

DEALING WITH YOUR PARENTS

Your parents are interested in you. For many people, parents are an important source of support. Just because you may be preparing to go to university/college does not mean you need to ignore them! Keep the lines of communication open.

GAINING YOUR PARENTS' TRUST

Are your parents driving you mad? Do you want them to back off and trust you more?

Here are some tips to help:

- **RESPECT** - If you want them to respect you, then you have to respect them.
- **TALK** - If you have something you need to talk about, tell them. Trust can't be built on secrets.
- **DON'T TAKE ADVANTAGE** - If you keep asking your parents for money and other things, they may treat you as a child. If you don't want to be treated as a child, don't act like one.
- **BE FRIENDS** - Do something fun with your parents and let them into your life so they can start to see you as an adult and a friend.
- **HELP OUT** - Help the family with yard work or errands. You want them to see you are responsible and they will trust you more.
- **FOLLOW THROUGH** - If you agree to do something, do it and do it well.

DEALING WITH PARENTS IN A "DYSFUNCTIONAL" FAMILY

Growing up in a dysfunctional family is more common than you may think. However, life in every family has challenges! So, when it comes time to go to college/university you may not hesitate to pick up and move, excited to start your own life. However, even after leaving home, you may find yourself faced with confusion and other difficulties due to your upbringing as well as continued family contact.

The difficulties that carry over into adulthood may include:

- **Relationship issues** - Difficulty maintaining friendships and romantic relationships
- **Trust issues** - Difficulty letting people get close
- **Resentment** - Angry with family, angry outbursts
- **Embarrassment** - Ashamed of your family and your family history

If one of your parents has a mental illness, it is important to educate yourself about their illness. Once you know more about the challenges they face, you may be more understanding of them.

Give yourself time to grieve. Know you are not to blame for their illness.

DEALING WITH ALCOHOLIC PARENTS

A lot of people assume alcoholics choose to drink and get very frustrated by the thought of someone not choosing to quit. But in fact, there's a lot more involved than just making that choice.

It won't make a difference if you try to make your mom/dad stop drinking by running a marathon, doing extra well in school or helping out more with the family. Truth is – it likely won't do anything except make you feel more frustrated.

So stop wasting your energy on trying to impress them and start taking care of yourself. You cannot make an alcoholic snap out of it. The alcoholic is the only person who can take charge of their disease.

WHY DOESN'T SHE/HE JUST QUIT DRINKING?

Because the truth hurts — denial gives reason for more drinking. It's easier to blame other causes for your problems than to take responsibility.

Many alcoholics feel sorry for themselves and may be resentful of their family members. Criticizing them will not usually be helpful.

Try to understand, be respectful and sympathetic. Covering up for them and nagging them will not usually help. A good idea would be to join a support group for children of alcoholic parents. But most importantly, be patient and live your own life.

WHY DO I FEEL SO BAD?

Because someone you love is hurting themselves and there is nothing you can do.

it is normal to feel:

- **Guilty** – You may feel guilty that you haven't been able to help change things.
- **Angry** – You may be angry with your parents for not being there for you or making your life difficult.
- **Sadness** – Your life has probably been like an emotional roller coaster at times - up and down, bouts of crying, sadness and loneliness.
- **Numb** – A lot of alcoholic families are forced into silence and you may feel numb.
- **Anxiety** – Tiptoeing around for so many years may lead to anxiety.
- **Confusion** – You will never be able to answer why the person drinks and it's very confusing and frustrating.
- **Depressed** – It's common to become despondent from dealing with something that seems so difficult to change.
- **Ashamed** – You may feel ashamed of your parent and not want your friends to meet them.

I MOVED OUT, SO WHY AM I STILL AFFECTED?

You can't expect as soon as the door closes on your past that your feelings will all of a sudden change too. It takes time and may require professional help. Sometimes friends or a partner can help you resolve feelings about these issues.

WHAT CAN I DO TO MOVE ON?

- Learn about alcoholism
- Seek counselling
- Grieve
- Join a support group
- Tell your parents your feelings
- Forgive

Discover yourself! You don't need to turn out like they did!

