# Adult Children of Alcoholics (Acoa) Encyclopedia Article

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# Adult Children of Alcoholics (Acoa)

People over the age of 18 who have at least one biological parent with severe and repetitive life problems with alcohol are referred to as adult children of alcoholics. Because they have family and genetic ties to an alcoholic, these people carry an increased risk of severe alcohol problems themselves—from two to four times that of children of nonalcoholics. When children of alcoholics reach adolescence or adulthood, they might be slightly more likely to have problems with marijuana-type drugs or with stimulants (such as cocaine or amphetamines).

Some researchers have also observed that people whose childhood homes were disrupted by alcohol-related problems may have greater difficulties managing their adult lives. Research has indicated that some adult children of alcoholics have problems with procrastination, with honesty, with forming close, trusting relationships, and with learning to have fun. Some children of alcoholics worked so hard throughout their childhoods to be the mature caregiver to their childlike, substance-abusing, dependent parent, that they find it impossible to stop acting as a caregiver. They are unable to make choices that benefit themselves, sacrificing instead to the often overwhelming and unreasonable needs of others.

Adult Children of Alcoholics □, or ACOA, is the formal name of a self-help group. People with at least one alcoholic parent can meet with others to have discussions, to share past and current experiences, and to offer support to each other. Those who join this voluntary organization usually feel impaired by their experiences and thus seek help in coping with their past and/or present problems.

**%See Organizations of Interest at the back of Volume 1 for address, telephone, and URL.**

In the fields of **psychology** and **psychiatry**, there is interest in tracing the origin of certain personality traits thought to be common among adult children of alcoholics. These traits may or may not come about because of specific alcohol-related experiences in the childhood home. They may instead stem from (1) the general childhood environment in which an individual was raised, (2) additional psychiatric conditions among the parents, or (3) general factors associated with a **disordered** childhood home.

Alcoholic parents leave a legacy that can affect their children well after those children have themselves become adults. Luckily, a number of groups exist to help these people go on to live healthy, happy, productive lives.

## See Also

Al-Anon; Alateen; Codependence; Conduct Disorder.