



VOICE
FOR THE
CHILDREN

Healing Through Art

NACOA'S GUIDE FOR SUPPORTING
CHILDREN AND TEENS IMPACTED BY
FAMILY BEHAVIOURAL HEALTH ISSUES

The **NACoA Healing Through Art Guide** was made possible through the generous support of the **Janie Fleckenstein Art Therapy Fund**. This resource honors Janie's legacy by empowering children and teens affected by substance use and mental health disorders in their family, to express, explore, and heal through the power of art.

Healing Through Art

NACoA's Guide for Supporting Children and Teens Impacted by Family Addiction

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Dear Facilitators, Camp Leaders, and Healing Guides,

Thank you for showing up for children and teens who live with the weight and hurt of familial addictions. These young people often carry invisible burdens: uncertainty, worry, silence, and grief. But when given a safe space, the ability to trust, and creative tools, they can tell powerful stories, name their feelings, and begin to reclaim joy.

This guide is for *you*—the mentors, social workers, faith leaders, camp counselors, therapists, and volunteers—who are walking in the company of children impacted by a loved one's substance misuse. The activities in this book blend art therapy principles with trauma-informed care to provide connection, expression, and hope.

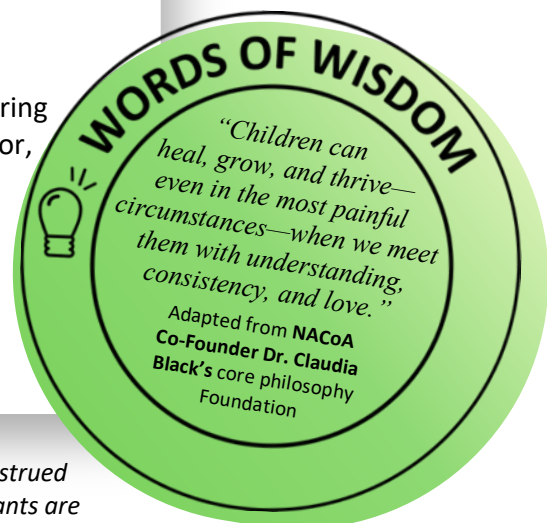
Each page offers a creative way to open conversations, build resilience, and let young people know: **You are not alone, and your voice matters.**

We encourage you to use person-first, non-stigmatizing language throughout. Every child deserves to feel seen, not for what has happened around them, but for who they are and what's possible ahead.

Let this guide be your companion in creating a safe, empowering space where healing begins with a brushstroke, a word, a color, or a quiet moment of reflection.

With gratitude,
The NACoA Team

This guide is intended for educational purposes only and should not be construed as a substitute for clinical consultation, supervision, or treatment. Participants are encouraged to consult with qualified professionals for any specific needs or concerns.

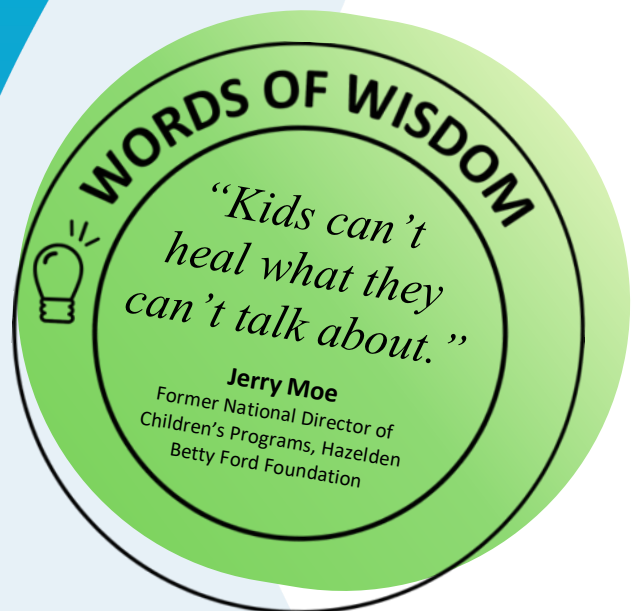


How to Use This Guide

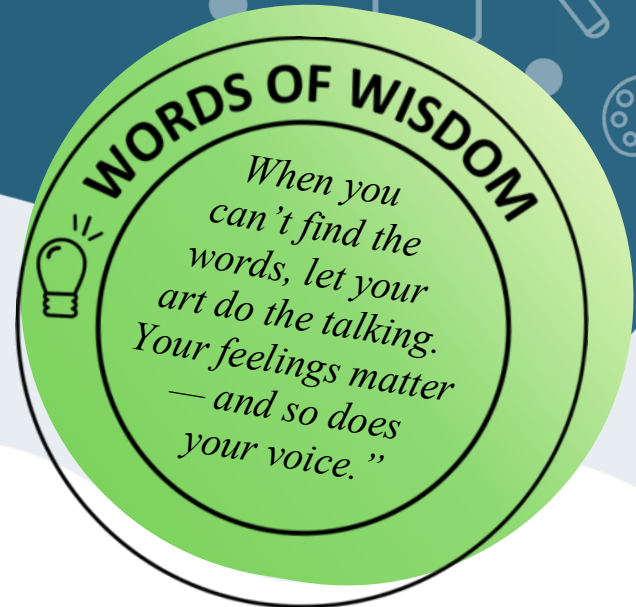
- Designed for children and teens aged 6–17
- Trauma-informed and strengths-based
- Adaptable for use in day camps, schools, church groups, or therapeutic settings
- Language is person-first and stigma-free

