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Student

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Adult Children

Introduction

A parent's role in a growing person's childhood is a vital part of the developmental process. Children that are raised in a family that includes living with a parent(s) that abuse a substance(s) have a greater risk of mentally developing different traits from those who do not experience that type of household. Most research comes to similar consensus about how the character traits and adult life stresses will be caused by the abuse from an addicted parent(s). Cases can range from one extreme of the scale to the opposite extreme. Cases can include children in and out of foster care, continuously being exposed to an addicted guardian or parent. This can inadvertently teach them bad ways of life and the children are not taught proper ways to cope with life stresses or occurrences. The opposite side of the scale, there is less exposure to the addicted family member and the learned traits that can alter a child's character later in life. This type of limited exposure can include a family member who binge drinks, someone that comes and goes as they please, a relative they see every so often, etc. Each case is different based on the child and how their mind develops to cope with different situations. Most children growing into adults often share similar traits such as, trust issues, intimacy difficulties, low self-esteem, often seeks approval and many **more.**

Commented [LS1]: This is a nice overview of your focus, -
-. I love the way this project has expanded and taken a
different shape than I think you originally planned on. I
especially appreciated your presentation and how impactful
I think it was on your audience 😊

I'm so proud of how willing you were to put yourself out
there

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In reading sides of the spectrum, children with an alcoholic or addicted parent still show similar signs of development. The severity of these traits and the long-term effects can vary from one child to the next. With my personal experience growing up with an alcoholic parent, I exhibit some, if not most of the traits that are associated with being a COA (Children of Alcoholics).

My mother ended up serving time, my father sunk into a depression that made him mentally and physically ill, my brother became a larger pain in the ass developing teenager, and I fell from childhood – directly into adulthood. With my mother gone, my brother, father and I developed a new system at home. We attempted to act as if there was no real emptiness, but there was. During this period when my mother was absent from my life, she attempted to communicate with me every time she called. She had managed to convince the family she will work on her sobriety; admitting she had a problem to be dealt with. Even still, I refused her phone calls and I refused to read the letters she sent me in full. When she asked; I told her they went in the trash.

Commented [LS2]: I like how this style choice ended up. I think using italics helps sets off your narrative while keeping it central to your discussion.

It is important to remember that addiction can affect its host in many different forms. Each person affected by the addiction will affect their surrounding loved ones but the way in which these people are affected can change overtime. Most adult children that have grown up with an addicted family member have similar characteristics. These characteristics include, trust and abandonment issues, intimacy difficulties and low self-esteem. Roughly 76 million American children have been exposed to some range of alcoholism or addictive behaviors in their family unit. Out of the 76 million estimated Americans that have faced this type of problem, roughly 27 million of those Americans are just children. These children are being exposed to

Commented [LS3]: Where are these stats from? Remember to include in-text citations for any source material.

addictive behaviors at an age in which setting an example for behavior is important for their development. Though these children may not become an addict in the future, they have the learned behavioral traits that exposes them as an ACoA.

While alcoholism is a complicated disease, living with a parent(s) that have made the choice to drink in front of an innocent child may seem like an obvious child endangerment issue. These parent alcoholics often depend of the alcohol because of the chemical imbalance in the brain.

My father and I learned that alcoholism and other types of additions have a connection to a certain chemical imbalance in the brain. We learned that these family members must admit they have a problem, they must want to get help and let the people around them help. This was and still is one of the hardest concepts for me to understand. My mother once admitted to having a problem and was living in a rehabilitation center to get the help she said she wanted and needed. Yet, years after jail time, rehabilitation centers and family disappointment, she now believes she does not have a problem. How can someone go from acceptance and admittance to denial and dismissal?

Today, this is still one of that hardest concepts for most family members trying to help or fix their addicted loved one. It was an extremely hard idea to wrap my head around, and it still is today. I may never fully understand my mother's addiction to alcoholic or the triggers that led her to another bender and there are also hundreds of thousands of other children in the world today that are thinking the same things as me.

Sara Amato // Daughter of an Alcoholic Mother

Commented [LS4]: I think these headings are working well too. I like the way you have blended all of these distinct elements to create a unique text. You took risks here that I think have paid off

Sara Amato, a writer for the Washington Post had written an emotional piece about her mother being an alcoholic. Through this piece you can notice the stages of which each person typically goes through while having an addicted parent. Her story begins with her mother's inability to pick her up from a softball game. Her mother was only a block away from the school when she was in a car accident and was then arrested. The decline in her mother was rapid, and Sara began to see these characteristics in her mother change. Her mother attempted to hide her disease, pick random fights with her daughter and was often too intoxicated to drive her to scheduled events.

"But the more I thought about how hard it was coping with my mom's addiction growing up, the more I recognized that it was those troubles that shaped me. It's made me more cautious out of fear of being let down. But it's also made me more responsible in how I deal with people in my life. Maybe I didn't need a fresh start. I just needed to realize that I'm not my mother. I never trusted her to show up for me as a parent. I never felt she cared about me. And maybe she didn't or maybe she couldn't because she was always drunk, but it forced me to see how important it is to be there for the people in my life"
(Sara Amato).

