

# CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

The problems that plague many children of alcoholics remain invisible because their coping behavior tends to be approval seeking and socially acceptable. However, a disproportionate number of those entering the juvenile justice system, courts, prison, and mental health facilities, and those referred to school authorities are CoA's.

## ▼ As a Matter of Fact

- An estimated 28 million Americans have at least one alcoholic parent.
- Approximately one-half of all alcoholics have an alcoholic parent.
- One of three families currently reports alcohol abuse by a family member.
- Children of alcoholic parents demonstrate an unusually high risk of becoming alcoholic themselves or of marrying someone who is or who will become an alcoholic.
- In up to 90 percent of child abuse cases, alcohol is a significant factor.
- Children of alcoholics (CoA's) are frequently the victims of incest, child neglect, and other forms of violence and exploitation.
- CoA's often adapt to the chaos and inconsistency of an alcoholic home by developing an inability to trust, an extreme need to control, excessive sense of responsibility, and denial of feelings — all of which result in low self-esteem, depression, isolation, guilt, and difficulty maintaining satisfying relationships. These and other problems persist or exacerbate throughout adulthood.
- Children of alcoholics are apt to experience a range of psychological difficulties, including learning disabilities, anxieties, attempted/completed suicides, eating disorders, or compulsive achieving/failing.

## ▼ *Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACoA's):*

- *Guess at what normal is.*
- *Become isolated and afraid of other people, especially authority figures.*

- *Tend to judge themselves harshly and consequently suffer feelings of low self-worth.*
- *Have difficulty acting; they more often react to others.*
- *Often are dependent and fear abandonment.*
- *Become alcoholic, marry alcoholics, or do both – or they tend to find some other compulsion, such as work, eating, gambling.*
- *Frequently become “addicted” to excitement after having lived for many years in a traumatic and sometimes dangerous family soap opera.*
- *Tend to confuse love with pity, and often “love” those whom they can rescue or pity.*
- *Feel responsible for their unstable families and have difficulty living independently.*
- *Frequently suffer guilt feelings if they consider their needs rather than the needs of others.*
- *Become approval-seekers, losing their identity in the process.*
- *Tend to deny or repress the feelings of their traumatized childhood – which separates them from all feelings, making it difficult or impossible to recognize/accept adults.*
- *Are sometimes unable to separate truth from fiction in their lives.*



For more information,  
contact the  
Missouri Department of  
Mental Health,  
Division of  
Alcohol and Drug Abuse  
P.O. Box 687  
1706 East Elm  
Jefferson City, MO 65102  
573-751-4942  
or 1-800-364-9687  
[modmh.state.mo.us](http://modmh.state.mo.us)



Source: National Association for Children of Alcoholics, “Charter Statement,” by Janet Woititz, “Laundry List for Adult Children of Alcoholics”