

Coping When a Parent Has an Alcohol or Drug Problem

en español: [Qué hacer cuando un padre o una madre tiene problemas con el alcohol o las drogas](#)

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If you live with a parent who has an alcohol or drug problem, you're not alone. [Alcohol](#) problems and [addictions](#) to [drugs](#) (such as [opioids](#)) are called **substance use disorders**.

Substance use disorders harm a person's health, and change the way they act. They cause problems at home and work. It's not easy living with someone who has a substance use problem. Especially if it's your parent.

If you are going through this, tell someone what it's like for you. Get the support you need and deserve.

What's it Like to Live With a Parent Who Has a Substance

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problem is not just about how you feel and act. It can affect your family life too. What it's like is different for each person. Here are some common examples. See if some of them describe what's it's like for you.

How people might feel. Some people feel:

- embarrassed, angry, or sad about a parent's substance use
- worried about their parent's health or safety
- worried for themselves, siblings, or their other parent
- scared, alone, or unsafe at home
- frustrated when their parent doesn't change
- relieved when a parent takes steps to recover
- it's hard to trust or relax
- they have to be an adult before they're ready
- overwhelmed
- depressed or anxious

How people might act. Some people:

- try hard not to upset a parent who drinks too much
- try to stay out of a parent's way
- may not speak up, or ask for what they need
- keep their feelings to themselves
- keep their parent's problem a secret
- hide what their life is like at home

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with schoolwork

- take on adult tasks
- argue or fight with a parent
- harm themselves
- act like they don't care, even if they are hurting

How family life might be affected. In some families with substance problems:

- a parent has trouble keeping a job or paying the bills
- there may not be enough food or money
- older siblings may have to take care of younger ones
- parents mistreat, abuse, or neglect their children
- a parent may drive drunk or high. They may get into trouble, get hurt, or hurt others.
- kids might have to live somewhere else to be protected or cared for
- parents split up or divorce
- relatives or friends step in to help
- parents get help and recover

What Can I Do?

If you're living with a parent who has a substance use problem, you might be having a tough time. Reach out to others for safety, help, and support. Here are some things to do:

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relative. Let them know what you're going through. It can be a relief to share what it's like for you. And they may be able to help you in other ways.

Know that it's not your fault. Some people blame themselves for their parent's substance use. They may think about times when a parent was angry or blamed them. They may wonder if they caused a parent to drink or use drugs. But kids can't cause a parent's substance problem.

Know and name your emotions. Don't bury your feelings or pretend that everything's OK. Notice how a parent's substance problem makes you feel. It's OK to feel the way you do. Use words (and not harmful actions) to express how you feel and why.

Find a support group. Find a group like [Al-Anon/Alateen](#) (they have a 24-hour hotline at 1-800-344-2666) or go online for help. Join a support group. Talking with others who are going through the same thing can help you cope.

Find a safe place. Do you avoid home as much as possible? Are you thinking about running away? If you feel you're not safe at home, you can call the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) at (800) 799-SAFE. If you think you or another family member could be in danger, call 911.

Build good emotional habits. Some people learn not to speak up or show emotion. They worry it may trigger a parent's drinking or

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Speak up, say how you feel, and show emotion helps you have good relationships in the future. Sometimes people need therapy to build good habits they were not able to learn living with an alcoholic or addicted parent.

Stop the cycle. People who have parents with substance use problems are at higher risk of having these problems too. A support group or therapy can help you learn how to avoid this risk.

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