

THE IMPACT OF ADDICTION ON CHILDREN & THE FAMILY SYSTEM

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Family Violence

Domestic Violence

- ▶ Usually male to female
- ▶ Partner violence more likely to involve alcohol than non-partner violence
- ▶ Relationship between alcohol dependence & physical abuse
- ▶ As amount & frequency of use escalates so does probability of violence
- ▶ Higher alcohol taxes may reduce consumption which may reduce female homicide
- ▶ *Women who are victims of violence or other traumatic events have higher rates of alcohol dependence*

Children

Scope of Problem

- ▶ Right now 10 million children live in a home where at least 1 parent has an SUD (20 million in past year)
- ▶ Most adults come from a family where at least 1 member had/has an AUD

Development

- ▶ Neural networks are still developing
- ▶ Can affect core beliefs about security and safety
 - Staying awake when parent drinks
 - Checking on sibling safety
 - Cooking meals
 - Coping plans for emergencies
- ▶ Viewed as overly mature, serious, well-organized

Abuse & Neglect

- ▶ Alcohol linked to child abuse
- ▶ Neglected children are more likely to be arrested for alcohol violations
- ▶ Yet depends on SES and cultural factors
- ▶ Break no talk/no trust → emotional expulsion
- ▶ Children are taught to not trust their own perceptions & instead turn to others for guidance & support even if others are dysfunctional & don't have child's best interests at heart

Abuse & Neglect

- ▶ Parent conflict might distract either from providing emotional support when child needs comfort & security
- ▶ Extremes of abuse & neglect from parental SUD may predispose child to depression, anxiety states, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, impulse control Dx, and later SUD
- ▶ Chronic stress for child can result in higher levels of illness
 - Blame self for use
 - Live in fear of divorce

Children Later On

- ▶ Later could grow up to be addicted to excitement/drama
 - Exciting partners to recreate family environment so they feel normal
- ▶ Adolescents trying to survive in these environments may not establish a strong self-concept or attend to other developmental issues of adolescence
- ▶ Can lead to codependency

Children of Alcoholics

- ▶ Carry a burden
- ▶ May not bring friends home &/or have few friends
 - Shame and unpredictability of alcoholic parent
- ▶ Sleep difficulties
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Loneliness
- ▶ Stomach problems
- ▶ Alienated from parents

Children of Alcoholics

- ▶ Poor communication skills
- ▶ Less trust
- ▶ More emotional longing
- ▶ ADHD 2.5–3x more likely if have a mother with AUD
- ▶ Lie
- ▶ Suppress feelings
- ▶ Withdraw from close relationships
- ▶ Anger toward nondrinking parent for not supporting & protecting

INTERVENTIONS

Coping Skills Training (CST)

Coping Skills Training

- ▶ Based on idea that family doesn't know how to cope so helps teach them how to cope with behavior of family member with SUD
 - Enabling, violence, conflicts
- ▶ Moves family members from victims to people taking steps to cope with the SUD

ACOA

Adult Children of Alcoholics

- ▶ Can find support from group Adult Children of Alcoholics (operates similarly to AA)
- ▶ Go to great lengths to hide parental drinking problem
- ▶ Secrecy & denial are key elements of family w/ alcohol problem
- ▶ Yet, children of alcoholics will open up if they perceive the listener to be supportive & trustworthy

Adult Children of Alcoholics

- ▶ Find it hard to receive & give love
- ▶ Devalue themselves
- ▶ Easily depressed
- ▶ Develop inordinate feelings
- ▶ Fear abandonment
- ▶ Handle authority poorly
- ▶ Feel guilt when asserting themselves
- ▶ Feel a great need to be in control
 - To avoid feelings of failure
 - To avoid self-deprecation

ACOAAs need to recognize 4 points

- ▶ Family affected by alcoholism isn't a normal family
- ▶ Responsibility & blame for an alcoholic family do not rest with them
- ▶ Growing up in an alcoholic household, although extremely painful, can be a learning experience
- ▶ ACOAAs have to acquire skills to form healthy relationships

Other Interventions

Other Interventions

- ▶ Help parent, especially if SUD is ≤ 3 yrs
- ▶ Parental substitutes like older siblings
parent surrogates like uncle, neighbor, real or imagined hero
- ▶ Viewing detachment as unconditional love
 - Learns behavior isn't a reflection on child
 - "I love you enough to let you be independent, even if the you choose a path of destruction"
 - Learn to establish & maintain interpersonal boundaries

Al-Anon & Alateen

Al-Anon & Alateen

- ▶ Al-Anon: for families
 - 12 steps, cope with stress of family substance use
- ▶ Alateen: for teens specifically
 - 12 steps, sharing, encouragement, info on alcoholism, blame, detachment from alcoholism

FAMILY RECOVERY

Process of Family Recovery

- ▶ Concept of Co-Addict
- ▶ Experiences & tasks of addiction & recovery are similar for all involved in family's addiction
- ▶ Yet, there are significant differences in hierarchy & equality when addict is a child (whether young, adolescent, or adult) than when the addicted person is part of an adult couple

Process of Family Recovery

- ▶ Recognize that there are many kinds of families single-parent, divorced parents, differences based on ethnic, cultural, social, gender, or religious identities

What is an Addicted Family?

