

professionals can be enlisted. Few adult children of alcoholics have shared their experiences with other ACA's. Group and individual counseling is often the first opportunity these adults have in understanding how their current life and their past experiences with an alcoholic parent have strongly shaped their personalities and present behavior. Relief, reduction of guilt and better control over themselves and their future is often possible. The UCI Counseling Center offers group and individual assistance to ACA's. We'd like to help and hope this information will enlighten. We can be reached at 949-824-6457 for more details or information about services.

## ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

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## ADULT CHILDREN OF ALCOHOLICS

When one member of a family is an alcoholic, the whole family suffers.

Approximately seven million children in the U.S. under the age of 18 are living with an alcoholic parent. These children live in an atmosphere of anxiety, tension which are magnified by the family's code of silence: the goings on in an alcoholic household are kept from the outside at almost any psychological cost.

Children from alcoholic families often use a variety of coping roles to survive. Some get sick: headaches, upset stomachs, insomnia and depression are common medical symptoms. The role of "scapegoat" or "problem child" involves getting into troubles in school or developing a learning disability as a way to draw attention away from the alcoholic parent towards themselves. The "mascot" put on a façade of being carefree and tries to minimize or deny problems at home by clowning and joking.

The "hero" or "caretaker," often the oldest sibling, becomes a surrogate parent, supervising the other children and running the household. Often these "heroes" become super achievers, doing extremely well in school, jobs or athletics. Last is the "lost child" who fades into the background, becoming withdrawn and isolated, first from the turmoil at home and later, fearful of people in general.

Often in each role, the children of alcoholic parents are dealing with psychological pain by denying their parent's problem drinking, instead feeling fault with themselves. They may downplay their emotions to alleviate psychic pain by becoming numb toward their feelings and those of others. Sooner or later these children pay a price, sometimes later as adults.

The strategies used to cope in childhood, often don't work as well or deteriorate in trying to cope with adulthood. There are an estimated 21 million Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACA's). The emotional scare of childhood are often carried into adulthood by ACA's. Some

ACA's become super achievers to gain control, feel good about themselves and to fill an internal sense of emptiness. Some often reveal addictions or compulsions to alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, work or sports. They frequently have problems with relationships or have difficulty getting close to someone. Sometimes they get involved with other alcoholics or unstable individuals in an attempt to "rescue" or "help" them to succeed with spouses or lovers where they "failed" with their parents.

ACA's need to identify their problems and the role of the family's atmosphere in their development. Often the family code of silence and guilt feelings block an ACA from being aware of the impact their families have had on them. It is not a foregone conclusion that ACA's will have drinking or drug abuse problems. By knowing yourself better and your susceptibilities, potential problems can be buffered and the support of others or of