YOUR PARENTS' DIVORCE

So you are about to move to College and now your parents are getting a divorce. You had expected to be able to go back home whenever you needed, knowing everything would be just as you left it. Now you're faced with the feeling of dread, thinking that the family and "home" you once knew exists no more.

So many questions will be running through your head:

"Where will I go for holidays?"

"WHY!?"

"Will they sell the house?"

"What can I do to help?"

"Who will move out?"

"Is there someone else?"

It is perfectly normal to feel torn, emotional and very confused. However, over time, feelings will begin to settle down and a new family routine will emerge.

You will go through the grieving process. It may feel like part of you has died. It is important you keep friends close by you to help you through this difficult time; isolation will only lead to more stress and anxiety.

Expect to feel a range of emotions from anger to sadness. It may feel like a roller-coaster ride for a little while, however, it's important to let your emotions out and talk to someone.

You can't change things; you can only change the way you look at things. Therefore, you will have to learn to understand the situation and realize that blame, guilt or revenge is useless.

Ask your parents questions. You have every right to know what is going on in the family and why.

Take care of yourself. Don't neglect your own needs. Give yourself permission to grieve and be alone. If you feel anger building, try going for a run to burn off some steam.

Know that your parents are doing what they feel is right for them and that it isn't anyone's fault. Sometimes we really forget to realize that not only are they our parents, but they are people with their "own" lives to live as well.

You may feel like you're caught in the middle, but just know that you don't have to choose sides. You have the right to have a relationship with each parent. You also have the right to take as long as you need to sort through your emotions and deal with the divorce.

It would be a good idea to see a counsellor to discuss your concerns. Don't turn to alcohol or drugs to help you with this issue.

Check this out:

<http://www.mpoweryouth.org/411PopTopDivorce.htm>

~~ Learn from Anna's story ~~

I grew up in one of those families that so many people envied; we had a nice house, nice cars, a cottage and went on vacations all over the world. My parents would have dinner parties all the time and we all had a lot of friends. Not in a million years would I have expected my parents to ever get a divorce! But I guess after my brother and I left home, things changed there. I only make it home on holidays and long weekends, and it always seemed normal. We all had good times and my parents never let on to anything out of the ordinary. However, out of the blue, my mom took the two-hour drive to come visit me alone. I thought it was strange, but we went shopping and had a good time, although something seemed off. Two months later my brother and I were called to come home to hear some news. I didn't know what to expect. This is when they broke it to us that they were getting a divorce. I was shocked to the core! I didn't want to believe it, so I just hopped in the car and returned to campus. But when Christmas time was approaching I had to face reality. My mom moved out and my Dad was living in the house still. Where was I going to go? I wanted to go home badly but my mom wouldn't be there. My mom wanted me to go to her new apartment, but it wouldn't feel like home. Would I go to dad's and my brother go to mom's? I was so torn! We couldn't very well leave mom alone and both of us go to Dad's. And we couldn't run back and forth to both houses all throughout the holidays.

What changed the situation?

We finally all sat down together to talk. We talked about the changes and how tough the first couple of years will be. We discussed changes openly. Just to be able to talk about what was going on made me feel less helpless, like we were still a family. Since it was going to be tough, my brother and I decided to call in support. We talked to our grandparents and my mom's sister. They understood the situation and we were all very close. Together we decided we didn't want to ruin the holidays, and we decided we'd have two holidays. Christmas was with dad, and mom was able to get together with her parents and her sister, so we didn't feel so bad leaving her to go to dad's. Then two days later we went to mom's house for New Year's! It was still a little awkward, but we were still able to enjoy the holidays, still like a family, but more like two families.

My advice to someone experiencing a family break up:

It is going to be difficult for the first couple of years but like anything, routine will set it and you'll adjust. You have to understand that you still have a family, only the dynamics of it have changed. You need to talk together and figure things out. Your parents are not trying to hurt you, but they have to do what's best for them, too — even if it means getting a divorce. Try to be understanding and keep an open mind. Life is full of changes, and often it's for the best.