

## Children of Alcoholics and Addicts

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There are times that teachers may become involved with a student in their classroom who is the child of an alcoholic or addict. This can happen at any level of education. Some of these children may exhibit behaviors that are challenging in the classroom and that may indicate dysfunction in the home.

1. Emotional, Behavioral, Physical, and Developmental Problems
  - Deny feelings, difficulty identifying or expressing feelings
  - Emotions are never resolved
  - Common to have physical complaints, developmental problems, poor impulse control, emotionally immature, fighting
2. Trouble with Peer Relationships
  - Rarely risk bringing friends home; avoid close friendships in general, isolated
  - Peers aren't attracted to them
  - Shallow sexual relationships
3. Problems in School
  - Truancy
  - Non-investment in school
  - Fear of authority figures
  - Poor achievement
4. Poor Self-Concept
  - Doesn't think own needs are important
  - Self-critical
  - Self-abusive
5. Distorted Locus of Control
  - External forces are in control
  - Personally responsible
  - Difficult to accept praise without guilt
6. Difficulty with Trust
  - Broken promises and unreliable environment
  - Unstable relationships
  - Problems with honesty
  - Oversensitive, strong fear of anger and abandonment
7. Problem Determining Responsibility
  - Unsure who is responsible, so often takes responsibility for problems that belong to others
  - Emotional caretakers to others but doesn't stand up for self
  - High tolerance for inappropriate behavior and requests from others

Family dynamics is a key to understanding and working with these students. The analogy of a mobile is often used to represent the family system. All the parts balance, reacting to each other when one part of the mobile is disturbed by a breeze or the touch of a hand. Then all the other parts will be thrown into chaos. After a period of time, the family begins to function around the problem. Although unhealthy, it's the only way they know how to exist. The following list gives some experiences that the student may deal with at home.

1. Survival Orientation
  - Dysfunction absorbs all the energy from family members
  - Lack of nurturing

2. Inconsistency
  - One day a behavior is fine; the next day you are yelled at for the same behavior
  - Some behaviors are treated the same from day to day, but you don't know which ones
  - Causes hyper-alertness because you perceive danger always
  - Sleep disturbances; stress
3. Chaos
  - Always a crisis; chaos is a mind-set
  - Worried about the next moment; difficulty following through
  - Can be a defense mechanism, allowing unaccountability, shifting the focus
4. Anti-Social Behavior
  - Competition for attention is fierce; any attention, even negative, is better than none
  - Rejection from peers and authority figures; avoids school
5. Isolation
  - Family secrets need protection
  - Avoids social contact
  - Doesn't bring friends home
  - Doesn't share information
  - No opportunities for intervention, social learning or reality testing
6. Guess What Normal Is
  - No rules so no idea of appropriate behavior
  - Condemnation of behavior reinforces shame and feelings of being "bad kids"
7. Denial
  - Threatening to face magnitude of family illness so they sacrifice themselves
  - Deny own needs and feelings
  - Don't talk, Don't trust and Don't feel are strict rules
  - Broken promises, no coping skills
8. Unhealthy Boundaries
  - Lack of respect for privacy; little true sharing
  - Prohibiting communication
  - Unhealthy alliances
9. Alcohol/Drug Involvement
  - Drugs and alcohol use may become coping mechanisms

It is extremely important that children of alcoholics/addiction learn:

#### **The 4 C's**

1. I didn't CAUSE the alcoholism
2. I can't CONTROL it.
3. I can't CURE it.
4. But I can learn how to COPE with it.

#### **The 5 S's**

1. I didn't START the alcoholism/addiction.
2. I can't STOP it.
3. I don't have to SUFFER with it.
4. I don't have to feel SHAME because of it.
5. I can SAVE myself.

While these students may need counseling or to participate in a group with children of similar backgrounds all educators can reinforce the 4 C's and 5 S's.

(Source: Internet Resources and SCIP Intervention Team Training Manual)