



“You
can’t
come to
my
house”

CHILDREN LIVING WITH
ADDICTION

**“Even if I had a friend, I
wouldn’t bring him home.**

**I wouldn’t want
him to know what my
family is like.”**

JEROME, 12 years old

Addiction to alcohol, drugs or gambling affects all members of a family, not just the person addicted. Often, children of an addicted parent or guardian try to cope with their situation in secret. They may have been told not to talk about “family business” to outsiders. Sometimes, they remain secretive because of their own shame and fear. The silence is an attempt to maintain appearances or to preserve the family balance without causing further upset. The silence also makes it more difficult to understand the children affected.

Children who live with addiction – or other problems at home – may respond by taking on certain roles that help them cope.

The coping behavior can be negative (acting out, withdrawal) or relatively positive (ambition, humor).



**“Sometimes I
feel a hundred years older
(than my parents).”**

BRYAN, 14 years old

Some children may become over-achievers and assume many adult responsibilities. This might be an attempt to restore family pride or to seek adult approval. Or the maturity just might be a necessity for survival at home.

Some children may provide the family with a focus other than the addiction by being sullen, defiant or quick to blame others. Still others offer relief to the family by being remote and undemanding. Outside the family, they may seem quiet, solitary and withdrawn.

And then there are the class clowns who establish self worth by making others laugh and forget their conflicts temporarily.

"I can't talk...

to anyone...

Children living with addiction are often filled with intense emotion although it may be suppressed. Sometimes adults deny or minimize their feelings with comments like, "Don't feel so bad". This can give children the impression that it's not okay to have feelings.



Feelings are neither good nor bad. It's the behavior associated with the feelings that may be positive or negative. Teenagers who live with addiction are at risk of turning to alcohol, drugs or other addictive substances as a way of altering their feelings.

**“If I wasn't so bothersome
maybe my Mom would
stop drinking.”**

TIFFANY, 11 years old

because no one...

would understand.”

NORA, 13 years old



Children of addicted parents often think they are to blame for the addiction. As a result, they may feel extremely guilty. They may also think their survival depends on fixing the problem. Youngsters need to be relieved of the responsibility for their parents' actions. They need to know they cannot cause, control or solve their parents' problems.



There are three unwritten rules when you are living with addiction: Don't talk. Don't trust. Don't feel. All three rules must be broken to begin the healing process. Children living with addiction need to know they can talk to someone about their situation. They need to learn how to share their feelings. And they need to know how to stay safe.

The good news is that children are resilient. Many children who live with addiction survive the experience well. Those who need assistance can learn how to feel better about themselves, make friends and seek help when they need it. Informed, supportive adults who are willing to listen can make the difference.

For more information or for someone to talk to, call the local office of the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba or a regional office listed in this brochure.

WINNIPEG REGION.....944-6229
WESTERN REGION (Brandon)1-866-767-3838
NORTHERN REGION (Thompson)1-866-291-7774
LIBRARY/RESOURCE CENTRE (Winnipeg)944-6233

www.afm.mb.ca

This brochure is one of a series of three.

Leading the way to an addiction free society.

