

Children of Addiction Examined

By Jim Rachels



There are many children in this world that are suffering from having a parent in active addiction. Many children live in fear day after day and night after night. Sometimes the problems with the child start right from birth. Many women continued to use drugs or alcohol even though they knew they were pregnant. This is something that happens all too often. Many babies are born addicted to drugs. This is called neonatal abstinence syndrome. This is where a baby is born withdrawing from whatever substances it was exposed to while in the womb. The baby can recover from this sometimes for only a few days while others may take weeks, maybe months. The baby might be suffering from a number of things such as fussiness, increased amount of crying, fever, shakes or tremors, trouble sleeping, diarrhea and throwing up. And many children have to go through this withdrawal process. Many mothers are advised not to just quit cold turkey while pregnant as that can negatively affect the child. Many times the doctor will suggest MAT (medically assisted treatment).

Something that is currently happening is the foster care systems are being overrun with children that are being put into this system because their parents are having addiction issues. Many places have scarce resources and this has been something that has overwhelmed the system. This is in part due to the opioid epidemic that is sweeping the nation.

Many children throughout the world are living with parents that have some type of addiction. No matter what the addiction is the children of addicts will almost always be affected by their parent's actions. Many children have parents that barely pay any attention to them. In some cases, some parents indeed neglect their children by not being there when they need it the most. Parents in active addiction are commonly absent from their child's life.

Many children are in a position where their parents want everything that is happening to be kept secret and these children are then scared to tell anyone outside the household what is really going on. Some children witness things like a parent or even both parents being passed out and unable to wake them. Some children are even traumatized by witnessing their parents overdose and die right in front of them. These are things that are incredibly difficult for a child so young to process. Things like that can leave scars and cause trauma to a child.

Many parents in active addiction ignore the many needs the children may have depending on their age. This can be things like going to the dentist and to the doctor, many children don't receive this type of care. Unfortunately, many children of addicts face the same type of issues, many children and their needs are simply neglected.

Some families may also have abuse problems with their addiction issues. Many parents are not in the right state of mind when they are in active

addiction. This can end up leading to abuse. It can be physical, sexual, mental or emotional abuse.

Other times children of parents with addiction issues face abandonment. Sometimes parents are just not there emotionally to help with their children. Sometimes children face physical abandonment where the parent can disappear from the child's life. Some children are facing both types of abandonment. Some parents leave the child alone for hours on end and some parents leave the children alone for days at a time. This can be parents just leaving without telling anyone or sometimes the parent may even be incarcerated during their disappearances unable to reach out to anyone for help.

Some children even get to a point where they act more like adults than their parents do. Many children get themselves up to be on time in the morning for school. Many are making their own meals. These children of addicts tend to have to grow up quicker than other children, they simply have to in order to survive. They also make sure to do good in school and complete all their homework on their own with no help from their parents.

Many children of addiction also develop different types of personality disorders. For example, some children develop narcissistic traits such as always wanting to be the center of attention, exaggerating achievements, showing off and ignoring the needs of others. There also might be anti-social type behavior being exhibited. Many children will lie, will be irresponsible and some might show impulsive qualities. These are just some of the ways children of addiction are affected.

Another thing that is prevalent amongst children of addiction is a fear of abandonment. They get severe anxiety at thinking of someone important in their lives just getting up and leaving. We may also criticize ourselves quite harshly and give ourselves low self-esteem. Many children have at one point or another been abandoned and now remember the fear that came along with that and the fear of that happening all over again.

All of these things that the child of an addict goes through are shaped by the substance abuse issues of their parents.

Something else that should be looked at is how having a parent with substance abuse issues affects the children's mental health. Many children grow up having anxiety and depression amongst a number of different ailments.

There are also many things that children of addicts go through such as seeing their parents inebriated. They may see their parents being abusive to other people in the family and then even themselves. Many times someone in the house will call the police on the parent that is acting out. They may

also see things like their parents fighting with the police and then getting arrested. These are some of the things that children of alcoholics and addicts face all too often. They may also witness things like their parent using and drinking until they pass out and the child cannot wake them. This can be scary for a child to see and be put through.

Because of the conditions that many of these children are living in many have been removed from their families and put into foster care. This is another thing that happens all too often when parents are stuck in active addiction. Many of these men and women are still fighting their demons and are in no position to be caring for a child as they can barely care for themselves most of the time.

So many foster care systems have been overrun with children of addicts being brought into the system. Something that has happened as of late is the opioid epidemic. Many children of parents who are addicted to opioids have been left by the wayside to fend for themselves.

Many children are also born addicted to drugs. This is something that is happening more and more. Children are born facing withdrawal from whatever drug their parent was using during the pregnancy. Many children are also born with birth defects due to the substance abuse of their parents. These children are at high risk for things like cerebral palsy, mental retardation, hypertension, strokes and SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome). These are just some of the risks associated with a parent using drugs during their pregnancy, there are many more.

What happens when these children finally reach adulthood? How do they process everything that they have been put through? Many of these children develop certain character traits that go along with being an adult that has faced having one or both of their parents being addicted to drugs or alcohol.

Later in life many of these children develop PTSD. Many of these children are going to witness many things that may be traumatic for them. They may also have no one to speak to about what's going on and this in and of itself is another traumatic moment in someone's life.

So how do the children of addiction get through the things that are going on in their life? How should someone speak to a child of addiction about what they are currently going through? I think we should take a very gentle approach in this as we do not know exactly how much the child we are speaking with has been affected. We need to teach these children that it is ok to speak about what is going on in their life. Many children have been taught not to speak about what is going on in the house and this is something major that needs to change.

I think once we are able to learn more about what each child is going through the easier it will be to custom tailor some type of program just for them.

Many times consulting or seeing a professional such as a licensed therapist or psychologist can help in explaining to the child exactly what is going on. One of the first things many people will explain is how to separate the person they love from the addiction and how they get when they are inebriated. This is a family disease and this must be explained to the child as everyone in the family is suffering.

Another thing that needs to be stressed and for these children to learn is that this is in no way shape or form their fault. Nothing they do causes someone to have trouble with addiction.

In the end, I believe the best way to help these children is through education. It must be explained in a way that each child could understand. We must educate all these children on why their parents are using drugs or alcohol and once again make sure they know none of this is their fault. And there is nothing they can do to get their parents better. This has to be done by the parent, it is their responsibility to be there for their children and be sober for them.