

Addiction Is a Family Disease

Honorable Jonathan Mark, Court of Common Pleas of Monroe County

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Possible Effects:

The Non-Substance Abusing Parent:

- Communication difficulties/arguing
- Jealousy
- Infidelity
- Financial difficulties
- Violence in the home
- Stress related disorders
- Substance use to deal with conflict and tension
- Feelings of responsibility
- “Am I crazy? Is it me?”

Source: American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

The Child:

- Physical effects due to pre-natal exposure
- Inadequate medical/dental care
- Educational delays, absenteeism/truancy, increase in behavioral problems/suspensions
- Diminished security due to chaotic environment
- Adverse Childhood Experiences/Trauma
- Mental health issues: Anxiety/Attention Deficit/Depression/Oppositional Defiant Disorder
- Increased vulnerability to future substance use

Source: American Academy of Pediatrics

Critical Issues:

- With a substance abusing parent in the home, the risk of child abuse and neglect increases, and, nationally, 60–80% of substantiated abuse and neglect cases parental substance abuse (Young, et al, 2007). Many of Pennsylvania’s child welfare agencies have indicated substance abuse as at least one factor in the agency becoming involved with a family.
- Children of substance abusing parents may develop less secure attachments than children with non-substance abusing parents. Secure attachments are critical to the development of children. Lack of secure attachments can lead to long lasting problems in many life areas.

Source: Solis, Shadur, Burns, and Hussong, 2012

- As insight and healthy coping strategies emerge, family stress is likely to decrease creating a more positive recovery environment for the substance abusing parent.

Critical Messages:

The Non-Substance Abusing Parent:

- Addiction effects the whole family.
- You can't control another person.
- You can recover.
- Children can recover too.
- Helping your children will help you.

The child:

- You're not alone.
- It's not your fault.
- There is help.
- Addiction is a disease.
- It's okay to share your feelings with safe people.

Ways to Help:

- Use the Family CAGE screening tool
 - **C** Have you ever felt that anyone in your family should **cut down** on their drinking/drug use?
 - **A** Has anyone in your family felt **annoyed** by complaints about their drinking/drug use?
 - **G** Has anyone in your family ever felt bad or guilty about their drinking/drug use?
 - **E** Eye Opener: Has anyone in your family ever had a drink/used drugs first thing in the morning to steady their nerves or get rid of hangover?
- Refer to self-help groups
 - Al-Anon: For family members of alcoholics
 - Ala-Teen: For teens with a family member who is an alcoholic
 - Nar-Anon: For family members of addicts
 - Narateen: For teens with a family member who is an addict
 - *note: Narcotics Anonymous and their related groups consider alcohol a drug and are inclusive of both addicts and alcoholics*
 - Coda: For co-dependent individuals
 - Recovering Couples Anonymous
- Provide SAMHSAs National Helpline number: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)
- Develop a multi-disciplinary collaborative to assess gaps in services, develop needed services and to develop creative and out-of-the-box solutions to issues for children and families affected by substance abuse.