

You are not alone

1 in 5 children in the UK live with a parent who drinks hazardously. Millions of adults in the UK are still being affected by their parents' drinking or the knock-on effects of growing up in a home where alcohol was a problem.

There is no lower or upper age limit to be affected by your parent, step-parent or carer's drinking and sometimes the problems only become apparent in adulthood. You can be affected whether or not you still live with them, or whether they are still drinking or still alive.

Nacoa is here for everyone affected by a parent's alcohol problems. Our helpline is a safe place where you can talk about things that are going on for you and how you are feeling. We are here to listen and will help for as long as you want. There is no need to give us your name and you can tell us as little or as much as you want. We will not judge and what you say will remain confidential.

Callers often talk about:

- feeling different from other people
- having difficulty with relationships
- fearing rejection and abandonment, yet rejecting others
- being loyal even when loyalty is undeserved
- finding it difficult to have fun
- judging themselves without mercy
- fearing failure, but sabotaging success
- over-reacting to changes over which they have no control
- lying when it would be just as easy to tell the truth
- guessing at what 'normal' is

"I was never allowed to be a child: I had to spend every night keeping my parents from fighting. I never learned to play. Now, I can't make friends; I never learned to let people close to me. Even my relatives seem to live in a different world." Andrew, 35

Alcohol problems and the family

Alcohol dependency is like an illness and can affect people of all ages and from all walks of life. People with alcohol problems have lost control over their drinking and usually need help in order to stop. They continue to drink despite negative effects on their lives, their health, and those around them.

When someone has a drink problem, alcohol often becomes their main focus. As the drinker organises his/her life around alcohol, other family members can be left feeling unimportant and confused. Children often feel responsible for their parents' problems, even though they are not.

Families adapt to cope and the drink problem often becomes the family secret. The family rules **don't talk, don't trust, don't feel** develop to keep the problem hidden from the outside world and protect the illusion of a 'normal' family.

"Through all those times of fear, embarrassment, we acted as if nothing was wrong. I wished that someone would see the pain behind the façade and would care. We knew not to talk about Dad's drinking. If we ignored it, we could all pretend it wasn't happening. I'm still haunted by my memories." Anon

Living with alcohol dependency can be chaotic and lead to other problems – parents may have money worries, argue, become violent or withdraw from family life, suffering with anxiety, depression and mood swings. What's OK one day may not be the next. Children often feel confused, frightened, anxious, lonely, embarrassed, guilty and ashamed.

Children are more likely to suffer from low self-esteem, depression and thoughts of suicide, and sometimes use drink, drugs and addictive behaviours, such as eating disorders and self-harm, in order to cope. Despite this, many grow up to lead happy and healthy lives. Just being aware of the problem and having support can help.

"Being brought up in an alcoholic family I was used to living in chaos and fear and learnt many coping strategies to help me to survive." Angela, 25

What you can do

Support is available for people who need help to stop drinking. However, they have to accept they have a problem and want to stop. You can feel better whether your parent continues to drink or not.

Find out more about alcohol and the family

This can help you to understand what's going on and most importantly to look after yourself. See Nacoa's website for more information.

Remember you are not responsible for people's drinking

Pouring away, watering down, or hiding alcohol may make things worse, and the person drinking may become angry, aggressive or secretive. Remember your parent's drinking is not, and never was, your fault.

Remember alcohol affects the brain

People who drink often experience memory blackouts where they have no recollection of what they did, sometimes over significant periods of time. Try not to argue with someone when they are drinking; it may make things worse. They may say things that they normally wouldn't, and will often not remember the conversation afterwards.

Be ready with information

Although you can't make someone stop drinking, you can have information to hand if and when they ask for it. Nacoa will happily research local support in your area. Sometimes, it's comforting to know what help is available.

Be realistic

When someone is dependent on alcohol, the need to drink becomes so important that they may hurt and upset people they love. Promises are often made that are not kept. This can be very difficult for everyone in the family and feelings of being let down are common. It is important to look after yourself first. Sometimes this may mean distancing yourself from the drinker.

"Thank you for the information. I come back from time to time, to remember it's not just me. I am not to blame and I am not alone." Tracey, 19



Ways to feel better

Talk to someone you trust

Talking about how you feel is not being disloyal to your family and can help you to feel less alone. At Nacooa we understand the problems you're going through. Sometimes, simply talking or writing to someone can help.

Make time for yourself

You are important. Find time for things that interest you. Sometimes worries take over, and taking even a short break can help.

Understand that your feelings are normal

It's OK to hate the problems that alcohol dependency can cause, yet love the person who is drinking. Alcohol problems in the family often result in complicated, confusing and upsetting feelings.

Read people's experiences on our website

Hearing about other people's life experiences often helps us to make sense of our own situation and feelings. Although every family is unique, there are many similarities in how alcohol problems affect the family.

Access other sources of support

The Nacooa helpline is here for you. We can also research services in your area that may be helpful. You may find the following organisations of interest:

- **ACA** - Support group for adults who have grown up in alcoholic families (adultchildrenofalcoholics.co.uk)
- **Al-Anon Family Groups** - Support for people affected by someone else's drinking (al-anonuk.org.uk)
- **BACP** - Information about counselling and how to find a counsellor (itsgoodtotalk.org.uk)

"I look upon discovering Nacooa as nothing short of a miracle, the information and support you provide paving the way to a new life, a fresh start and to leave behind over forty years of unhappiness, pain and tension." Cathy, 43

Nacooa was founded in 1990 to address the problems faced by children growing up in families where one or both parents suffer from alcohol dependency or a similar addictive problem. This includes children of all ages, many of whose problems only become apparent in adulthood.

Nacooa's aims

- To offer information, advice and support to children of alcohol-dependent parents
- To reach professionals working with them
- To raise their profile in the public consciousness
- To promote research into the problems they face and the prevention of alcohol dependency developing in this vulnerable group

Our services are funded by voluntary donations. Please support this vital work by becoming a member, volunteering or making a donation. Together we can make a difference.

Text HELP21 followed by the amount (£10, £5 or £3) to 70070 or visit nacooa.org.uk/getinvolved

"Finding someone I felt comfortable talking to was the beginning of everything changing for me. Without your help, I could have spent the rest of my life watching Mum drink herself to death. Now I know there is help for Mum and for me." Paul, 15

Patrons

Tony Adams MBE • Olly Barkley • Calum Best • Lauren Booth
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Information
for people
affected by
their parent's
drinking