Each activity includes:

- ✓ Purpose
- ✓ Materials
- ✓ Instructions
- ✓ Discussion prompts
- ✓ Age modifications
- ✓ Optional journaling prompt



- ✓ My Safe Space
- ✓ Resilience Tree
- ✓ Inside/Outside Mask
- ✓ Worry Monster or Worry Box
- ✓ Music & Mood Collage
- ✓ Healing Hands
- ✓ Postcard to My Future Self
- ✓ Feelings in Color
- ✓ Family Reimagined
- ✓ Gratitude Mandala



My Safe Space

PURPOSE

To help children and teens visualize and connect to a sense of emotional and physical safety.

Materials

- Two sheets of paper
- Art supplies

Instructions

1. Draw your family now
2. Then, draw a family you dream of—what feels different?

Discussion Prompts

- What's something you would keep or change?
- How do you want to feel at home?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Symbol-based drawings



TEENS

Collage or abstract versions



Journaling Prompt

What would a healthy family feel like to you?

Resilience Tree



Printable
Template
Page 16

PURPOSE

To identify support, strengths, and future goals through a tree metaphor.

Materials

- Poster board or paper
- Drawing supplies
- Optional: tree template

Instructions

1. Draw a tree with roots, trunk, and branches.
2. Roots = sources of support
3. Trunk = personal strengths
4. Branches = hopes or dreams

Discussion Prompts

- What helps keep your trunk strong?
- What's something growing in your branches?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Add stickers or icons



TEENS

Add stories of "storms" they've weathered



Journaling Prompt

What have you been through that made your trunk stronger?

Inside Outside Mask

PURPOSE

To explore emotional duality—what we show vs. what we feel inside.

Materials

- Paper mask template or blank paper
- Art supplies, scissors, collage options

Instructions

1. Outside = how the world sees you
2. Inside = what you feel but hide
3. Decorate each side accordingly

Discussion Prompts

- What's something you wish others knew?
- Who makes you feel safe showing your inside?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Use emojis or stickers



TEENS

Reflect with poetry or lyrics



Journaling Prompt

What would it feel like to show your true self more often?

Worry Monster or Worry Box

PURPOSE

To externalize and release fears through symbolism.

Materials

- Small boxes or paper bags
- Art supplies
- Paper slips for worries

Instructions

1. Decorate a box or monster face
2. Write down worries
3. Feed them to the box—
release them

Discussion Prompts

- What did you release today?
- How did it feel to let it go?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Story-style monsters



TEENS

Journaling version for private use



Journaling Prompt

What's something you'd like to stop worrying about?

Music & Mood Collage*

PURPOSE

To reflect emotions inspired by music using visual art.

Materials

- Music player
- Paper, magazines, glue
- Art supplies

Instructions

1. Play instrumental or mood music, or wild and crazy fun music.
2. Create a collage based on what it makes you feel
3. Share or reflect together

Discussion Prompts

- What emotions came through in your art?
- Did music help you feel something new?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Provide cutouts and bright music



TEENS

Choose their own songs



Journaling Prompt

What song makes you feel understood?

Healing Hands

PURPOSE

To identify inner strengths and external supports.

Materials

- Paper
- Art supplies
- Optional: sticker affirmations

Instructions

1. Trace your hand
2. Fill fingers with supports
3. Palm = affirmations or goals

Discussion Prompts

- What's in your hand that helps you?
- What would you add to your hand one day?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Use hearts or smiley faces



TEENS

Use transparency layers
(internal/external)



Journaling Prompt

What strengths are in your hand that no one can take away?

Postcard To My Future Self

PURPOSE

To envision hope and speak kindly to oneself.

Materials

- Postcards or index cards
- Art supplies
- Optional envelopes

Instructions

1. Imagine yourself in the future
2. What message would that person send you?
3. Write/draw it on the card

Discussion Prompts

- What do you hope your future looks like?
- What do you want to hear most right now?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Drawings instead of text



TEENS

Include mailing option



Journaling Prompt

What would your future self thank you for today?

Feelings in Color

PURPOSE

To express emotions nonverbally through color.

Materials

- Paper
- Crayons, markers, or paints

Instructions

1. Connect feelings with colors
2. Draw shapes and lines expressing today's emotions
3. Optional sharing

Discussion Prompts

- Which colors show up the most today?
- How does it feel to turn feelings into art?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Guided prompts



TEENS

Abstract styles or layering



Journaling Prompt

What color is your strongest feeling today? Why?

