

Community-Based Organizations Serving Children and Families

"Children exposed (to drug and alcohol problems), through no fault of their own...are thrust into families and environments that pose extraordinary risks to their immediate and future well-being and threaten the achievement of their fullest potential."¹

It is a sad fact that one in every four children in the U.S. is exposed to alcohol abuse or dependence in the family.² Although the majority of children who grow up in homes where drugs and alcohol are a problem will eventually overcome the obstacles they face as a result, many of them carry life-long scars or go on to develop serious drug and alcohol problems of their own. Consider these disturbing facts:

Facts About Parents Who Have Drug and Alcohol Problems and Their Children

- ▶ Children of addicted parents are the highest risk group of children to become drug and alcohol abusers due to both genetic and family environment factors.³
- ▶ Families affected by alcoholism often exhibit increased family conflict, emotional or physical violence, decreased family cohesion, decreased family organization, increased family (and social) isolation, increased family stress (including work problems), illness, marital strain and financial problems, and frequent family moves.⁴
- ▶ Three of four (71.6 percent) child welfare professionals cite drug and alcohol problems as the top cause for the dramatic rise in child maltreatment since 1986.⁵
- ▶ In one study, 79 percent of adolescent runaways and homeless youth reported alcohol use in the home, 53 percent reported problem drinking in the home, and 54 percent reported drug use in the home.⁶
- ▶ Children of addicted parents exhibit depression and depressive symptoms more frequently than do children from non-addicted families.⁷ They also are more likely to have anxiety disorders or to show anxiety symptoms.⁸

The good news is that family-focused treatment and recovery support programs can be very helpful in mitigating the damage done to the children of parents who have drug and alcohol problems. Community groups that serve families, particularly those that are interested in fostering the health and well-being of children and young adults, can be a resource for parents and children who are in need of these services. These groups also need to recognize the critical role they can play when it comes to timely intervention and prevention. Consider these important findings:

- ▶ There is evidence that social support from friends and outside influences can moderate the effects of a family history of drug and alcohol problems.⁹
- ▶ Children who coped effectively with the trauma of growing up in families affected by alcoholism often relied on the support of a non-alcoholic parent, step-parent, grandparent, teachers, and others.¹⁰
- ▶ Factors that have been cited in fostering student ability to resist drugs include positive peer affiliations, bonding/involvement in school activities, relationships with caring adults, opportunities for school success and responsible behavior, and the availability of drug-free activities.¹¹