



Helping children affected by
their parent's drinking

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Who is Nacoa?

Nacoa (The National Association for Children of Alcoholics)

- Founded in 1990 to address the needs of children growing up in families where one or both parents suffer from alcoholism or a similar addictive problem
- Based in Bristol with a small staff team and a large, well-trained volunteer base responding to children from across the UK and beyond



Our aims

1. To offer information, advice and support to children of alcohol- dependent parents
2. To reach professionals who work with them
3. To raise their existence in the public consciousness
4. To promote research into the problems they face and the prevention of alcoholism developing in this vulnerable group

Patrons

- Mr Tony Adams MBE
- Mr Calum Best
- Ms Lauren Booth
- The Rt. Hon. Liam Byrne MP
- David Coldwell
- Ms Geraldine James OBE
- Sophie K
- Ms Cherie Lunghi
- Ms Elle Macpherson
- Mrs Suzanne Stafford CQSW
- Camilla Tominey
- Mr David Yelland



Our work



1. Free Helpline by telephone, email and letter
2. Website
3. Information packs
4. Publications
5. Schools Poster Campaign
6. Training programmes
7. Information
8. Research
9. Instant chat – coming COA week



Nacoa model of care

- **Problems with alcohol often translate into a family illness**
- **We focus on the effects of alcohol on the family**
 - Family colludes to keep the problem hidden from the outside world
 - Children are confused, unable to voice concerns and feel they are to blame
 - Unspoken family rules often apply: Don't talk, don't trust, don't feel
- **Alcohol is rarely an isolated problem** - a study with 4,000 respondents found these children are:
 - 6 times more likely to witness domestic violence
 - 5 times more likely to develop an eating problem
 - 3 times more likely to consider suicide
 - 2 times more likely to experience difficulties at school
 - 2 times more likely to develop alcoholism or addiction
 - 2 times more likely to be in trouble with the police
- **We** Help children to break the silence
 - Help them to develop healthy coping strategies
 - Identify who can help in their family and friends
 - Provide ongoing support with daily challenges and in crisis situations
 - Celebrate their triumphs
 - Identify other resources and agencies in their local area or specialist help



Anger



Hidden



Confusion



Alcohol: The family illness

Parents do not choose to become dysfunctional but adapt their behaviour in order to cope with alcoholism and the resulting stigma. The following adaptive patterns of behaviour allow the family unit to balance the effects of the drinking parent and keep the family together. This can lead to the adoption of roles for the family members.

- **Communication** becomes distorted with little room for honesty and self-honesty
- **Guessing at 'normality'** by comparison to how other people appear
- **Denial, compliance and control** leading to low self-esteem and unidentified fear
- **Dependence on others** for sense of self-esteem
- **Confusing love with need**
- **Fear of abandonment**
- **Unrelenting guilt and shame**
- **Development of unhealthy defences to deal with emotional pain**
- **An inability to identify or express feelings**
- **Difficulty in intimate relationships**
- **Denial and / or minimisation of past and current problems**



The roles

| Role | Motivating Feeling | Identifying Symptoms | Pay Off For Individual | Pay Off For Family | Possible Price |
|------------|---------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Dependent | Shame | Chemical use | Relief of pain | None | Addiction |
| Enabler | Anger | Powerlessness or Martyr | Importance Righteousness | Responsibility | Illness Exhaustion |
| Hero | Inadequacy Guilt | Over-achievement | Attention (positive) | Self-worth | Compulsive drive |
| Scapegoat | Hurt | Delinquency | Attention (negative) | Focus away from dependent | Self-destruction Addiction |
| Lost Child | Loneliness | Solitary Shyness | Escape | Relief | Social isolation |
| Mascot | Fear | Clowning Hyperactivity | Attention (amused) | Fun | Immaturity Emotional illness Addiction |

Adapted, with kind permission, from the work of Sharon Wegscheider Cruse, who worked with Virginia Satyr on family dysfunction



Living with the problem

- What you can do:
 - Remember you are not alone; there are millions of people in the UK who have been affected by a parent's drinking
 - Find out more about alcohol and the effects on the family
 - Talk to someone you trust
 - Make time for yourself
 - Access support. Nacoa's here to listen. You can talk in confidence by phone or email. You don't need to tell us your real name and no one else needs to know you've contacted us. You don't have to be on your own with all this.
- Helping friends who might be in this situation doesn't need to be complicated:



Listen



Be there for them



Make them laugh



Outlook

- **Scale of problem** is vast: 1 in 5 school age children live with a parent who drinks too much
- **Social media + email** has increased engagement with young people
- **Lack of awareness** amongst the public that alcoholism affects the whole family
- In February 2016 Naocha Patron, The Rt. Hon. Liam Byrne MP announced the setting up of an **All-Party Parliamentary Group on Children of Alcoholics**
- There is now some **co-ordination nationwide** but services are still under-resourced



Info for Professional

Important messages to pass on to children include:

- You are not alone.
- You are not responsible for your parent's drinking.
- You did not cause it and you can't control it.
- You are not responsible for your parent's behaviour.
- There are people who can help.

Who Can Help?

- Encourage the child to talk about their relationships with friends / family.
- Be aware that some children have no-one else to confide in.
- Help the child to contact the **Nacoa Helpline: 0800 358 3456**.
- Local clubs and sports teams may help the child to build positive relationships.

Ongoing Support:

- Refer the child to someone with specialist skills e.g. a School Counsellor.
- Be prepared to continue to provide a listening ear
- Remind the child that the Nacoa Helpline provides ongoing support without time limits and can be accessed **confidentially** by phone and email.

More Information



The National Association for Children of Alcoholics

Read our website **nacoa.org.uk**

- Real life stories
- Help & advice
- Publications
- Facts & figures



Email us
helpline@nacoa.org.uk



Call us
0800 358 3456