

Effect of alcoholic parent on child



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Behavioral Problems in Children with Alcoholic Parents

Introduction

Children tend to have behavioral problems when they have an alcoholic parent or parents. There are studies that link children of alcoholics to be at a higher risk of behavior problems, mental and physical health problems, social problems, and substance abuse problems later in life (Christensen, 2000 p. 219 and Vernig, 2011 p. 536). Alcoholism is a big issue when it comes to the development of children because some alcoholics tend to miss their children's events, not be around all the time, or are too drunk to be mentally present. Children are also impressionable at young ages and tend to follow in their parents footsteps which is why children, especially young ones, need parents who are good, strong role models that set good examples and teach them. Alcoholic parents probably struggle in this department and set bad examples of how to cope with certain aspects of life. Children see this and act accordingly while developing many issues of their own throughout childhood and adulthood. The behavior of alcoholic parents has a huge impact on the way their children behave. Children of alcoholics have trouble with social situations and often have to do more help to keep the family together than normal families. They usually try to get attention, struggle in school, and are much more prone to mental and physical illnesses.

Alcoholic parents often are associated with being absent in their children's lives, whether they physically are not around, or they are mentally not around. This causes children to act out for attention. That could include getting into trouble at school, acting out at home, or other forms of acting out

for attention. Parents who are absent because of their alcoholism cause their children to become important roles in the house to help out the “enabler” or the nonalcoholic parent, according to Peter Vernig (2011). Peter Vernig also states that the oldest child often steps up to help the other parent. This causes issues mentally, physically, and socially with the child later in life. The entire family suffers from the parent's habits (Vernig, 2011 p. 535). Children other than the eldest child suffer as well, maybe to get attention from their siblings, or either parent. The other children in the family have their own roles and each has its own problems. For example, one often receives the least amount of attention and feels rejected because this child is often overlooked which causes mental illnesses from being neglected. The youngest child is typically a distraction from the heavy feelings of the family issues. Intelligence is not highly expected in this child. The second eldest child is used to draw attention away from the issue at hand. This child is the most prone to legal trouble, trouble in school, and they are most likely to be drug and alcohol abusers of all the children in a family. (Vernig, 2011 p. 535-537) These categories break down which child is most likely to develop certain issues over the other children.

Body

One of the biggest problems with children of alcoholics is that they tend to be more prone to mental illnesses. Many children struggle with hyperactivity problems, anxiety, depression, low self esteem, and psychosomatic reactions (Christensen, 2000 p. 219). These emotional problems are a result of their parent's actions. These children grow up seeing their parent in situations that create added stress for them. The parent may or may not be abusive, or

may be absent for important things. Maybe the parent even argues with their children over certain matter that influence less support (Barerra, 1993 p. 603). This can lower the child or childrens' self esteem. Low self esteem leads to or can lead to real mental health problems such as depression or anxiety. These children are much more likely to have substance abuse problems early in life. Some of the reasoning behind that is the genetics of mental health disorders, such as alcoholism, but some of it is because children with anxiety and depression can turn to drugs and alcohol to cope (Puttler 1998, Serec 2012, Vernig 2011).

Children of alcoholics' mental health problems create issues for them not only during childhood, but also later in life (Vernig 2011, Serec 2012, Puttler 1998, Eiden 2009, Sher 2007). Their adulthoods often include some form of substance abuse often caused by their mental health problems.

Alcoholic typically also have depression or anxiety of some form (Eiden 2009). Children of alcoholics feel neglected because their parent or parents do not always pay attention to them, or they have to give up being a child in order to replace the support of their alcoholic parent. The oldest child steps up, while the younger children begin to feel neglected and ignored. These children act out and develop these mental problems as a result of the little attention they are paid. In early stages of development these children need more attention and care and often do not receive it. This causes anxiety, depression, and hyperactivity disorders (Eiden 2009, Vernig 2011, Puttler 1998).

Physical illnesses are common in children of alcoholics just as the mental illnesses are. Children in these situations tend to become more prone to

illnesses, especially in earlier childhood stages like infants, toddlers, preschool age, and middle school ages. These children need a lot of support, love, and help from their parents and lack of their basic needs causes more physical illnesses to occur. They need to be taken care of and given lots of attention. Studies show that alcoholic parents possess lower quality parenting skills than those of nonalcoholic parents (Eiden 2009).

Children in preschool or of preschool age are 65% more likely to come down with illnesses such as colds and coughs more than other children. They are also more likely to have allergies and anemia or to be over or under weight (Serec, 2012). Due to the poor parenting skills of alcoholic parents, children at young stages are more at risk to be hospitalized for their illnesses or injuries. They are more likely to spend more days in the hospital, need more medical treatment, and get more injuries than children without alcoholic parents (Serec, 2012). These children are not treated properly at home, or not as well as they should be taken care of.

Physical illnesses occur in the children in adolescence as well, but are more common in those of the younger children. Aggravation of alcoholic parents towards their children is more likely than that of nonalcoholic parents, so that is possibly an aspect of why children tend to become sicker when their parents are alcoholics.

Children of all ages try to get attention from their parent or parents when one or both of them are alcoholics. It is natural for the human body to need (or crave) love and attention. Younger children often need more love and attention as their brains develop, learn, and grow. Children cannot likely

develop correctly when these needs are ignored. 8-27% of all children are said to have one or both parents that have an alcohol problem (Serec 2012). That means that 8-27% of the child population struggles with these problems and likely feels unwanted or wants attention and approval from their parents. Young children struggle more with attention problems because they have yet to establish a solid foundation or identity for themselves. They need the support from their parents. In order to get attention children will act out in school, get into trouble with the law, or just create trouble in general. They might intentionally fail in classes to get some attention.

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