

Adult Children of Alcoholics Often Confused

By Barbara Kaplan, MHDL
Reprinted from *Lambda Connection*

It is my experience that it is not uncommon for an adult child of an alcoholic (ACOA) to enter therapy with his/her partner with concerns about their immediate relationship. The ACOA may feel confused, have a feeling of being different from others, need constant approval, and exercise rigid control over oneself and others. She/he may judge oneself too harshly, be impulsive, compulsive, irresponsible, or super responsible, and be loyal to others when it is not deserved. Depression and feelings of impending doom may be present as well as an overwhelming fear of abandonment.

Many ACOA are not aware that these characteristics are common for the child who was raised in a family where alcoholism was present, whether or not the alcoholic was violent when drinking. Alcoholism is a family disease. The family members do not have to be alcoholic or drink at all to be affected by the disease.

The alcoholic family is a dysfunctional system. The environment is clearly out of the range of what is considered normal. Chaos, violence, constant stress and denial are part of the system. Many people are familiar with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a problem seen in a number of Viet Nam veterans. The symptoms these people experience are similar to the characteristics of ACOAs.

People who are raised in this dysfunctional system simply do not know what normal is. They guess! They do not know what others know. And to complicate matters, the guessing is usually kept a secret from others.

There are over 26 million ACOA. Many are not aware that they were raised with the disease. Others acknowledge alcoholism but are not aware of the consequences. The child grows up, leaves home, but simply does not connect the turmoil in their present adult primary relationship with the hurt and pain of their earlier family system. It's fairly common for people to think that the disease is left behind or because the booze stopped, the disease was cured — over and done with. This does not happen. And it is evident in repeated failed relationships. Intimacy requires the sharing of thoughts and feelings.

For the ACOA, she/he learns at an early age to hide and deny feelings and not to trust one's own perceptions and thoughts. Three rules for alcoholic families seem to be: don't trust, don't feel, don't talk.

Although ACOA are affected by their past, as we all are, it is not necessary to be victims. We have a choice. Understanding the disease is a beginning. ACOA can work through their pain, fears and hurts.

Barbara E. Kaplan, MHDL, a psychotherapist, is in private practice in North and South Carolina. She holds a dual license in South Carolina as a Marriage and Family Therapist and as a Professional Counselor.

**SOMETIMES, DON'T YOU WISH YOU
DIDN'T HAVE TO THINK ABOUT AIDS?**



AIDS isn't something we can wish away. And safer sex isn't just for some of the time. Protecting ourselves and those we love means thinking about what we do and using condoms every time.

WISHING CAN'T PREVENT AIDS. CONDOMS CAN.

map

Metrolina AIDS Project

Hotline - 333-2437

Office 333-1435

All New, Just For You

New Chef — New Menu
and
New Wine List

Liaisons
RESTAURANT

Valentine's Day

Dinner Specials for Two

Call For Reservations Now

Sundays

Brunch From 11:00 - 3:00

Bloody Marys, Mimosa, and Champagne \$1.50

Now Open

5:00 P.M. until

Monday-Saturday

Upstairs or Down 5:00 - Close:

Steamed Clams, \$6.25 dz.

or Steamed Oysters \$6.95 dz.

Accepting Applications For: Parttime Experienced Cook
Waitstaff No Phone Calls Please

Liaisons

316 Rensselaer Avenue

Charlotte, NC

(704) 376-1617