

Feature

For Adult Children of Alcoholics...

Time doesn't erase the trauma

by Marie Stoppelmoor
Feature Editor

Quite a bit of national attention has been paid to the problem of alcoholism and drug abuse. Little attention has been paid to the effects of these illnesses on the children that live with a substance abuser.

Ann and Mary (not their real names), students here at Clackamas Community College, know the after-effects of living in an alcohol/drug addicted home. Both are adult children of alcohol/drug addicts.

"I remember going home from school," Mary said "and wondering if we could have violent arguments - or would Dad just pass out quietly."

"How can you live with that," Ann asks, "and not be affected?"

There are three basic "laws" for living in a household with an addicted person, which are: 1) Don't talk. 2) Don't trust. 3) Don't feel.

"Until 7th grade I didn't understand that the reason Dad was yelling at me was because he was drunk," Mary said. "What was there to talk about? I assumed, since he was the adult, that he was always right."

For a child to learn trust in an alcoholic home is nearly impossible, because there is little guidance or dependability from obsessed parents (one parent is obsessed with alcohol/drugs, one with the alcohol/drug addict.)

Ann's father began molesting her when she was a teen. Ann finally confided in her mother,

but the abuse continued for another year.

The family law of 'don't talk' or trust can often lead the child to deny their feelings, because they do not believe that their family members will validate them.

"I can't be mad at my mother for not doing anything," Ann says. "I'm a stronger person than her, and, if anything, I would be the one protecting her."

As a result of the three family laws (don't talk, trust or feel), adult children of alcoholic/drug addicts grow up with gaps in their development.

*"Don't talk.
Don't trust.
Don't feel."*

The following generalizations are from a book available at the CCC library - "Adult Children of Alcoholics," by Janet Geringer Woititz, Ed. D.

1. Adult children of alcoholics guess at what 'normal' is.

Mary: "I was shocked when I first spent the night at a friend's house. Their family could have disagreements without turning them into shouting matches."

2. Adult children have difficulty following projects through from beginning to end.

Ann: "This is one of my worst problems. Everything I started or would get excited about, my father would just tear it down until finally I quit."

3. Adult children judge themselves without mercy.

Mary: "I sometimes still feel 'not good enough.' I'm not a good enough student, employee or girlfriend. I always think 'you could have done that better.'"

4/5. Adult children have difficulty having fun, and take themselves very seriously.

Mary: "Sometimes when I go to parties, I just stand and watch everyone have fun. If I'm drunk I can let myself go and have fun."

6. Adult children have difficulty with intimate relationships.

Ann: "I guess, deep inside, I don't feel very attractive. I think there's something wrong with me."

7. Adult children over-react to changes over which they have no control.

Mary: "Once, at work, I was scheduled to work in one department, but my boss switched me to another. It was no real problem, but I was just seething. My boss asked why it mattered and I didn't have an answer."

8. Adult children constantly seek approval and affirmation.

Ann: "When I was little, I was daddy's girl. Everything I did had to have his approval."

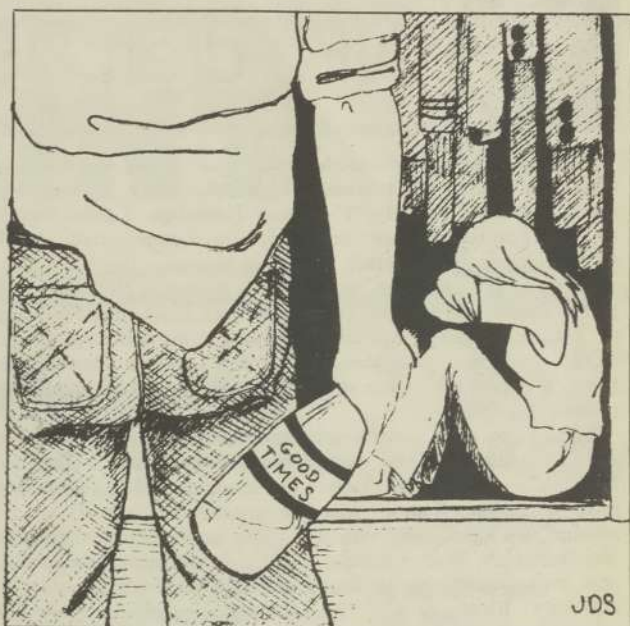
9. Adult children feel that they are different than other people.

Mary: "I am different. In high school, it was worse, though. The only people I could relate to were the 'stoner' types; now I have a wider variety of friends."

10. Adult children are either super-responsible or super-irresponsible.

Ann: "I don't know. When I lived at home, I was really responsible - but since I've moved out, I'm really in debt."

11. Adult children are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence



that the loyalty is undeserved. families get caught up in the disease and become emotionally ill themselves. For information regarding help for adult children of alcoholics, contact Mary Fitzgerald at the Health Center,

"I have a hard time breaking up with someone, even if things are just shitty."

another state, to come back to Oregon, while all I have here are debts."

Research in this country indicates that there are ten million plus alcoholics in America. Most alcoholics are in a family unit. Without help, many

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