



Kit for



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Letter to Kids

Hello:

I'll bet you feel all alone when your mom or dad drinks too much or uses drugs, because maybe you think that no one else's mom or dad does that. Or maybe you think that no one knows how you feel. Do you know that there are plenty of kids your age who feel exactly like you, because their parents drink too much? I know how you feel, because one of my parents is an alcoholic too.

It's not easy. When I was your age, I felt so alone. Every time my parent started drinking, I had that funny feeling in my stomach that something wasn't right. I was scared to tell anyone. I wondered why I had a parent who drank so much.

I always wondered if I did anything to make my parent drink. None of my friends could spend the night at my house because I never knew when it would start. I didn't want my friends to know what went on in my house; besides, when my parent started to drink I never knew what would happen. I didn't want anyone to know what a mess it was when the drinking started. I felt ashamed, and I believed my house was REALLY different from everybody else's.

When I grew up I moved away from my confusing house, and I began to meet other people who had alcoholic parents. I talked a lot to these people about how it was in my house, and I didn't feel embarrassed because they talked about what went on in their houses when their parents started drinking. I realized that other people had the same kinds of confusing things happen to them.

Some people came from homes that were more messed up than mine, and other people came from homes that didn't have as many problems as mine did. Many thought their parents' drinking was their fault, even though it really wasn't. But I realized one thing: that all the time when I was a kid, when I thought I was alone and the only one with parents who drank too much, I WASN'T.

You aren't the only one with parents who drink too much or use drugs. There are a lot of us here.

On the next page, I want to tell you some things about alcoholism that I wish someone had told me when I was a kid. Maybe these things will help you understand a little bit better, and maybe you won't blame yourself the next time your parents drink too much.

Your Friend,
An adult child of an alcoholic



Fact Sheet Just For You

Fact #1 Addiction is a disease. Your parent is not a bad person; he or she has a disease that makes him or her lose control when drinking or using other drugs. Alcohol and drugs do that; when you drink too much, or use drugs, you do and say things that you normally wouldn't. Maybe the disease makes them do mean or stupid things that they would not do if they didn't drink.

Fact #2 You cannot control your parent's drinking. It is not your fault. Don't hide the bottle or try to be perfect; you can't do anything about your parent's drinking. You are not the reason why your parent drinks. You did not cause the disease.

Fact #3 You are not alone. There are lots of kids just like you. I'll bet there are some in your class at school - kids you would never think of might have a parent who drinks like yours. Maybe you know some of them because you've seen what goes on in their house. In fact, from all the surveys done in the United States, we know that about 1 out of 4 children in our country are living with alcoholic parents. You really aren't alone.

Fact #4 You CAN talk about the problem. Find someone you trust who will talk to you. It could be a teacher, a friend's parent, a big brother or sister, or someone else who will listen to you. These are the 'safe people' in your life. You can fill out the page in this booklet called "People Who Can Help Me". Just keep this list with you so that you can call someone if you feel like talking. We also have a list of phone numbers here that you can call if you need someone to talk to or for help of any kind. The phone numbers are on a card that you can keep in your bookbag or other safe place. These numbers are on the same page as your personal list "People Who Can Help Me." All of the numbers are free; just dial 1-800- and then the number. Also, there is a group for kids called "Alateen". This group has meetings, like a club, and the kids there share tips on how to make their lives easier. Some schools have Alateen meetings on the school grounds during the day or after school. Maybe your teacher could help you find one. Or, you could look for the phone number of Alateen in the phone book or call directory assistance and ask for the number. (Sometimes you need to call Al-Anon or Alcoholics Anonymous to find Alateen meetings in your area.) Maybe a grownup you can trust will help you get to a meeting if transportation is a problem for you.

Please don't forget these four facts.

Questions and Answers about Alcohol Problems

Question: What is alcoholism?

Answer: Alcoholism is a disease. People who have the disease have lost control over their drinking and are not able to stop without help. They also lose control over how they act when they are drinking.

Question: How does alcoholism start?

Answer: Doctors don't know all the reasons why people become alcoholics. Some start out drinking a little bit and end up hooked on alcohol. A person might drink to forget problems or to calm nerves, but then they end up needing alcohol to feel normal. Once a person loses control over drinking, he or she needs help to stop drinking.

Question: If the alcoholic is sick why doesn't he or she just go to the doctor?

Answer: At first, the alcoholic person is not aware that he or she is ill. Alcoholism is a disease that convinces people they don't have it. Even when the alcoholic becomes aware that something is wrong, he or she may not believe that alcohol is the problem. An alcoholic person might keep blaming things on other people, or might blame their job, or the kids/family, or whatever. But, really, it's the alcohol that's the biggest problem.

Question: Is there an "average" alcoholic?

Answer: No. There is no such person as the average alcoholic. Alcoholics can be young, old, rich, poor, male, or female.

Question: What is the cure for alcoholism?

Answer: There is no cure for alcoholism except stopping the disease by stopping the drinking. People with alcoholism who have completely stopped drinking are called "recovering alcoholics". Recovering alcoholics can lead healthy, happy, productive lives.

Question: Can family members make an alcoholic stop drinking?

Answer: No. It is important to know that an alcoholic person needs special help to stop drinking, but no one can be forced to accept the help, no matter what you do and how hard you try. It is also important to know that family members by themselves cannot provide the help that an alcoholic needs. An alcoholic needs the help of people trained to treat the disease.

