

## Substance Use Disorder Hurts Everyone in the Family

If your mom, dad, or another family member is misusing alcohol or other substances, you probably already know that it doesn't just affect them—it affects everyone in your family. Including you! Maybe things at home feel stressful or unpredictable. Maybe you feel like you can't talk about what's happening. Maybe you're worried about what your friends would think if they knew.

It's important to know that **you are not alone** and that what's happening in your family is **not your fault**.

### How Substance Use Affects Families

When a parent or caregiver misuses substances, family life often becomes **unpredictable** and **stressful**. Many families try to keep things looking "normal" from the outside, but behind closed doors, things might feel very different.

Families in this situation often experience:

- **Less communication** – People might stop talking about their feelings or avoid tough conversations and deny family problems in the hope they will disappear if they are not talked about.
- **More arguments** – Small problems might turn into big fights, or family members might seem angry all the time.
- **Less closeness** – You might feel like you're walking on eggshells, or like everyone is distant and disconnected.
- **More stress** – You might feel chaotic, pressure to take on extra responsibilities, like taking care of younger siblings or managing things your parent should be handling.
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## The Unspoken Family Rules

Dr. Claudia Black, an expert on families and substance use, describes three common unspoken rules in families where substance use is present:

- **Don't talk** – No one discusses the problem, even when it's obvious.
- **Don't trust** – It can be hard to rely on others when promises are broken.
- **Don't feel** – You might feel like you have to push down your emotions to get through the day.

These rules can make it feel like you have to handle everything on your own. But the truth is, **you don't have to do this alone**—help and support are available.

## Different Family Roles

In families where a parent has a substance use disorder, family members sometimes take on different roles to try to manage the situation and to cope with it. You might recognize yourself or others in your family in one or more of these:

- **The Hero** – The one who tries to make everything look perfect and overachieves to bring positive attention to the family.
- **The Caretaker** – The one who takes care of others, sometimes even taking on adult responsibilities.
- **The Scapegoat** – The one who acts out or gets into trouble, drawing attention away from the real problem.
- **The Withdrawn** – The one who stays quiet and avoids conflict, often feeling lonely or invisible.
- **The Clown** – The one who tries to make people laugh and lighten the mood, even when things are really hard.

No role is better or worse than another – **they are all ways of coping with a difficult situation**. But no one should have to carry these burdens alone.

## You Can Find Support

Even if your parent or family member isn't ready for treatment or help, **you can still take care of yourself and find your own path to healing**.

**Talk to someone you trust** – A teacher, coach, school counselor, or another trusted adult can help.

**Find support** – There are groups like Alateen where kids and teens can talk with others who understand.

**Take care of yourself** – Try to eat nutritious foods when you can, get exercise, and remember teens need **9–10 hours of sleep per night** to support both mental and physical health.