

# Tip Sheets for Employees

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## Adult Children of Alcoholics



### Alcoholism and the Family

Alcoholism affects the entire family. It is a progressive disease often characterized by broken promises, lies, silence and hidden feelings. There are an estimated 10 million alcoholics in this country, and according to the Children of Alcoholics Foundation, 1 out of every 8 Americans is raised in an alcoholic household. A child raised in an alcoholic family system learns to relate to the world and the people in it in ways that are not necessarily healthy or adaptive. It is important to note that not every family is affected identically.

ACOA refers to individuals who were adversely impacted by familial alcoholism. They can be generally categorized as individuals who, as children, coped with a home filled with confusion, unclear communication, chaos, inconsistencies, anxiety, embarrassment, and pain.

In the alcoholic home, children tend to take on various roles, usually as a defense mechanism against the disease that is threatening their family. One role that may be taken on is the "responsible" child. This child takes on the role of caring for other members of the family, and may try to ensure things seem as normal as possible.



### Common Traits and Behaviors

There tend to be emotional and psychological patterns developed by children raised in an alcoholic home which may result in some of the following characteristics in adulthood:

- Adult Children of Alcoholics:
- ~ Aren't sure what "normal" is.
  - ~ Tend to feel uneasy around authority figures.
  - ~ Tend to be people pleasers.
  - ~ Tend to feel uneasy when life is calm.
  - ~ Have difficulty in following through on projects.
  - ~ Lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.
  - ~ Judge themselves harshly.
  - ~ Have a hard time having fun.
  - ~ Look for immediate gratification.
  - ~ Take themselves very seriously.
  - ~ Have a hard time with intimate relationships.
  - ~ Overreact to changes over which they have no control.
  - ~ Constantly seek approval and affirmation.
  - ~ Feel that they are different from others.
  - ~ Tend to be either very responsible or very irresponsible.
  - ~ Are extremely loyal, even when it is apparent that loyalty is undeserved.
  - ~ Tend to be impulsive and make decisions without evaluating alternatives, or considering the consequences.

It is important to note that not all of these characteristics may apply to every individual ACOA.

### What to Do?

Personal reflection may help you understand the impacts of having grown up in an alcoholic environment on your adult life. It is also important to consider specific ways in which alcohol problems in your family continue to influence your life. This will help you work on any needed coping strategies.

What works for some may not work for others. Think about what is most appropriate for you. Self-help books may educate and support you sufficiently. Or, you may try group counseling, individual counseling, spiritual support, and website education.

All ACOA characteristics are learned coping strategies, and are focused on promoting survival, rather than growth. Often, the coping skills learned while growing up become problems for these individuals as adults. An inability to trust others or express emotions can impede an ACOA from forming loving intimate relationships.

### For more information, visit:

[www.adultchildren.org](http://www.adultchildren.org)  
[www.coaf.org](http://www.coaf.org)  
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