



KIM'S STORY

It's Monday morning, and Kim hears the slamming of a door. She already knows her parents have started arguing because of her mom's time at the bar last night. Even though the bar closed at 12 am, her mom snuck in drunk a little after 2:00. Kim covers her head as her parents start screaming at one another, but she can't drown out the noise. She hears her dad throwing bottles around the kitchen and her mother crying. She knows she only has a few more moments before her little brother Adam will come running into her room. He's only 6 and is afraid of the noise. "Come see, little man," Kim says softly, "It's going to be ok. Let's get ready for school." She goes down to the kitchen to fix some breakfast, but sweeps the floor up first.

Her parents continue fighting in the living room for a few more minutes, and Kim hears her dad pick up his keys to leave. After fixing breakfast and feeding Adam, she helps him brush his teeth, comb his hair and get dressed. Then Kim rushes to dress herself, not even remembering to comb her own hair. As they run out the door, she catches a glimpse of her mother pulling a hidden bottle out from behind the sofa. "Come on, Adam. We have to walk fast to school so we won't be late."

As Kim sits in her algebra class, she realizes she forgot to pick up her homework from off the coffee table in the living room. "I've got to talk to my parents about my mom's alcoholism. I just can't keep living this way," Kim thinks to herself silently. Later that evening, after Kim puts Adam to bed, she walks into her parents' room and says, "Mom, can I talk to you? I really love you and care about you. I'm worried about your drinking, and I want you to get help. I'll even go to an A.A. meeting with you. I just want you to get the help you deserve."

TEST YOURSELF!

Test your knowledge on alcoholism and how to best deal with an alcoholic parent.

- The best time to start a discussion about getting your parent to stop drinking is after they've had a few drinks.
 - True
 - False
- Alcoholism is...
 - Drinking too much or too often
 - Being physically addicted to alcohol
 - Continuing to drink even when a person knows their drinking causes a problem
 - All of the above
- A constructive way to get your mind off your alcoholic parents includes...
 - Journaling
 - Getting drunk yourself
 - Bottling up all of your emotions
 - Getting into an argument
- You should suggest your parent cut back on their drinking by telling them you'll buy their alcohol for them.
 - True
 - False
- Many people who suffer from alcoholism also have some other sort of issue, such as depression.
 - True
 - False

DEALING WITH AN ALCOHOLIC PARENT



Answers: 1. b; 2. d; 3. a; 4. b; 5. a;

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SPEAK UP!

ARE YOU SURE YOUR PARENT IS AN ALCOHOLIC?

Warning Signs

First of all, it's very important to know the difference between alcoholism and alcohol abuse. While both are very serious, abuse is when a person has unhealthy or dangerous drinking habits, like drinking every day or drinking too much at a time. Many people who abuse alcohol have strained or damaged relationships, may miss a lot of work, or continue to drink even when they know their drinking causes problems.

Alcoholism takes alcohol abuse one step further. In addition to all of the problems that alcohol abuse causes, alcoholism is when a person is physically or mentally addicted to alcohol, and they sincerely believe they need alcohol just to get by. It's not a weakness or a lack of willpower; alcoholism is a serious disease.

In the United States alone, there are approximately 28 million children who have at least one alcoholic parent. It's also estimated that 11 million of those children are under the age of 18.

Families with alcohol addiction often have other problems.

Some of these problems may include:

- Difficulty communicating
- Financial issues and struggles that contribute to a more stressful life
- Poorly managed homes—homes with no set schedule, structure or discipline
- Poor or absent parenting skills
- Conflict in the home including arguing, fighting and physical abuse



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- First, try and understand the causes of alcoholism. Many people who start abusing alcohol do so because they are depressed. However, alcohol is a depressant, so it makes a person feel even more depressed as they drink. As their abuse continues, they may become physically or mentally addicted and believe they need alcohol to cope with their feelings.
- Avoid arguing with an intoxicated parent. Depending on how much they've had to drink, your parent may not even remember your argument, but there's also the chance of them refusing to open up to you in any future talks. There's also a chance of you getting physically hurt, too. It's best to avoid sounding sarcastic or like you're nagging; instead, phrase your concerns as a request coming from a worried child.



- Try talking to them when they are sober. Plan on talking to them when you're both calm and your parent hasn't been drinking. Sit them down and tell them exactly how you feel, explain what problems have arisen because of their drinking, and make it clear what behavior you will and won't tolerate. For example, say that if their drinking keeps putting you or someone else in physical danger, you'll take action like leaving to stay with someone else. You may not be able to convince them to stop altogether, but you can help them understand how their alcoholism affects you.

DO WHAT YOU SAY

Be Firm

Stay consistent with your alcoholic parent. If you tell your parent that you'll do something as a result of their drinking, stick to it. Inconsistency on your part may keep you stuck in the cycle of enabling their behavior. Remember to not aid your parent's alcoholism by giving them money for alcohol or buying it for them.



HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?

Let It Out!

Let your feelings out and do things to keep your mind off of your situation at home. There's something extremely beneficial to writing down your feelings, either online or in a journal. Finding a way to express your feelings may help you process and deal with them. Dealing with your emotions and looking after yourself should be your biggest priority. If you're constantly worrying about your parent's alcoholism, you will eventually begin to feel drained and upset. Also remember to surround yourself with friends and family members who love and support you.

Understand that your parent's alcoholism is NOT your fault, and leave if the situation becomes toxic or dangerous. Even if they didn't directly tell you it's your fault, you may still feel the blame. Remember that your parent was the one who chose to abuse alcohol, not you. If you are being physically or mentally abused, leave. No one deserves to be harmed, so have a plan for who you should contact when you need a safe place. You should also never get in a car with your parent after they've been drinking. Driving drunk is extremely dangerous, so don't put yourself at risk by riding with them. Call a relative, another trusted adult, or even a friend.