder. 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, other relative, or someone else who will listen to you. These are the 'safe people' in your life. Also, there is a group for kids called "Alateen." This group has meetings, like a club, and the kids there share advice 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, school counselor, nurse, or doctor could help you find one.

You can also visit the Al-Anon Teen Corner <https://alanon.org/newcomers/teen-corner-alateen/> online to learn about Alateen meetings in your area and to learn more about Alateen. Maybe a grownup you trust can help you learn more about Alateen.



# Important Conversations about Alcohol and Substance Use with Children

When children grow up in homes impacted by addiction, it is important to recognize that they can be at higher risk than other children to develop addiction themselves. If we think about asthma, cardiac disease, or diabetes, that also run in families, caring adults sit down with children and explain why it is important to take good care of themselves. Many adults struggle with how to have these conversations with children. **Fortunately, there are some wonderful resources to help.**

## **Sesame Workshop – Exploring Addiction**

<https://sesameworkshop.org/resources/explaining-addiction/>

## **Child Mind Institute – How and When do I talk to my kids about alcohol and drugs?**

[childmind.org/positiveparenting/alcohol-and-drugs/](http://childmind.org/positiveparenting/alcohol-and-drugs/)

## **SAMHSA Talk – They Hear You**

<https://www.samhsa.gov/talk-they-hear-you/parent-resources/why-you-should-talk-your-child>

## **HealthyChildren.org - Why to Have the Alcohol Talk Early**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/substance-abuse/Pages/Why-to-Have-the-Alcohol-Talk-Early.aspx>

## **Ask Listen and Learn - For Adults With Kids 9 – 13 years old**

<https://asklistenlearn.org/>

## **NIAAA for Middle School**

<https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/alcohols-effects-health/niaaa-middle-school>

## **Wait21**

[Wait21.org](http://Wait21.org)

## **Straight Talk from Claudia Black: What Recovering Parents Should Tell Their Kids about Drugs and Alcohol**

By Claudia Black, PhD

<https://www.amazon.com/Straight-Talk-Claudia-Black-Recovering/dp/1592850413>



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[nacoa@nacoa.org](mailto:nacoa@nacoa.org)  
[Nacoa.org](http://Nacoa.org)