

## **THE ADDICTED FAMILY – AN OVERVIEW**

Addictive diseases trap the addict and the entire family. The addiction governs the thoughts, feelings and actions of every family member. You need to understand the effects on the family, as well as the roles that family members take on, and how to get help.

### **Understanding Chemical Dependency:**

Chemical dependency (alcohol or drugs) is not a character weakness. It is a disease. Addicts are physically and psychologically dependent on a chemical.

The circumstances under which people begin using alcohol or drugs vary widely. No one is to blame. No one “drives” anyone else to addiction. The chemical seems harmless to the addict at the outset. Over time, however, the addict finds that larger and more frequent doses are needed to get the same effect. The addict becomes isolated as he or she struggles to maintain control. By now, the addict is less reliable as the chemical takes center stage in his life.

### **Effects on the Family:**

The addict’s family members share these concerns:

- ☞ They are suspicious of the addict’s action. This leads to constant family conflict.
- ☞ They blame themselves for the addict’s illness.
- ☞ They are afraid of the addict’s unpredictability, especially of the mood swings. They also fear that the family unit will break up.
- ☞ They are constantly feeling disappointed by the addict due to the addict’s inability to live up to commitments and obligations.
- ☞ They feel isolated by the unspoken rule not to discuss the problem among themselves.
- ☞ They are embarrassed by the addict’s behavior.
- ☞ They resent the unfair demands placed on them by the addict.

### **Family Roles:**

Family members take on inappropriate roles:

- ☞ The **rescuer** want to protect the addict from the consequences of the addiction by making excuses for him or her.
- ☞ The **caretaker** tries to compensate for the addict’s unreliability and minimize the possibility of trouble.
- ☞ The **rebel** draws attention away from the family’s primary problem of addiction.
- ☞ The **hero** engages in exemplary behavior, secretly thinking that this will make it easier for the addict to quit.
- ☞ The **blamer** makes the addict the scapegoat for all the family’s problems while not doing anything positive to change the situation.
- ☞ The **adjuster** distances himself or herself from pain by withdrawing from upsetting situations.

Roles learned in childhood due to the presence of an addict in the family will carry over into adulthood. Adults who are struggling with the results of growing up in an addicted family may need the support of Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA) groups. (ACOA is not necessarily just for alcohol-related problems.) To find out more about ACOA groups, you can contact the Employee Assistance Program. HelpNet EAP offers professional, confidential counseling at no cost to you or your family members. To find the location nearest to you, see the reverse side of “HelpNet Works.” Help is available to assist you at HelpNet EAP 24 hours a day and 365 days a year.

Family members cannot control an addict’s behavior, but they can control their own lives and free themselves. Sometimes we adapt and allow ourselves to live under the worst possible conditions because no one points out the obvious – we don’t have to live that way and we are capable of changing ourselves to improve our own lives. You don’t have to wait for the addict in your family to make a decision to change. Call HelpNet today for an appointment or further information – let the healing begin.