

Chemical Dependency and the Family

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What is a Family?

The Disease of Addiction

How Addiction Affects Families

Family Roles Typical of Chemically Dependent Families

What Can I Do?

Healthy Vs. Troubled Families

Remember, there is no right or wrong, good or bad, black or white. If emotional pain exists, we have a choice to stay in the pain or make changes to remove the pain.

	Healthy Families	Troubled Families
1. Rules	Few rules exist, and they are clear and specific. Rules are respected, consistently enforced, fair, and negotiable. Rules lead to a predictable environment.	Some rules are occasionally enforced, but others are not. Often no discussion is allowed on changing or modifying rules. In some cases rules are completely absent, making members feel uncertain or anxious because they do not know what is OK and what is not.
2. Communication	Clear responsibility is taken for statements, which are open and considerate of others. People take risks to express feelings, ideas, and beliefs. If a problem exists, the family discusses it and seeks outside help if necessary.	Communication is almost nonexistent. There is a lot of talking about the person instead of to the person. Double messages, secrets, and a lot of "shoulds" and "ought to-s" are frequent. Family secrets are protected at all costs, and there is fear of seeking outside help.
3. Alliances	Members take time with one another individually and together. There is a strong parental relationship.	Family members take sides and reject other members. They form hidden relationships (even across generations.) The parental relationship is weak or nonexistent, or one parent may dominate.
4. Feelings	Members allow and respect feelings. There is an honest expression of vulnerable feelings.	Members do not discuss or allow feelings. There is fear of feelings; people try to hurt one another. Some feelings are OK, whereas others are not.
5. Self-worth	High self-worth exists. Persons are separated from their behavior. Members listen with interest and respect. Members respect other's views.	Individuals are treated without respect (this includes adults and children.) Children are seen but not heard. A person is condemned, not his or her behavior. Shame is used for punishment. Blaming is common. Cynicism and negative attitudes exist.
6. Change	Members are open to change.	Members are rigid, fixed, and not open to change. "Nothing can be done; what's the use."
7. Defenses	Members display defenses that are functional and appropriate to the situation.	Problems and feelings are denied. Pain is hidden. Strange or unusual behavior is ignored. There is a "no talk" rule – even about serious problems.
8. Stress	Members know how to deal with stress. They can see when others are in pain and can nurture and comfort.	Members avoid pain in themselves and others. They deny stress and often feel they can't cope.
9. Growth	Members accept and welcome life stages.	Parents may compete with children, growth is painful, and change is feared.
10 Control	There is less need to control. Parents are in charge but can negotiate. They respect children's opinions.	There is rigid control or shifting patterns of domination, possible upside-down family (children running the family.)

THE DISEASE OF CHEMICAL DEPENDENCY AND CO-DEPENDENCY

For the addict:

- Preoccupation with alcohol/drug
- Increased physical tolerance to alcohol/drugs
- Blackouts
- Hides drinking
- Avoids reference
- Guilt
- Alibis, rationalizes
- Failed efforts to control use
- Grandiose and aggressive behavior, unpredictable personality changes
- Broken promises
- Increased withdrawal from others
- Neglect of physical self-care
- Ill health, falls, accidents
- Work, legal and family problems
- Tremors, eye-openers
- Decreased tolerance
- Impaired thinking, confusion

For the family:

- Preoccupation with the addict
- Increased tolerance of unacceptable behavior
- Family denial of problem, avoid reference
- Guilt
- Makes excuses, cover-up
- Failed efforts to control use, to control the family environment
- Arguments, fights, anger and anxiety; inconsistent reactions
- Disappointment, hurt, confusion
- Family isolation
- Lack of communication
- Stress-related illnesses; sleep disturbances, eating disorders
- Financial stress, assuming responsibilities, chaos
- Family violence, sexual abuse
- Increased hopelessness, depression, despair
- Lack of clarity in decision-making, confusion
- Obsessive preoccupation with chemically dependent person, continued problems with health, work, school, relationships