Family Reimagined

PURPOSE

To process current family experience and dream of what's possible.

Materials

- Two sheets of paper
- Art supplies

Instructions

1. Draw your family now
2. Then, draw a family you dream of—what feels different?

Discussion Prompts

- What's something you would keep or change?
- How do you want to feel at home?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Symbol-based drawings



TEENS

Collage or abstract versions



Journaling Prompt

What would a healthy family feel like to you?

Gratitude Mandala

PURPOSE

To focus on what brings joy and meaning through circular art.

Materials

- Paper, mandala templates
- Coloring tools

Instructions

1. Create a mandala
2. Fill each ring with things you're grateful for or hopeful about

Discussion Prompts

- What did you add to your mandala?
- What helps you stay grounded?

MODIFICATIONS



YOUNGER

Pre-drawn rings



TEENS

Symbolic or personal goals



Journaling Prompt

What helps you feel thankful, even when life is hard?

Group Healing Projects

1

Our Strength Shield

Each person decorates a section of a shared shield with strengths, then they co-create a symbol of unity in the center.

Purpose
Create a shared shield of strengths and values.

Group Size
3–4 youth/teens

2

We Are the Story – Collaborative Story Quilt

Each participant makes a “story square,” to be combined to create a quilt that represents shared experience, strength, and survival.

3

Tree of Togetherness

Participants add leaves or handprints to a large group tree—each representing roots, values, or identity.



Printable Template
Pages 16 & 17

4

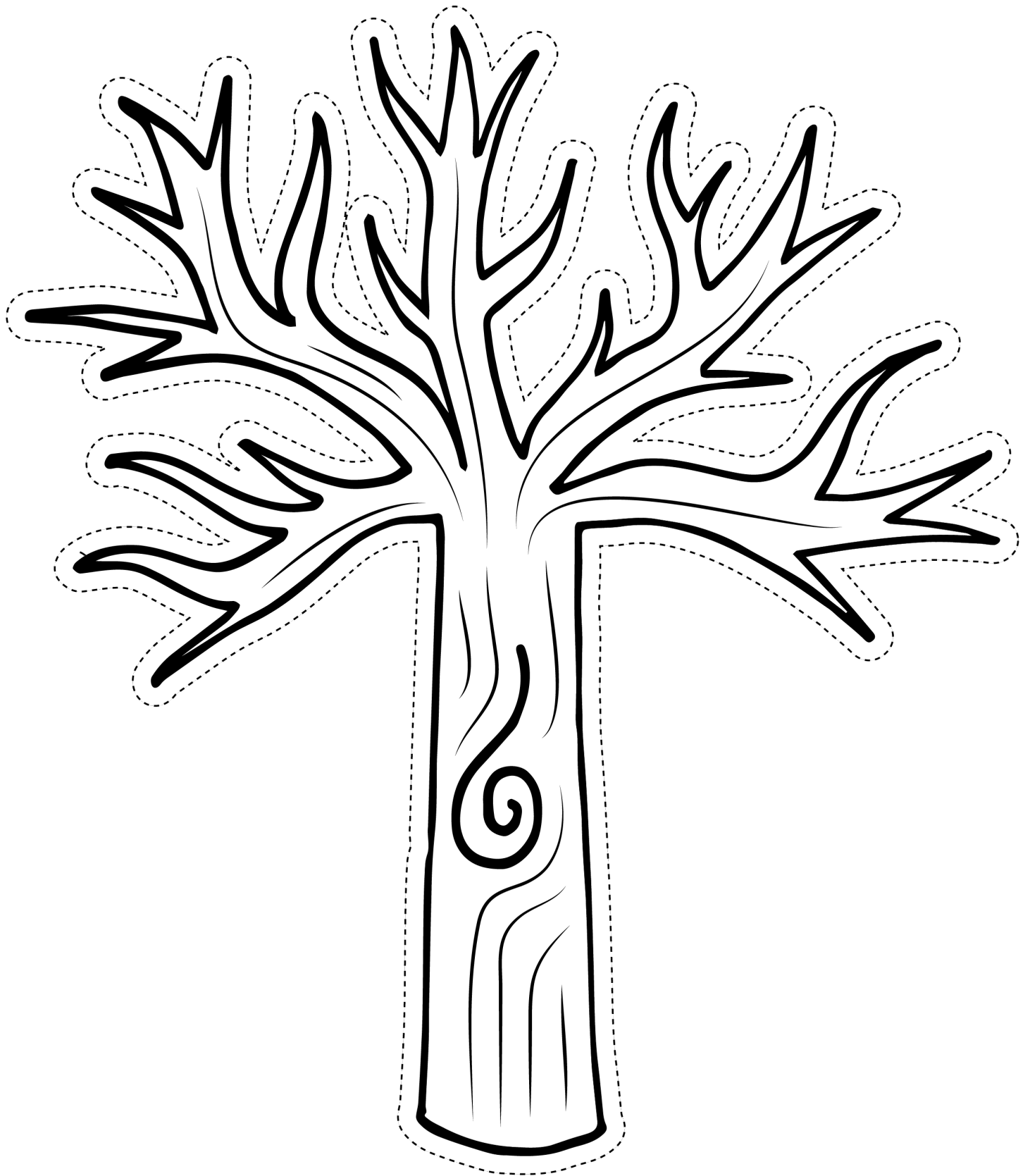
River of Resilience

Participants write challenges and strengths on paper stones, placing them into a shared flowing river.

