

# Talking to Children About Addiction (by Chelsy Ranard)

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Addiction is a hard topic to discuss. For both addicts and those close to them, it's tough to explain the struggle to family members, friends, or employers. When talking to children about addiction, it can be impossible to find the words to help them understand. For children of addicts, siblings of addicts, or even grandchildren of addicts, the process can be difficult for them to understand. When explaining such a difficult topic, it's important to take the child's age into account, be honest with them, focus on support and communication, and foresee the issues that many children tend to develop while being close to addiction.

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## Talking to Children About Addiction

### Taking Age into Account

Obviously there are certain topics that are difficult for children to understand and addiction is even difficult for adults to understand sometimes. When discussing a child's parent, sibling, or family member struggling with addiction, it's important to consider the child's age and cognitive ability to understand such a complex issue. For younger children, the discussion about addiction might be best described as feeling sick. The older the child is the more details about addiction you can share, but be careful to not be too confusing. Your language and attitude is also important. Depending on how close the child is to addiction, they may already feel sad or angry about their absent family member – help them to understand their feelings and their family member's feelings without encouraging a negative connotation.

## Honesty

One of the most difficult aspects to explaining addiction to children is the importance of honesty. Those struggling with addiction themselves tend to feel embarrassed or ashamed of their substance abuse issues, even if they are recovered or in the process of recovery. However, even though it's not necessary to share the inner details of every aspect of addiction, it is important to be as honest as possible. The child has to feel like they are able to trust someone in regards to the addict in their life. Addicts have to be able to take responsibility for their mistakes, especially to their children.

Children of alcoholics and children of addicts exhibit many of the same symptoms and may have trust issues with the entire subject of substance abuse in general. If the addict will be in treatment for a while and away from home, it's important to tell them that and why. If the addict in their life is not yet seeking sobriety, it's important to be honest about their status. It's natural to want to protect them from certain information or certain pain that may come from knowledge pertaining to addiction – but helping them to understand addiction and being honest about the realities of addiction is much more beneficial to them.

## Support and Communication

Experiencing addiction, having a family member struggle with addiction, and being a child of an addict are all difficult circumstances to be a part of. Addiction has many sides and affects each side differently. Don't be afraid to ask for support when you're given the task of explaining this difficult disease. Visit an Al-Anon meeting, speak with a counselor, or do some research online for the answers to any questions you have. You may be able to seek these answers with the child you're discussing addiction with as well as a way to explain the addiction process to them. Show them that they aren't alone in dealing with addiction and they have a support system.

Discussing hard topics with children is difficult and you can use

## The Seven C's

The [National Association for Children of Alcoholics](#) encourages that children know the seven C's of addiction in order to help them with handling the addiction around them. Many children tend to blame themselves for many issues that their parents or loved ones face. The seven C's help them understand it's not their fault, they can't fix it, and how important self-care is.

- I didn't **cause** it
- I can't **cure** it
- I can't **control** it
- I can **care** for myself

- By **communicating** my feelings
- Making healthy **choices**
- And **celebrating** myself

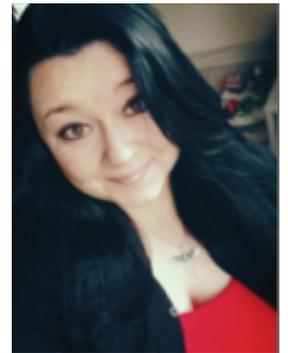
These points are important for children because it points out the issues commonly experienced by children in this position. Guilt is common, helplessness is common, poor self-worth is common, and these seven C's address those issues.

It's hard for children of all ages to really understand why their loved one is addicted to a substance. With such a delicate topic and such a sensitive mind, explaining these things to a child is a tough burden to carry. Fortunately, children understand a lot more than we give them credit for. Adults tend to be very protective of children, which is why there's a belief that some things should be kept from them. This can be true in some instances – but the saying, "honesty is the best policy," applies to children a lot more than we are comfortable with. Release the stigma of addiction and involve children in the difficult aspects of this problem in an appropriate way. Remember to consider their age, be honest, show them support, encourage open communication, and offer skills to cope. The explanation is hard, but it's important.

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### **About the Author: Chelsy Ranard**

Chelsy is a writer from Montana who is now living in Boise, Idaho. She graduated with her journalism degree from the University of Montana in 2012. She is a recovered addict who is passionate about addiction recovery advocacy. [Follow Chelsy on Twitter.](#)



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