Question: How many children in the United States have at least one alcoholic parent?

Answer: About 1 in 4 children under age 18 in our country are growing up with at least one alcoholic parent. There are probably a few in your class right now. And remember, some adults grew up with alcoholic parents too.

Question: I know I can't make my alcoholic parent stop drinking, so what can I do to make myself feel better?

Answer: Talk to someone you trust about the problem. Talk to a teacher, a Scout leader, a coach, a school counselor. Also, there is a group for kids who have alcoholic parents called "Alateen". Alateen has meetings, like a club, and the kids share tips on how to make life easier. You can look for the phone number of Alateen in the phone book or call directory assistance for the number of Alateen. Someone at Al-Anon or the Alcoholics Anonymous answer line can probably tell you how to find the meetings too. Ask at school if there are any Alateen groups or school-sponsored support groups. (www.alateen.org)



What Can Kids Do?

Here are a few suggestions for you:

DO talk about how you feel. You can talk with a safe person in your life - maybe a close friend, relative, school counselor, teacher, minister, or others. Sharing your feelings is not being mean to your family. Talking to someone about your feelings can help you feel less alone.

DO try to get involved in doing enjoyable things at school or near where you live - the school band, softball, Boy or Girl Scouts, or other fun activities. Doing these types of things can help you forget about the problems at home, and you could learn new things about yourself and about how other people live their lives.

DO remember that feeling afraid and alone is a normal way to feel when you live with alcoholic parents. It's confusing to hate the disease of alcoholism at the same time that you love your alcoholic parent. All people have confusing feelings: two different feelings at the same time. This is the way many kids feel about alcoholic parents.

DO remember to have fun! Sometimes children with alcoholic families worry so much that they forget how to be "just a kid." If things are bad at home, you might not have anyone who will help you have fun, but don't let that stop you. Find a way to let yourself have fun.

DON'T ride in a car when the driver has been drinking if you can avoid it. It is not safe. Walk or try to get a ride with an adult friend who has not been drinking. If your parents are going out to drink somewhere, try not to go with them. If you must get in a car with a drinking driver, sit in the back seat in the middle. Lock your door. Put all your stuff on the floor. Put on your seat belt. Remain calm.

DON'T think that because your parent drinks too much that you will be in trouble with alcohol too when you get older. Remember, if you don't drink or use drugs, you can't get this disease.

DON'T pour out or try to water down your parent's alcohol. The plain fact is that it won't work. You have no control over the drinking. You didn't make the problem start, and you can't make it stop. It is up to your parent to get help. What your parent does is not your responsibility or your fault.

REMEMBER the Seven Cs





People Who Can Help Me

Name	Phone Number

Cut out this card and keep it in a place where you can get to it easily, like in your bookbag, pencil case, or in with collector cards.



Phone Numbers for Kids to Call If They Need Help

Remember that these calls won't cost you anything because they have an area code of "800". Be sure to dial the "1" first.

Boystown National Hotline	1-800-448-3000
CHILDHELP USA Child Abuse Hotline	1-800-422-4453
National Runaway Switchboard	1-800-786-2929

Books for Kids to Read

You can take this list to the library, and ask the librarian if they have any of these books. If they haven't, you might ask if they are at another library. If they are, sometimes the librarian can get an "inter-library" loan for you. Some of these books can be purchased through online book distributors. You can find more books, booklets and pamphlets especially for you by visiting www.alateen.org

Alateen-Hope for Children of Alcoholics. Virginia Beach, VA: Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc. www.alateen.org

The Beamer Series. Tom Drennon and Jerry Moe. Rancho Mirage, California: Betty Ford Center, 2008. Beamer faces many challenges due to addiction in his family. In this series of four booklets, each containing three chapters, Beamer learns that he's not alone and addiction is not his fault. www.bettyfordcenter.org

Bottles Break. Nancy María Grande Tabor. Watertown, MA: Charlesbridge Publishing, 1999. This book is about parents who are absorbed in drinking and how the young narrator feels about it. Included are helpful web sites, addresses and phone numbers. Also available in Spanish, *Botellas Se Rompen*.

Emmy's Question. Jeannine Auth. St. Augustine, Florida: Morningtide Press, 2007. This is the powerful story of a young girl's struggle with parental alcoholism.

Kids' Power Too! Words To Grow By. Cathey Brown, Elizabeth D'Angelo LaPorte and Jerry Moe. Dallas, TX: Imagin Works, 2010. A book of daily affirmations to help children, one day at a time, to face life's daily challenges in a healthy and balanced way.

My Dad Loves Me, My Dad has a Disease. Claudia Black. Bainbridge Island, WA: MAC, 3rd Edition, Revised 2011. A workbook designed to help young children learn about themselves, their feelings, and the disease of alcoholism in their families through art therapy. Children between the ages of six and fourteen share what it is like for them to live in an alcoholic family.

Think of Wind. Catherine Mercury. Rochester, NY: One Big Press, 1996. A book about how it feels for a child living with alcoholism in the family.

Internet Addresses That Can Help You

Alateen
www.alateen.org

National Association for Children of Alcoholics
www.nacoa.org/kidspage.html

Alcoholism is dominoes. The alcohol
knocks down the alcoholic who knocks
down everyone including themselves.

