

ALCOHOLISM AND THE FAMILY

Alcoholism is a chronic condition characterized by preoccupation with and impaired control of the use of alcohol, accompanied by persistence of alcohol-seeking behavior despite numerous biological, psychological, and social consequences. It is for this reason that alcoholism is termed a biopsychosocial disease. Although its effects are widely observed, it is a disease that is not always easily recognized. Family members may see its effects on themselves but not on the rest of the family. Not only does it trap the alcoholic, it absorbs that person's family, workplace, and society, as well. The stress of living in an unpredictable and chaotic home deeply affects the children and the spouse of the alcoholic. Why alcoholism is called the family illness is because alcoholism is an illness that can affect people of all ages and races, male and female alike. Alcoholism isolates family members from each other, which is why it so closely related to domestic violence.

This devastating disease is certainly no respecter of persons; it does not happen only in bad people. Myth on alcoholism: This family or person is so nice, well-to-do, religious, clean cut, average, proper, and they couldn't be having a drinking problem. The reality: The family where alcohol dependency is an issue does everything to shield the drinker and hide the truth from neighbors, friends, employers, or relatives. Another myth the family of the alcoholic is aware that the problems the family is having are because of the alcoholism or drug problem. In reality, the family often does not recognize the alcoholism themselves because of the process of denial. If an alcoholic parent is from a family where alcoholism prevailed, they may not see themselves as an alcoholic because they hold down a job or drink only beer or wine. The spouse may not relate behavior to the drinking, not realizing alcoholism affects the entire life of the family.

Fact for Families

Fifty or sixty percent of all family violence occurs in alcoholic or drug homes. Seventy percent of children of alcoholics develop a pattern of compulsive behavior as an adult, such as alcoholism, overeating, or drug abuse. Children of alcoholics or drug addicts feel shame about their families struggle to keep secret the alcoholism or drugs, never dreaming that their own friends and or classmates share the problem. Kid's natural belief that the world centers around them causes deep guilt about their parents' drinking. Blame is part of the illness of alcoholism/drugs and children may be blamed for the alcoholic's behavior.

It's not the alcoholic's fault either. It is hard to accept that alcoholism is a disease, not willful behavior by "bad" parents. Reassurance that the parent is not bad, but ill, and loves them is important for the child. It is important for children to know that they're not alone and that it's not their fault. A classroom 25 students averages four to eight students with parents who has an alcohol and/or drug problem.

The Emotional Effects on Family

- Suspicion
- Insecurity
- Guilt
- Fear
- Disappointment
- Isolation
- Embarrassment
- Resentment
- Anger
- Anxiety
- Depression

The Emotional Effects on Children

- Guilt
- Confusion
- Embarrassment
- Inability to trust
- Anger
- Anxiety and depression

Family Role

Families can take positive steps to help themselves, even if the alcoholic does not stop drinking. The alcoholic can be helped and the earlier the intervention the greater the chance of recovery. Family members play important roles in the addicted person's disease process. Often, out of love for the alcoholic or to make life easier for themselves, family members do things that actually contribute to the problem. By understanding how this happens, family members can avoid being part of the problem, i.e. he/she is not feeling well, he/she is busy, and/or he/she is not home).

How Family Can Be Part of the Problem:

- 1) Enabling
The addicted person needs his/her family members to make excuses for them, rescue them, take care of them, share their denial, and buy into their delusions.
- 2) Decrease other members of family lives: when family members, worried all the time, almost preoccupied with trying to control or help an addicted person, they cannot live normal lives of their own. This is usually very distressing and it can create anxiety/depression for family members.
- 3) Despair
Family member feels hopeless and feeling going no where with addicted person. When addicted person control their lives, they are on a self-perpetuating treadmill. To get off that, those around the addicted person have to stop being part of the problem and start being part of the solution.

To Be Part of the Solution:

- Don't enable
- Focus on their own needs
- Get professional help for yourself and children

CONTINUE TO TAKE THE QUIZ

This quiz does not provide a diagnosis of alcohol abuse or alcohol dependence. The results cannot substitute for a full evaluation by a health care professional, and should only be used as a guide to understanding your alcohol use and its potential health issues.

1. Do you lose time from work due to drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
2. Is drinking making your home life unhappy?
Yes ___ No ___
3. Do you drink because you are shy with other people?
Yes ___ No ___
4. Is drinking affecting your reputation?
Yes ___ No ___
5. Have you ever felt remorse after drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
6. Have you had financial difficulties as a result of drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
7. Do you turn to inferior companions or environments when drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
8. Does your drinking make you careless of your family's welfare?
Yes ___ No ___
9. Has your ambition decreased since drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
10. Do you crave a drink at definite time daily?
Yes ___ No ___
11. Do you want a drink the next morning?
Yes ___ No ___
12. Does drinking cause you to have difficulty in sleeping?
Yes ___ No ___
13. Has your efficiency decreased since drinking?
Yes ___ No ___
14. Is drinking jeopardizing your job or business?
Yes ___ No ___
15. Do you drink to escape from worries or trouble?
Yes ___ No ___
16. Do you drink alone?
Yes ___ No ___

17. Have you ever had a loss of memory as a result of drinking?

Yes ___ No ___

18. Has your physician ever treated you for drinking?

Yes ___ No ___

19. Do you drink to build up your self-confidence?

Yes ___ No ___

20. Have you ever been to hospital or institution an account of drinking?

Yes ___ No ___

Number of Yes Answers: _____ / 20

If you answered three of these questions with a yes it is a definite sign that your drinking patterns are harmful and possibly considered alcohol dependent or alcoholic. You may want to seek an evaluation by a healthcare professional.