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Effects Alcoholics Have on Children

One major mistake that many people make about alcohol is that the drinker is the only one being damaged. The drinker is the only person drinking. Therefore, he or she is the only one that could possibly be harmed. Unfortunately, this is simply not the case. There is plenty of evidence and research that shows just how much alcoholics can affect others, especially children. Although alcohol abusers may think that they're not hurting anyone but themselves, they unfortunately have a huge negative impact on any child involved.

According to surveys, one in five adult Americans has lived with an alcoholic relative while growing up ("Children" par. 1). Most children of alcoholics have experienced some form of neglect or abuse, and they are at a greater risk for developing emotional problems. The child may feel that he or she cannot even talk to his or her own family for support, which adds to the deep-rooted issues that the child may come to have. The child may develop several negative feelings such as guilt, confusion, anger, and, perhaps the most dangerous of all, depression. The child can come to think that he or she is the reason for the alcoholic's drinking, that the alcoholic's downward spiral is somehow his or her own fault. The child can feel lonely and helpless to change the situation. These feelings are only to name a few that can forever scar the child. Any issues children may develop can stay with them their entire lives and lead them to very negative outcomes later on in life.

In her book *Adult Children of Alcoholics*, Dr. Janet G. Woititz lists several characteristics that children of alcoholics seem to share. One of those characteristics is the feeling of having to guess what normal is. Children of alcoholics most likely never experienced a “normal” family life (qtd. in “Many” par. 2). Dr. Woititz also includes several interviews from several children of alcoholics in her book. Jojo states, “I do feel I never learned 'correct' behaviors or reactions to situations, am very scared of angry people, authority or any kind of conflict...I seem to exude a scent of 'weak' and 'victim'” (qtd. in “Many” par. 4). Sandie states, “Having to watch others to learn the right way to behave, sometimes you don't know good role models from bad. Dealing with mental health issues and the shame that comes with that. Can you ever overcome the feeling that you are not good enough” (qtd. in “Many” par. 6).

When children grow up in a home with alcoholism, they can develop serious trust issues that they will continue to suffer from into adult life. As children, they were disappointed too much by people close to them. They may have been constantly lied to and forced to keep secrets about their family. That can cause them to think that they can never truly trust anyone. Pufflet claims, “Better to be alone than to ever subject myself to even the chance that someone might abuse me emotionally the way my mother did” (qtd. in Buddy par. 5). “The effects of my childhood have been numerous and overwhelming. I have an intense fear of intimacy and trust no one. I have recently become extremely isolated in my life,” states L.W (qtd. in Buddy par. 7). Nearly all of the same interviewees have said that they feel they are different from others. They are uncomfortable in social situations, they have very deep-rooted insecurities that started when they were children, and they've never felt quite right around others. It's clear that any child of an alcoholic can grow up to be very emotionally scarred, and most of the issues are a result of being neglected when he or she was a child.

Along with internal emotional issues, the child can also have external issues. The child can demonstrate “acting out” behavior, such as defiance, aggression, and impulsivity. Those characteristics can correspond to several behavior disorders, such as ADHD (attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) (Sher par. 14). Women who drink alcohol while they’re pregnant allow for the possibility of giving birth to a baby with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome. According to the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence, about 5,000 babies are born each year with severe damage caused by FAS; another 35,000 babies are born with more mild forms of FAS (“Effects” par. 2). Alcohol abuse during pregnancy can cause infants to have slow growth development, facial deformities, and neurological problems. Several studies also show that children of alcoholics are at a very high risk of developing alcoholism themselves. The reality of what they had to go through with an alcoholic parent can cause them to turn to alcohol as an adult, simply to cope with their childhood. The child is between two and ten times more likely to develop alcoholism than children of non-alcoholic parents.

One other highly devastating matter that can become a result of alcoholics with children is physical child abuse and neglect. Alcohol is a major factor in nine out of every ten cases related to child abuse (Green par. 1). Children whose parents abuse alcohol and other drugs are three times more likely to be abused and more than four times more likely to be neglected than children from non-abusing families (“National” par. 6). Physical abuse can include anything from cuts and bruises to burns and broken bones. In some cases, the injuries can be permanent or even fatal. The parent may feel angry or guilty about their alcoholism, and they may take it out on the child. If the parents are constantly drunk, the child may be beaten for a simple thing, such as spilling a drink. Neglect can include the child not having enough food and possibly no shelter.

The parents may be too drunk to realize that they have a responsibility to their child. They may just spend all of their money on alcohol and have none left to support their child. All forms of physical abuse and neglect can cause the child to become very ill, and can possibly even cause death.

It's very clear that children of alcoholics are constantly in some form of danger. It may come from the very hurtful emotional abuse they have to endure, the constant loneliness and helplessness. It may be from the physical abuse and neglect they are forced to suffer, being beaten or not being able to eat. They may be born in danger if their mother consumed alcohol during pregnancy. It doesn't matter what form of abuse or neglect the child suffers; the fact is that a child is being harmed by an alcohol abuser. An innocent child is suffering because of terrible choices that someone else is making. I only hope that parents become more responsible with alcohol. It only takes one drink to become addicted and create a living hell for a child.

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