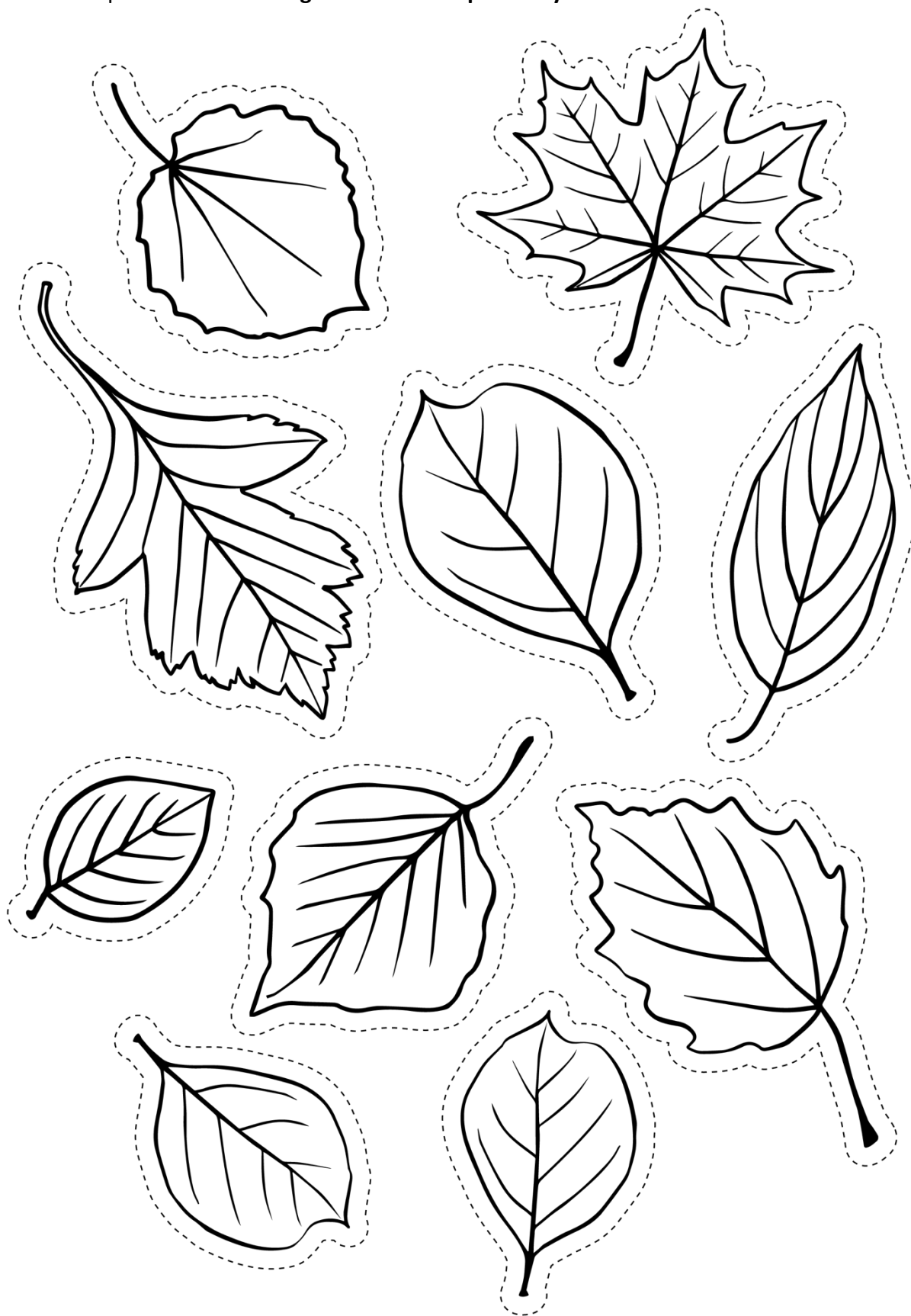


Printable Template
Page 18

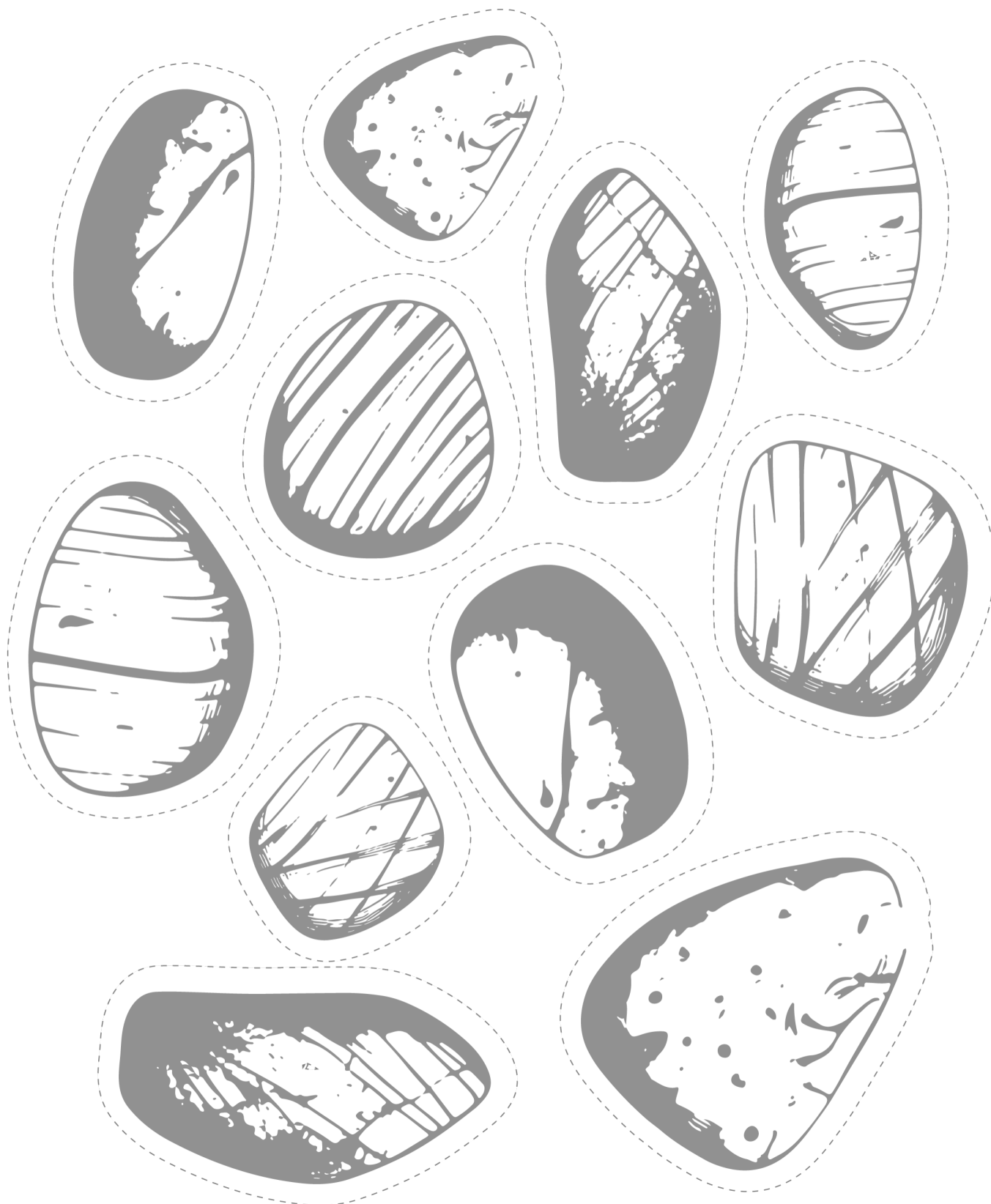
Printable Template for Resilience Tree Individual Activity and Tree of Togetherness Group Activity



Printable Template for Tree of Togetherness Group Activity



Printable Template for **River of Resilience Group Activity**



Emotional Word Bank

*This is a collection of **emotion-related words** that people—especially children or youth—can draw from to help **identify, express, and explore their feelings** through art. It's especially helpful when working with children of parents with alcohol/substance use disorders, who often have a tough time naming or expressing emotions due to complex family dynamics*

Here's how you can use it:

What is it?

A curated list of feeling words, ranging from basic to more nuanced emotions (like “sad” to “grief,” or “angry” to “resentful”), organized by categories such as:

Happy (joyful, proud, excited)

Sad (lonely, disappointed, hurt)

Angry (frustrated, irritated, furious)

Afraid (anxious, nervous, scared)

Confused (overwhelmed, unsure, disoriented)

Loved (cared for, safe, accepted)

Why it matters:

Kids growing up in families impacted by alcohol use may:

- Struggle to name their emotions
- Learn to “shut down” feelings as a survival skill
- Be more likely to mislabel complex emotions (e.g., calling sadness “anger”)



An emotion word bank **helps bridge that gap**, especially when paired with visual art prompts like “Draw what ‘confused’ feels like,” or “Pick a word that fits your heart today.”