- ▶ Family in which environment, or context of family life, becomes dominated by anxieties, tensions & chronic trauma of drug addiction
- ▶ Substance use becomes central organizing principle of family system, controlling & dictating core family beliefs, behaviors, & development

Family Denial

- ▶ There is considerable dissonance in family
- ▶ What is most visible & most problematic, the addiction, is most vehemently denied
- ▶ Denial operates to say to world “this doesn’t happen here or this doesn’t exist”, yet members of family are engaged in continuing crusade to make addict well or to simply enable the family to survive despite what is really happening

Family Denial

- ▶ When consequences of addiction become more visible & difficult to resolve (illness, job loss, physical abuse, arrest), need for secrecy grows, & family becomes a closed system, cutting itself off from outside input & help
- ▶ Individuals within family develop same behavioral & thinking disorders as addict: they are controlled by the reality of addiction & must deny it at the same time
- ▶ Individual development is sacrificed to greater needs of unhealthy addicted family

STAGES OF FAMILY RECOVERY

Stages of Family Recovery

- ▶ Stage 1: **Active Addiction**
- ▶ Stage 2: **Transition**
- ▶ Stage 3: **Early Recovery**
- ▶ Stage 4: **Ongoing Recovery**
- ▶ Relapse

Stage 1: Active Addiction



Active Addiction

- ▶ Family is caught in double-bind of active addiction
- ▶ Family is dominated & organized by realities of substance use, which everyone must deny *and* explain *at the same time*
- ▶ Family says: “There is no addiction and here is why we have to use the substance..
 - (e.g. because of stress of Dad’s job, children fight, mom is a terrible wife, etc.)

Focus

- ▶ The family focus is
 - To maintain denial of any problem with substance
 - To maintain a core belief that there is no addiction
 - To invent explanations for addicted reality
 - To cover up & maintain family secret
- ▶ The beginning task for recovery is:
 - To break down denial with any family member

Control

- ▶ Primary focus in this stage is on substance & using behavior
- ▶ Addict has lost ability & perhaps the desire to stop using & co-addicted family members cannot control the addict
- ▶ Core beliefs are
 - (1) there is no addiction of any kind
 - (2) there is no loss of control over use or anything else

Stage 2: Transition



Transition

- ▶ Family begins to recognize reality of addiction & loss of control (i.e. addict cannot control use & co-addict cannot control addict)
- ▶ Family may begin to challenge old beliefs that supported use & denial
- ▶ Family is moving toward “hitting bottom” & surrender

Primary Tasks of Transition

- ▶ To break denial
- ▶ To realize family life is out of control
- ▶ To begin to challenge core beliefs
- ▶ To hit bottom & surrender
- ▶ To accept reality of addiction & loss of control
- ▶ To allow addicted system to collapse
- ▶ To shift focus from system to individuals who begin detachment & individual recovery
- ▶ To enlist supports outside family
- ▶ To learn new abstinent behaviors & thinking

Shift

- ▶ Family as a whole shift from using to non-using & sometimes go back & forth until abstinence becomes steadier condition
- ▶ They develop new behaviors to cope with impulses to use or control family
 - E.g. call sponsor, attend meeting, or take a walk
- ▶ All family members are learning to disengage from old behaviors that locked them into unhealthy addicted system

Death of Denial

- ▶ Denial is breaking down
- ▶ As it crumbles, family feel despair
- ▶ Next, they hit bottom, then surrender & acceptance of loss of control
- ▶ Onset of abstinence is time of emotional vulnerability & dependency on external supports
- ▶ Individuals in recovery begin to develop new friends & activities centered on abstinence & support of 12-step program rather than using

Transition for Couples

- ▶ This can be difficult for couples in which only one partner is in a process of recovery, or one is farther ahead than the other
- ▶ There can be deep sense of loneliness & loss
- ▶ Some cope with these normal feelings by returning to active addiction
- ▶ Some couples separate
- ▶ Others weather threat of change within family, relying on experience of others outside family for support

Transition for Parents

- ▶ It is also difficult for parents who may not understand need for focus on themselves & own recoveries
- ▶ Parents may struggle if they disagree about addiction & what is necessary for recovery
- ▶ They have particularly hard time “letting go” of their children as it often feels to them like abandonment of a child in need
- ▶ Parents may not be able to reconcile their roles as protectors with need for child to accept responsibility for her/himself

