

# National Children of Alcoholics week

*American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*

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One in five adult Americans lived with an alcoholic while growing up. Child and adolescent psychiatrists know these children are at greater risk for having emotional problems than children whose parents are not alcoholics. Alcoholism runs in families, and children of alcoholics are four times more likely than other children to become alcoholics. Most children of alcoholics have experienced some form of neglect or abuse.

Although the child tries to keep the alcoholism a secret, teachers, relatives, other adults, or friends may sense that something is wrong. Child and adolescent psychiatrists advise that the following behaviors may signal a drinking or other problem at home:

- Failure in school; truancy
- Lack of friends; withdrawal from classmates
- Delinquent behavior, such as stealing or violence
- Frequent physical complaints, such as headaches or stomachaches
- Abuse of drugs or alcohol; or
- Aggression towards other children
- Risk taking behaviors
- Depression or suicidal thoughts or behavior

Children Of Alcoholics may exhibit many symptoms when trying to deal with alcoholism in the family:

1. Guilt. Children may blame themselves for their parents drinking.
2. Anxiety. Children may fear injury, fights, and violence between the parents.
3. Embarrassment. Children may feel ashamed to invite friends home and are afraid to ask anyone for help.
4. Inability to have close relationships. Children may not trust others.
5. Confusion. Children recognize that their alcoholic parent is unpredictable. (A parent can change suddenly from being loving to angry, regardless of the child's behavior.)
6. Anger. Children feel anger at their alcoholic parent for drinking, and the anger can extend to the non-alcoholic parent for lack of support and protection.
7. Depression. Children feel out of control and helpless to change the situation.

Facts for families:

- Some children may act like responsible "parents" within the family and among friends.
- They may cope with the alcoholism by becoming controlled, successful "overachievers" throughout school, and at the same time be emotionally isolated from other children and teachers.
- Their emotional problems may show only when they become adults.

Source: <http://www.aacap.org/page.wv?section=Facts+for+Families&name=Children+Of+Alcoholics>

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