



DrugFree@WorkPlace

Impact of Addiction on Children

Alcoholism and drug addiction take a heavy toll on America's children. Currently, 8.7 million kids in the United States live with at least one parent who needs treatment for drug or alcohol abuse. The impact of addiction on these kids can be substantial.

Children of addicted parents are at greater risk for:

- Mental illness or emotional problems.
- Risk-taking behaviors, depression, and suicidal thoughts.
- Physical health problems.
- Learning problems—including difficulty with cognitive and verbal skills, conceptual reasoning, and abstract thinking.

Children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are almost three times more likely to be verbally, physically, or sexually abused, and are four times more likely than other children to be neglected.

Children living with an addicted parent have to regularly deal with denial, shame, and silence about their family experience. Their lives are filled with unpredictability and irrationality. They live in an atmosphere that is often blaming, emotionally hurtful, and sometimes physically unsafe. These kids usually feel obligated to take on their parent's responsibilities, which results in a loss of childhood.

Children of addicted parents don't have the calm, peaceful, balanced childhood that all kids deserve, and their parents rarely realize the damage being done.

Helping Children of Addicted Parents

The problem of children being raised by addicted parents is sad and tragic, but there is some good news. Research shows that children with addicted parents can benefit in many ways from adult efforts to help and encourage them. In fact, children who cope most effectively with the trauma of growing up in families affected by alcoholism or drug addiction often attribute their sense of

well-being to the support of a non-alcoholic parent, stepparent, grandparent, teacher, or other significant adult in their lives.

If you know children who are living with addiction in their home, there are some ways you can help. Providing these kids with age-appropriate information about alcohol, drugs, and the disease of addiction is the first step. The most important messages for these kids to hear from trusted adults are:

- Alcohol/drug dependency is a disease. It's not your fault that your parent drinks too much or uses drugs, and you are not responsible for fixing it.
- You can take care of yourself by talking with a trusted person and making healthy choices in your own life.
- Treatment for alcohol/drug dependency is available and can be effective in getting a parent with addiction on the road to recovery.
- You are not alone. You need and deserve services. There are safe people and places that can help you.

Another way to help is to teach children how to identify and express their feelings in healthy ways, especially by seeking out and speaking with "safe" adults. Kids can be guided toward educational support programs at their school or in their community. These programs can help them develop coping skills to deal with the problems of life in healthy ways.

The most important thing you can do to help is to take the time to develop a healthy adult/child relationship with a child who needs you. Kids who live in alcohol- and drug-dependent families learn not to trust adults. By offering your time and an open ear to provide assurance and validation, you can counteract much of that mistrust and make an immeasurable and positive impact on a child's life.

If you are in a position to influence the adults in the family, help them find a qualified professional who is experienced with intervention and can help them get the assessment and treatment they need to begin recovery.

A number of resources are available to help adults identify and support children who are living with addiction in the home. If you want to help children in alcohol- or drug-dependent families, familiarize yourself with area peer support groups, such as Alateen and Al-Anon; school-based student assistance programs; and therapy programs that can help. Showing this kind of interest in a child and offering support can make a difference in his/her life.

The following information is provided by the Georgia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Disabilities.

40 million Americans own or use firearms. We all can take steps to increase firearm safety.

Did you know that more than 50% of all suicide deaths in the United States involve firearms?¹ Did you know that more than 60% of all firearm deaths in the United States are suicides?² The sad truth is that suicide can be an impulsive act, and easy access to a firearm can turn a hasty decision into an irreversible tragedy. For youth suicides using firearms, one study found that 82% of the firearms belonged to a family member, usually a parent.³

Firearm safety is always important, but even more so during a mental health challenge or time of crisis. For the safety of yourself, your family, and your friends, it is crucial to have a gun safety strategy in place in your home. Thankfully, there are options for every lifestyle and budget.

Using locking devices such as internal locks, trigger locks, and cable locks, or storing firearms in a gun case or gun safe are options you can use while keeping firearms in the home. For off-site storage, which is recommended for somebody

experiencing a crisis, storing firearms at a gun shop or shooting range, using a pawn shop for short-term storage, or even using your local police department may be options. Be sure to call and ask if these services are available and what any costs might be.

More safety tips:

- Always make sure that firearms are unloaded when not in use.
- Always store ammunition and firearms separately.
- Always make sure that firearms are never in reach of children or other unauthorized persons.
- Remember: drugs, alcohol, and guns don't mix!

A cable lock can cost as little as \$10. So why wait? Take steps to increase firearm safety in the home today!

¹ Suicidal Statistics. (2019, April 16). Retrieved from <https://afsp.org/about-suicide/suicide-statistics/>.

² Gramlich, J. (2019, August 16). What the data says about gun deaths in the U.S. Retrieved from <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/08/16/what-the-data-says-about-gun-deaths-in-the-u-s/>.

³ Youth Access to Firearms. (2013, January 9). Retrieved from <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/means-matter/means-matter/youth-access/>.

To learn more about suicide prevention, visit the DBHDD website at: <https://dbhdd.georgia.gov/suicide-prevention>.

Or contact Suicide Prevention Director, Walker Tisdale, at: walker.tisdale@dbhdd.ga.gov.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:
1-800-273-TALK (8255).