Treatment Guide for Children of Addicted Parents

The people who raise us deeply influence our lives in so many ways. That's why children who are raised by parents who are addicted to drugs or alcohol end up with many issues whether physically, mentally, or emotionally. These children are likely to have low self-esteem, emotional and behavioral problems as well as poor academic performance. They are also at a higher risk of sexual, physical, or verbal abuse and are more likely to develop depression and anxiety than their peers. It's also not surprising that being exposed to drug and alcohol abuse in their formative years makes them more likely to experiment with these substances earlier than most other children.

Reversed Roles in a Home with Addicted Parents

Parents are supposed to watch out for and guide their children. Unfortunately, parents who are struggling with substance abuse are often unable to step into their parental roles, thereby neglecting their children's needs. These children are then forced to mature beyond their years to take care of not only themselves but also their parents.

The roles are reversed in such homes with the child taking over the role of caregiver in various ways. For instance, they might feel the need to rescue their parents by trying to prevent them from using drugs or alcohol. They also end up keeping their parents company with the latter increasingly infringing on their emotional boundaries by confiding in them. This adds to the child's emotional and mental stress which can in turn harm their brain development.

To make matters worse, children from such homes often take on the blame for their parents' addiction. They believe that their parents' behavior is somehow their fault. That maybe if they were better children, more obedient, better in school, etc, their parents wouldn't resort to drugs or alcohol.

How to Deal with Addicted Parents

Young people who find themselves entangled in such situations need to feel empowered to get help for themselves and break free of their caregiver roles. However, this can be difficult as addicted parents can be quite manipulative, often discouraging their children from sharing what goes on at home. The shame and guilt of a parent's substance abuse can also keep the children from speaking out.

If you are dealing with your parent's substance abuse, you need to know that it's not your fault. Your parents make their own choices. What you need to do is build self-confidence and get past the fear that keeps you from speaking out and seeking help.

Here are some suggestions on how to do that.

Confide in an adult.

It can be scary to open up to someone but confiding in an adult you trust can ease the burden and make you feel valuable. This can be a close relative, a teacher at school or any adult you trust and respect

Keep a journal.

Writing down your thoughts can help clear your mind. It's also a great way to record all the stuff that's happening in case you need to recall it later.

Take part in activities that you enjoy.

Develop hobbies that make you feel good about yourself and distract you from the situation at home. Having some activities that you're good at can boost your confidence and happiness.

Make friends and stay close to them.

Making friends can be hard and it might be tempting to withdraw and isolate yourself but that will only worsen things. Keep in touch with at least one person you're close to.

Keep emergency numbers close.

Know who you can contact in case a crisis comes up at home and keep their numbers in a safe, easily-accessible place. This might include the numbers of a teen crisis center, emergency services, or concerned teachers, neighbors, or relatives.

Have a list of safe places to go.

It's also a good idea to know where to go if you need to leave your home in a hurry. Maybe a friend's place, family shelter, or a teen center where you can be safe for a while.

Talking to Your Parents About Seeking Help

It can be difficult and intimidating to talk to your parents about getting help for their substance abuse. You might feel that you're violating their authority or betraying them in some way. When this happens, remind yourself that you are only looking out for them and acting in their best interests.

To make this conversation more successful, try doing the following:

Putting down your feelings.

Confronting your parent might be more useful if you wrote down what you wanted to say to them. That way, should they get angry or try to divert the conversation, you can refer to what you've written to keep the conversation on track.

Asking for help.

When holding an intervention with an addicted person, it's always helpful to have backup. This could be people who are experienced in interventions e.g. therapists, pastors or community workers as well as others who are affected by the person's abuse such as your siblings, relatives, or your parent's work colleagues.

Choosing the appropriate time.

Choosing the right time to have this conversation is critical. You want to pick a time when there are minimal distractions and both you and your parents are calm. Speaking to them when they're high or otherwise intoxicated or when you're angry and emotional will be counterproductive.

Getting help to make sure your parents follow through.

Addiction can have a powerful hold on someone, making it hard for them to quit no matter how much they want to. You need someone with you to ensure that they stick to their promise of going to rehab and that they follow through with their treatment.

At the Evolve Indy addiction treatment center in Indiana, we have a team of addiction specialists that can help your parents get sober and remain that way. We also offer different treatment options – from residential treatment therapy to intensive outpatient programs – to ensure we cater to every individual's unique needs.

If you're ready to help your parents overcome their addiction contact us today.

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