

Prevent This

Southeastern Illinois Counseling Centers, Inc. and Illinois Department of Human Services

Child Abuse & Alcohol Awareness

The relationship between child abuse and the use or abuse of alcohol has two aspects. First, some findings have indicated that parental alcohol abuse may be associated with the physical or sexual abuse of children. Second, the experience of being abused as a child may increase a person's risk for alcohol-related problems as an adult.

Both alcohol and drug problems are widespread in the country. Almost 14 million adult Americans abuse alcohol. The number of illicit drug (marijuana, cocaine, inhalants, heroin, non-medical use of prescription drugs) users exceeds 12 million. With more than 6.6 million children under the age of 18 living in alcoholic households and an additional number of children living in households where parents have problems with illicit drugs, a significant number of children in this country are being raised by addicted parents.

Child maltreatment has become a national epidemic. More than one million children are confirmed each year as victims of child abuse and neglect by state protective service agencies. State child welfare records indicate that substance abuse is one of the top two problems exhibited by families in 81% of the reported cases.



Do parental alcohol problems cause child abuse?

Recent research on the connection between these problems and child maltreatment clearly indicates a connection between the two behaviors.

- Among confirmed cases of child maltreatment, 40% involve the use of alcohol or other drugs.
- Research suggests that alcohol & other drug problems are factors in a majority of cases of emotional abuse and neglect.
- Neglect is the major reason children are removed from a home in which parents have alcohol or other drug problems.
- Children in these homes suffer from a variety of physical, mental, and emotional health problems at a greater rate than do children in the general population.
- Children of alcoholics suffer more injuries and poisonings than do children in the general population.
- Alcohol & other substances may act as disinhibitors, lessening impulse control and allowing parents to behave abusively.

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Influencing Factors

Researchers have proposed several hypotheses as to why victims of child abuse and neglect may be at increased risk for alcohol abuse during adulthood.

Alcohol may serve as ...

- ◆ A mechanism to cope with or escape from the trauma of childhood abuse and the related depression.
- ◆ A way to reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness.
- ◆ Self-medication in an attempt to gain control over the experience.
- ◆ A way to improve self-esteem.
- ◆ A form of self-destructive behavior.

FAST FACT

Most 6-year-olds know that alcohol is only for adults. Between 9 and 13, youth begin to think that alcohol is ok. That's why it's never too early to start talking with young people about the dangers of underage drinking.

Teens say that they rely on adults in their lives more than anyone else to help them make tough decisions and to provide good advice.

What Is "A Drink" Anyway?

A drink can come in many forms. It can be a shot of hard liquor or a mixed drink containing vodka, rum, tequila, gin, scotch, etc. It can also be wine, a wine cooler, beer, or malt liquor. A standard drink is any drink that contains about 14 grams of pure alcohol (about 0.6 fluid ounces or 1.2 tablespoons). This is the amount of alcohol usually found in— One 12-ounce beer, One 4- to 5-ounce glass of wine, One 1.5-ounce shot of 80 proof liquor.

But not all drinks are standard drinks. In fact, different drinks often have different amounts of alcohol. Mixed drinks may contain more than one shot of liquor, and different beers or wines may not have the same amount of alcohol in them, even when the drinks are the same size. For example, some beers and beer products, like "ice" beers, and malt liquors, and some wines, have more alcohol than others.

What's a Standard Drink?



*Note: It can be difficult to estimate the number of standard drinks served in a single mixed drink made with hard liquor. Depending on factors, such as type of spirits and the recipe, one mixed drink can contain from one to three or more standard drinks.