Transition for Individuals

- ▶ Individuals may also be struggling with new concepts of surrender & higher power
- ▶ These concepts may threaten individual still clinging to core belief in control, or threaten family using system
- ▶ Surrender and vesting of dependency in higher power accomplish yielding to & acceptance of loss of control that opens way toward positive, healthy growth & recovery

Stage 3: Early Recovery



Early Recovery

- ▶ Steady abstinence, as new attitudes, behaviors, & thinking are integrated
- ▶ Individual development continues to take precedence over family system
- ▶ New behaviors are continuously developed & expanded to support abstinence & sobriety
- ▶ Begin to cope with uncomfortable feelings & impulses to use or return to co-addicted behaviors
- ▶ Only when new behaviors are internalized can recovering individuals move from action to reflection, insight, & inner exploration

Primary Tasks of Early Recovery

- ▶ To continue to learn abstinent behaviors & thinking
- ▶ To stabilize individual identities:
 - I am an addict and I have lost control
 - I am a co-addict and I have lost control
- ▶ To continue close contact with 12-step programs & begin working steps
- ▶ To maintain a focus on individual recovery, seeking supports outside the family
- ▶ To continue detachment & reduced family focus

Insight & Emotions

- ▶ Deeper insight & emotions
- ▶ Period of emerging emotions that may feel out of control
- ▶ Individuals cope with emotions through structure of the 12-step programs, learning to identify & name feelings & accept emotion without having to act on or change it
- ▶ Individual's new belief structure, "I am an addict & I cannot control my use," or "I am co-addict & I cannot control addicted person" is more firmly in place

Fear

- ▶ Fear of returning to co-addictive thinking & behavior
- ▶ Initially fear is helpful to provide motivation & energy to create supports & learn new behaviors
- ▶ The co-addict works to focus on detachment & disengagement, rather than the addict
- ▶ As abstinence strengthens, fear of becoming obsessed with addict becomes warning that new awareness, conflicts, or past memories will emerge and cause pain

Stage 4: Ongoing Recovery



Ongoing Recovery

- ▶ Individual recoveries are solid & attention can be turned back to family
- ▶ Abstinent behavior is stabilized.
- ▶ External behavioral controls give way to internalization so that individuals can reflect on an impulse to use or control family rather than substituting a direct action
- ▶ Reliance on the steps facilitates emotional & spiritual growth

Primary Tasks of Ongoing Recovery

- ▶ To continue abstinent behavior
- ▶ To continue & expand addict & co-addict identities
- ▶ To maintain individual programs of recovery; to continue to work 12 steps & internalize principles
- ▶ To work through consequences of addiction & co-addiction
- ▶ To add focus on couple, parenting, & family issues
- ▶ To deepen spirituality
- ▶ To balance and integrate combined individual & family recoveries

Out with the old...(sort of)

- ▶ Develop new interests & pursue old ones in different & more meaningful way
- ▶ Develop new relations & expand one's life
- ▶ Some construct a social life & support system that includes non-AA/12-step individuals
- ▶ They are able to bridge existing differences in recovery & non-recovery environments
- ▶ For some, social life remains anchored in AA/NA & Al/Nar-Anon, reinforcing a focus on themselves & their own recoveries

Spirituality

- ▶ Individual is further developing personal concept of & relationship to higher power
- ▶ Spiritual focus alters beliefs, values, & attitudes about self & others
- ▶ Control is vested in power greater than individual
- ▶ Spiritual foundation changes recovering individuals deeply as feel more solid connection with others & universe

Roll the credits...

- ▶ Strong individual recovery lays foundation for return to couple, parent/child, & family focus that will accent new relationship with healthy, open communication, equality between adults & possibly greater intimacy
- ▶ An appropriate hierarchy between parents & children will be established with clear recovery rules, roles, & boundaries
- ▶ Much of stage involves finding a balance between individual, couple, parent/child & family growth.

Relapse



Relapse

- ▶ Can occur at any stage
- ▶ Shift back to use & perhaps addictive mind set
- ▶ Desire to use > desire & support for abstinence
- ▶ To avoid, addict must have good external support (AA/NA & supportive environment), ability to substitute new behaviors for substance use, & knowledge of how to remain sober (“work” program)
- ▶ Relapse for co-addicted partner includes same shift back to using behaviors & perhaps a “using” mind set

RELAPSE

- ▶ High
- ▶ Return to high-risk environment
 - partner uses
 - lack coping
 - lack social support
 - cues
- ▶ Predictors
 - negative emotions
 - interpersonal conflicts
 - social pressure
- ▶ Less likely to relapse if:
 - Married
 - Employed (4 years)
 - Quit for years (5)
- ▶ Recovery predictors
 - compulsory supervision
 - new relationships
 - substitute dependency
 - inspirational group membership
- ▶ Tx of 6 mos is best