Feelings Word Bank

Use these words to help name your feelings. Pick one that fits your heart today, or use it to inspire your art.

You can try this with your art:

- **Pick a feeling** and draw what it looks like as a shape, a color, or a creature.
- **Use more than one word** if your feelings are mixed (because they often are!).
- **Name your art** using a word from the bank—or make up your own word!

HAPPY JOYFUL



SAD



ANGRY FRUSTRATED



SCARED WORRIED



MIXED-UP UNSURE



Thank You

To all the incredible facilitators, mentors, and caring adults —

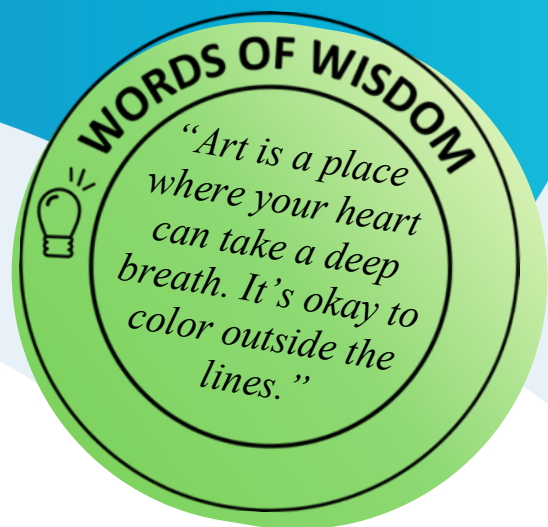
Thank you for working with children and teens impacted by substance use disorders as they explore, create, and express themselves through art.

Your presence, compassion, and support create a space where healing can begin, and creativity can thrive. Every drawing, painting, and collage is a step toward hope — and you are a part of that journey.

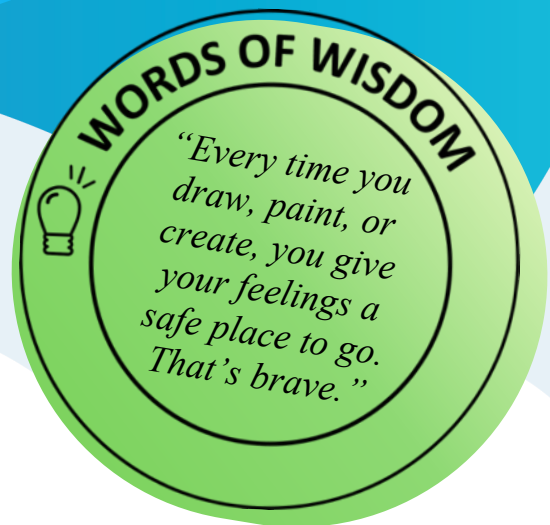
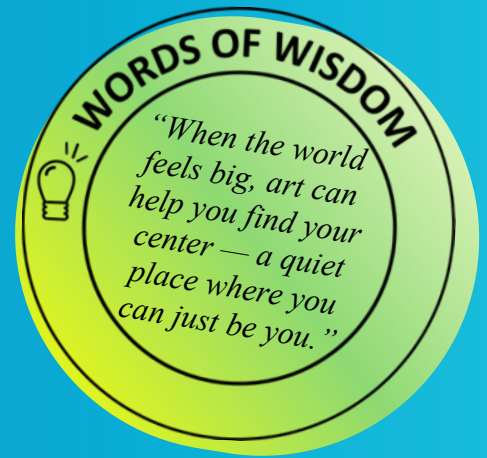
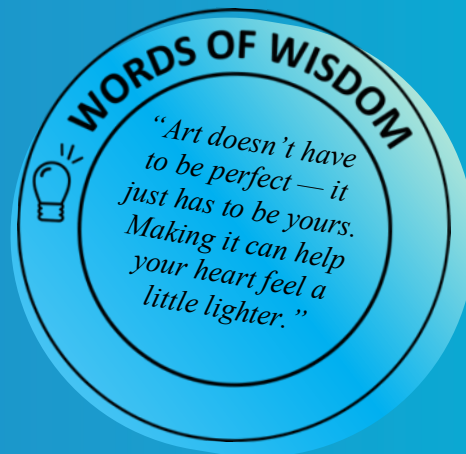
We'd love to see the powerful art your young participants have created! Please feel free to share photos of their finished pieces (with appropriate consent) by emailing us at: _nacoa@nacoa.org

Thank you for making a difference in their lives — one brushstroke, one word, one moment at a time.

With gratitude,
The NACoA Team



Appendices





When Families Struggle With SUDs, the Stigma They Experience Hurts the Children

When working with children and young adults in families impacted by substance use disorders (SUDs), give them age-appropriate information – in language they can understand – to validate their experience and provide support. Avoid providing too much so they end up confused and overwhelmed. Helping them understand what the disease of addiction is, and that it isn't their fault, can lessen the impact of stigma.



