



## Parental Drug and Alcohol Problems

### Confused about feelings

- I am really confused. My dad has a problem with drinking and it really worries me. No one else in my family talks about it. Is it normal for me to feel this worried?
- Should we be talking about it?
- Sometimes I feel so angry with my dad for doing drugs. I just wish he'd stop.
- What should I do when I feel angry like this?

**Q. I am really confused. My dad has a problem with drinking and it really worries me. No one else in my family talks about it. Is it normal for me to feel this worried?**

**A.** Every family situation is different. Only you know how you are feeling and what way things are for you living in your family.

Children and young people can be affected in a number of different ways and it can be really hard to accept that this is happening in your family.



- When a parent has a problem with drugs or alcohol, it often means that they are not available to help other family members, including their children.

- You may feel that your dad is not there for you to talk to when you need him, possibly to help with homework or hear how your day has gone.
- Important family celebrations like birthdays or holiday events can be spoiled or forgotten about. This can be really disappointing and hurtful.

***'I'm scared; I'm always scared in case he's sick in his sleep or something. So I'm always... whenever he falls asleep... I'm always turning him over and all that' Kate, 16***

- Sometimes daily family routines such as mealtimes and bedtimes are affected, and you may have no routine at home.
- Other times, because alcohol and drugs can cause people to become loud and aggressive, there can be arguments at home which upset everyone.
- You might end up taking on a caring role and feel like you are 'minding' your parent when they have taken drugs or alcohol.

All of these worries are normal reactions to this situation. It can be even more difficult if no one else at home is talking about it. Try talking with someone else in your home or another adult you can trust.

## Q. Should we be talking about it?

A.

It's really important to find someone you can trust to talk to and share your feelings with as keeping everything to yourself will only add to the problem. Because drug and alcohol problems affect how a family works, people often like to keep it a secret. It really won't help you to do this.

You don't need to talk about it all the time, but not talking at all can lead to feelings of confusion. Sometimes young people living in this situation can start blaming themselves for what is happening. You must remember that none of this is your fault.

When tense feelings or problems are kept inside for too long, sometimes we can snap or explode and then we end up doing things we wouldn't normally do. Because of too much tension or stress, we can end up acting out of character. This could mean getting into trouble at school or having problems with people in authority.

- Some young people might start missing school and getting into trouble at school.
- Others may start staying out late to be out of the house as much as possible and end up getting in trouble with Gardaí.
- Other young people may become withdrawn, which is a sign of the sadness they are feeling.
- They may be exhausted and weary, and not want to hang out with friends or do activities in school or hobbies.

None of these actions are good choices for you and will only make life harder.

If your home is not safe, it is important for you to be somewhere that is safe, like with other family members or in the home of a family friend. If you are out late at night and not in a safe place, you are putting yourself at risk and you might find yourself getting into trouble.

**You may find it hard to manage emotions and become very angry or withdrawn. However, by recognising how you feel and talking to a close friend or family member, you will be able to get help and support for yourself.**

## Remember

**It is not your fault when someone has drug or alcohol problems. You are not responsible for 'fixing' them.**

**Q. Sometimes I feel so angry with my dad for doing drugs. I just wish he'd stop.**

A.

It is normal to wish your dad would stop. When a person becomes dependent on drugs or alcohol they experience a loss of control and need to get help to stop. It is ok that you want him to stop, but he has to want to do this himself. This can be really hard to do. Stopping will mean getting professional help. See [Finding Help](#).



It is also very normal to have strong feelings about what is happening in your family. It is important to recognise these feelings and where they are coming from. There are no right or wrong feelings. You can find ways for dealing with your angry feelings which will help you to cope.

- When anxious and stressed like this, you may find that your own health starts to suffer and you could develop physical symptoms such as stomach pains or headaches. This is **not ok** and you really need to talk to an adult you trust who can help you to get you medical attention for your physical symptoms, if necessary, and counselling to help you cope with how you are feeling.
- In families where drugs or alcohol are causing harm, the problems can seem to take over family life. Life can seem so unfair, especially when parents do not take responsibility.
- Some children and young people feel sad and lonely.
- They can also feel tired and worn out.
- As with you, there can be angry feelings and confusion.
- Some young people can feel very scared about what is happening.

There are so many different feelings to describe all the different situations facing a young person living with parental drug and alcohol problems. Some of these may include being:

- Worried
- Guilty
- Hopeless
- Overburdened
- Disappointed
- Even unloved

**However, there can still be feelings of strength, positivity and hope that things will get better.**

Q.

**What should I do when I feel angry like this?**

A.

When your parent is taking drugs or under the influence of alcohol it is not a good idea to get angry with them. Your mum or dad won't be thinking straight and won't be able to tune into what you are saying.

Also this could lead to a row and arguments, and the situation may become unsafe. Drugs and alcohol can make people behave in an aggressive way, sometimes leading to domestic violence.

**The [section on Domestic Abuse](#) on this website may be of help to you.**

While it is best to have an adult who can protect you and help you to be safe, it is very important that you do what you can to help keep yourself safe.

If you are angry about something that is happening at home, it may be best to leave the house and go and talk to a family member, neighbour or friend. Even getting out of the house to go for a walk or to kick a ball around may help you to calm down.

You can try to talk to your dad later when he is not under the influence or ask someone else to if you do not feel you are able to.

## **Remember**

- **Parents who have problems with alcohol and drugs do love their children.**
- **Drugs and alcohol affect how people behave and cause them to say and do things which they would not do if they were not drunk or high.**