



How to Come to Terms with an Alcoholic Parent

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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There's an old saying "You will never be disappointed unless you have expectations".

So often society helps feed our goals and dreams. We want the ideal family and relationships that are often portrayed in the Hallmark commercials where everyone is happy and eager to build strong connections with each other.

But life doesn't work that way and sometimes addictions set up patterns that are divisive and disappointing for the family members.

Over the years I have worked with so many clients who have been let down by an alcoholic parent who has made a promise that s/he has not kept. The child looks forward to seeing it fulfilled and hopes that "this time it will be different" only to be upset with the parent who failed to follow through as expected and themselves for trusting yet "one more time". Over time, the disappointment can turn to anger, resentment and emotional barriers that block that parent out.

Those who have advanced into a state of alcoholism have two factors to consider. They are physiologically addicted and psychologically addicted. In very general terms this means that most of their time and energy is devoted to filling the needs and wants that the addiction demands of them. Even when they truly want to meet the needs of those who they love, it is not always possible for several reasons:

1. Sometimes they forget - They might be so focused on the drinking that it never crosses their mind that someone is depending on them for something.
2. They might be too drunk - "One drink is too many and fifty are not enough" is a popular saying in recovery circles. When an alcoholic starts drinking, they are usually not able to stop. Perhaps they think that taking that one drink will help them to relax or prepare for the upcoming promised event. Unfortunately, it usually puts an end to it before it even begins.

If you are trying to come to terms with an alcoholic parent, there are several things to consider:

1. This is NOT your fault - Each of us chooses how we will behave and the alcoholic's behaviour is not about you. It is about their addictive habit that has led them to an extremely unhealthy way of living.
2. You cannot "fix" another person - As much as you would like to help your parent to make different life choices, it is up to the parent to make the decision and behaviour changes.
3. You can still have a healthy life in which you enjoy activities, relationships and health - Your parent can be an influence but you, too, have the ability to make your own decisions and live your own life.
4. Things might never change for your parent - As sad as this might seem, some people never let go of their addictions.

5. There are many supports with wonderful people who will help you to detach in a healthy way. Alcoholics Anonymous and associated programs such as Al-anon are there for all family members who want to access the services.

Coming to terms with an alcoholic parent is not an easy task. As long as you keep the focus on your own life and choices, however, you will find that your efforts can lead to change that will be beneficial for you!