Amato started to grow up and in doing so she began to see the person who raised her through a different lens. This disease does not just alter the person consuming the alcohol, but everyone else around them as well. From this point there are clear stages in Sara's story, she started to distract her mother to pour out the alcohol, next she started to keep her mother's condition to herself because of the shame. She became more independent, finding her own way to school events or friends houses. Staying away from the house as often as possible but feeling the guilt if something bad were to happen to her mother if she wasn't there to clean up after her. Then

finally, college. Moving away to take care of herself for a change. This space helped her realize that she needed to care for herself for a change and her mother's inability to admit she had a problem was not a burden that Sara needed to carry.

"Most importantly, I realized that talking about these issues and getting help isn't shameful, because alcoholism isn't a one-person disease: It affects everyone. I know that now at 27, but when I was 16? No, I was really stubborn. It took me a long time to realize that letting people in doesn't make you weak. And you should never feel alone when dealing with a loved one's addiction. Because you're not" (Sara Amato).

Her mother's drinking stopped her from drinking socially because she believes that she had a chance of becoming like her mother. While in some cases this might be true, Sara, like many other children of **alcoholics**, grow up with more caution and responsibility or hyper sensitivity to these types of situations. So, in part of growing up and away from your alcoholic parent, realizing that you are not your mother (or father) will benefit you greatly. Maybe that parents truly did care about you and had no way of showing it or maybe there is a different story. But admitting to yourself that you will not become, and you are not like your alcoholic parent is the first step in the Adult Child's recovery.

Characteristics Breakdown

Reading Sara's story was an important step in my own journey, one that I did not that I would have needed. While analyzing the research and characteristics that Adult Children tend to show, I had attempted to break down my own characteristics based on the research. None of these characteristics are exclusively part of growing up with an alcoholic parent, but they are commonly found in those who have.

Commented [LS5]: You're doing a nice job of also synthesizing each of these unique pieces to create a larger whole.

Trust Issues

Trust issues is a highly common affect left on those who have grown up in similar circumstances. Growing up with an alcoholic mother, I was always “waiting for the other shoe to drop,” no one knew when she would start drinking again. I remember times when I would tell her things in confidence in a mother-daughter conversation and the next thing I knew she was drunk and using those same things I told her against me.

Communication troubles

Communication is an extremely important part of any relationship. Adult Children often grow up in environments without the wisdom or nurturing family system that is needed to develop the basic important skills needed to grow up into an adult. That is why these children are often labels as Adult Children. They have missed that point in their childhood that develops communication cues.

Relationship Problems

Relationships are a more complex factor that can be considered a subcategory of communication. The communication issues that were first developed also manifest into something different when intimacy gets involved. It is often seen that the partner is unaware of the Adult child’s past, or does not understand the characteristics that can be prevalent. This leads to miscommunication and complications.

Harsh self-criticism

While I exhibit all of these characteristics, I feel most strongly about harsh criticism of myself. With my history with my mother, I never felt like I was able to make her proud. I was always told that everything I did was not good enough or things of that same nature. This made me develop this inner critic I have for myself. Even though I am starting to realize that there is

Commented [LS6]: These sections are really important. I appreciate the way you’ve set off each of these in a separate sections.

nothing I can do to change my mother, this criticism factor will stay with me because I was exposed to this concept during my strongest developmental stages.

Finding more comfortability in chaos rather than peace

This is something I did not think was true about myself until I started to read a little more deeply into how this could be developed. The fights, high tension and stress in a household can become the basis for your view of chaos. There were moments of peace, but the chaos became a normality. I now believe that this chaos base line made me unconsciously pick a major to study which is mostly built off of chaos, changing due dates and many long times working. Not to mention that Architecture is a mostly male dominated field, I added another dimension of chaos or stress on top of the workload.

Burden of responsibility

Much like Sara Amato story, I started to gain more responsibility at a younger age because I could not depend on my mother being able to drive me anymore. My father was out of town most of the time when my mother started to drink, so I needed to find other ways to get to my scheduled school events or sports practice.

Conclusion

Overall, Adult Children share a collection of characteristics that can develop from early childhood to adulthood stages. Each characteristic can develop for a range of reasons and the adult children over time learn to cope with their family history. I have only recently noticed the traits I've gained by growing up with an alcoholic mother, but the healing process has begun and today I am better for it. Much like Sara Amato, I did not notice the ways in which my mother's addiction had affected me until now and now I know that I am not my mother. Research numbers may say that children of addicted parents have a greater risk of becoming addicted themselves,

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but what they don't include is the numerous cases in which adult children are nothing like their parents. It is a choice the children have not make as they grow up, it is a new door and they chance to follow your own foot steps instead of your parents.

Commented [LS7]: Absolutely. Great takeaway.

Works Cited

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