When Talking To Children

- The preferred term is addiction. It can refer to alcohol, other substances, and tobacco.
- Words like stuck, hooked, and trapped help children to understand what addiction is.
- Keep it simple, concrete, and to the point.

When Talking to Teens

- Speak in an age-appropriately about substance use disorders (SUDs) with appropriate terminology, as you would with other diseases.
- Discuss the higher risks children with blood relatives of those with SUDs have to develop SUDs themselves. They can lower this risk by learning about the disease, asking for help from safe people, and by practicing self-care.
- You cannot control your loved one and are not responsible for the feelings of others.
- It's okay to tell the truth, even if someone gets in trouble or gets angry.
- It's okay to keep yourself and others safe.
- People can, and do get better.
- You have strengths, people who care for you, and positive ways you can express your feelings.
- Explain to teens about the changes that may take place in families when a parent is in early recovery, how to support their parent (s), and how to take care of themselves.

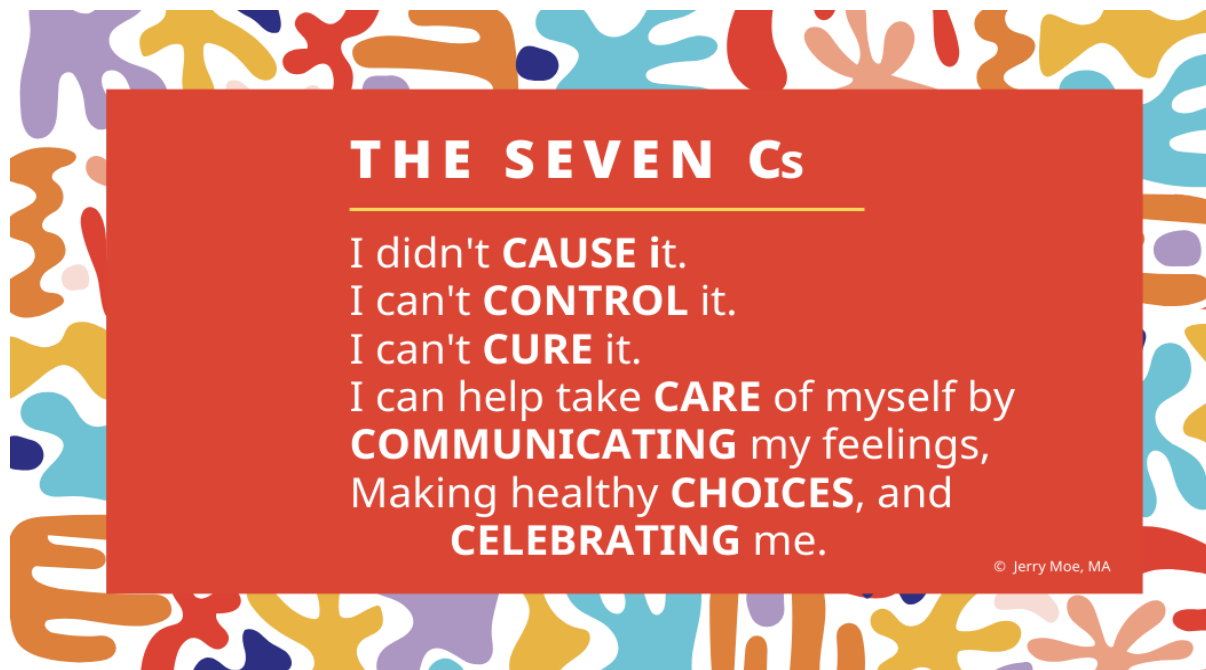
For Kids and Teens

- Help kids and teens to separate the person they love from the disease of addiction. Someone is not a bad person because they have a disease.
- Teach kids and teens experientially about denial, loss of control (can't stop), recurrence/relapse, and treatment and recovery.
- Incorporate the Seven Cs. It helps children understand what they can't change and empowers them to help take care of themselves in the ways they can.
- **You are not alone. You are valued. And you deserve support.**

The Seven Cs

I didn't **CAUSE** it. I can't **CONTROL** it. I can't **CURE** it. I can take better **CARE** of myself by **COMMUNICATING** my feelings, making healthy **CHOICES**, and **CELEBRATING** myself.

© Jerry Moe, MA



When working with youth affected by familial addictions, it is important to understand the Seven Cs and how to help families embrace it as a tool for hope and healing.

The First C: I Didn't Cause It

Children growing up in families affected by addiction often carry feelings of guilt and self-blame, believing they are somehow responsible for the chaos or pain around them. When no one explains the situation in a way they can understand, they may create their own explanations, often blaming themselves. **It's important to reassure children that addiction is a disease, and no matter what, they are not to blame for their family's struggles.**

The Second C: I Can't Control It

Children often try to fix or stop a parent's drinking or drug use by taking on responsibilities, mediating conflicts, or striving for perfection. When these efforts don't work, they may feel like they should try harder. It's important to teach children that addiction is a disease—those who are stuck, hooked, or trapped by it need help to recover. **Children are not responsible for fixing their loved ones. Instead, they deserve the chance to focus on being kids.**

The Third C: I Can't Cure It

Children need to know they cannot cure addiction—it's a serious medical issue that requires treatment and recovery, which could include counseling, support groups, and/or faith-based practices. While there's no cure for addiction, people can find peace and joy by making their own recovery priority. It's the responsibility of the person with addiction to work on their wellness, not the child's.

