

The Network Presents...

Home for the Holidays: A Guide for Student Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACoA)

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For many students with addicted family members, the holiday season acts more like a time machine, instantly transporting them back to a time when addicted behavior makes it seem like they have gone, “home for the holidays” rather than home to celebrate caring and sharing with members of the family.

Often, students who return to an addicted family unit have been away just long enough for memories of the family’s chaotic behavior to have been eroded by time. Still others are paralyzed by the fear of what awaits when they return to this likely chaos. In short, these young adults are all, at the least, anxious about returning home for the holiday season.

While this picture is not hard to envision, we must prepare ourselves to help students “get through” such situations. Here are several proactive steps counselors can consider in order to help students prepare for surviving “the holidays”:

[Reminders for Students]

1. Help students remember: **Just as no family member makes the alcohol or other drug dependent individual drink or use, neither can anyone keep him/her from drinking or using.**

This is arguably the single most frequent irrational belief held by untreated members of an addicted family. On a cognitive level, family members “know this” yet, on an emotional level, they have failed to “accept this.” This point is of paramount importance when helping students prepare for the holidays. If a client cannot accept her/his limits when interacting with the addicted family member, the client will react to the family problem rather than acting on a personal solution.

2. Help students remember: The 1st rule of codependency to be challenged is their need to put the addicted individual first, in front of all else in one’s life.

To this end, **discuss with your client the merits of inviting the addicted family member to celebrate and socialize with the family, but if he/she refuses, so be it... Go on and celebrate your holiday anyway!**

3. Help students remember: As difficult as it is to deal with someone who is obnoxious and intoxicated, **avoid confrontations when the addicted individual is “under the influence.”** Confrontation is to the intoxicated person as kerosene is to a flame!

4. Help students remember: **While there is no excuse for the addicted individual’s behavior, it is understandable.**

Believe it or not, most addicted individuals do not intend to do what they do. True, they may intentionally drink or drug, but they do not necessarily intend to “act out.” In addiction counseling 101 we all learned that the working definition for the insanity of addiction is the belief that “this time it will be different.” This thought won’t lessen our frustration but it may help prevent being drawn into the craziness of addiction.

5. Help students remember: **Addiction is an issue of health not one of morality.** As the diabetic can no more tolerate sugar during the holidays than at any other time of the year, neither can the addicted person tolerate alcohol or pills any better just because it is the holidays. While it is true that the holidays seem to be a time when “more” of everything is somehow associated with seasonal celebrations, this increased presence does not mean that the addicted reveler is less susceptible or any better able to lessen the effects of intoxicating drink or other drugs.

[Help Students Remember...]

1. Just as no family member makes the alcohol or other drug dependent individual drink use, neither can anyone keep him/her from drinking or using.

2. The 1st rule of codependency to be challenged is the need to put the addicted individual first, in front of all else in one’s life.

3. As difficult as an obnoxious intoxicant may be to deal with, avoid confrontations when the addicted individual is “under the influence.” Confrontation is to the intoxicated person as kerosene is to a flame!

4. While there is no excuse for the addicted individual’s behavior, it is understandable.

5. Addiction is an issue of health not one of morality.

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