The Fourth C: I Can Help Take Care of Myself

Children can't change or cure addiction, but they can focus on their own self-care. Activities that nurture the body, mind, feelings, and spirit are important for their well-being. Tools like the Serenity Prayer remind children to accept what they can't change and find courage to care for themselves. Creating a "self-care bag" filled with simple, comforting ideas like reading, gratitude, or playing a game can help children practice self-care daily, giving them strength and support in challenging times.

The Fifth C: Communicating Feelings

Learning to identify and express feelings in healthy ways is an important skill for children. A "feelings vocabulary," like faces showing different emotions, can help kids name what they feel. Activities like art, writing, role-play, and talking give them safe ways to express themselves and discover what feels most comfortable. In groups, children often find comfort knowing others share their emotions, realizing they are not alone in their experiences.

The Sixth C: Making Healthy Choices

Children can learn to make healthy choices for their well-being, like spending time with friends, journaling, and especially having fun. Most children growing up in these families are very serious and have not experienced much fun or are so guilt-ridden they believe they don't deserve it. Reducing stress and supporting children to experience and feel comfortable when having fun is essential for normal development; it is a very important for a child's healthy living. Additionally, kids and teenagers need to know it's okay to ask for help. Identifying "safe people," such as trusted family members, teachers, or neighbors, gives kids a support network they can turn to in difficult times, helping them feel secure and empowered.

The Seventh C: Celebrating Me




Every child has unique gifts and strengths, but addiction in the family can sometimes overshadow them. By helping children recognize their special qualities and celebrating their accomplishments—whether in school, sports, friendships, or creative arts—we support their resilience and confidence. Acknowledging their successes fosters connection and belonging, which are vital for healing and growth.

By helping families – parents as well as the children - to appreciate what they can and cannot change, the Seven Cs provide a clear road map to help, hope, and healing for anyone affected by substance use disorders growing up.



Children Learn What They Live

The Recovery Version

If children live with parents who are high, 
 They learn that people are unpredictable and unreliable.
 If children live with denial, 
 They learn to mistrust what they feel and sense.
 If children live with shame,
 They learn to hide who they really are.
 If children live with rage,
 They learn to be afraid.
 If children live with emotional abuse,
 They learn to feel bad about who they are.
 If children live with trauma,
 They learn to become anxious and despondent.
 If children live with addiction, 
 They learn to become addicts.

If children live with recovery,
 They learn that people can change for the better.

If children live with parents who ask for help,
 They learn to reach out for help too.

If children live with amends,
 They learn to forgive.

If children live with peace in the home,
 They learn to feel safe inside.

If children live with dependability,
 They learn to trust.

If children live with honesty,
 They learn to tell the truth.

If children live with emotional maturity,
 They're allowed to be children.



Written for the National Association for Children of Addiction by Tian Dayton, PhD/Inspired by Dorothy Law Nolte, PhD



Your story matters. Your courage inspires. Your journey is important.

CERTIFICATE OF COURAGE

This Certificate Is Proudly Presented To

**For your strength, bravery, and resilience
in growing up in a family impacted by addiction.**

You have faced hard things with a heart full of hope and a spirit that shines bright.
Always remember:

You didn't cause this disease.
You couldn't control it.
And you cannot cure it.
But you can care for yourself — and that is courageous.

This certificate honors you for who you are: brave, kind, creative, and strong.
With love and recognition, The NACoA Team

Supporter | Caring Adult | Program Facilitator

Date

Additional Important Resources When Working With Kids and Teens Affected by Familial Addiction:

Tools for Kids https://nacoa.org/tools_for_kids/

Tools for Parents and Caregivers: Helping Families Impacted by Substance Use Disorders
<https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Tools-for-Parents-and-Caregivers.NACoA2024.pdf>

Helping Kids and Teens Understand Abstinence, Sobriety, and Recovery
<https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/helping.png>

NACoA's Parent's Guide: Talking to Kids and Teens About Alcohol and Other Substances
<https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/NACoAs-Parents-Guide.Talking-With-Kids.2025.pdf>

NACoA's Parent's Guide: Safe Medication Storage <https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/Parents-Guide.SafeMedStorage.2025.pdf>

Support for Grieving COAs https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Support-for-Grieving-COAs.NACoA_.pdf

NACoA's Spanish Resource List for Children and Families Impacted by the Disease of Addiction
<https://nacoa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Spanish-Resources.NACoA24-1.pdf>

Learn more by visiting [NACoA.org](https://nacoa.org)