Kids, families and alcoholism

Alcoholism is a family disease. An alcoholic parent has a profound impact on the whole family – especially the children. One in every twelve adults abuses alcohol, leaving 7 million children living in a home with at least one alcoholic parent.

Such children are at risk for problems that can become life-long behaviors. Claudia Black, leading author and theorist on the subject, says the unspoken rules in an alcoholic home include:

*Don’t trust.* In alcoholic homes, promises are often forgotten, celebrations cancelled and moods unpredictable.

*Don’t feel.* A child has to quit feeling in order to survive, so developing authentic, intimate relationships is hampered.

*Don’t talk.* The elephant in the room (alcohol abuse) must not be addressed, and there never is a good time to discuss it. Early on, a child learns never to talk about anything unpleasant.

*If you are a heavy drinker and you have children,* you may want to rethink how your drinking impacts your family. Perhaps you want to cut back or quit drinking. Help is available for you.

*If you grew up in an alcoholic home,* you may want to seek professional counseling or a support group. Growing up around excessive drinking may have affected you in ways you may not even realize. Although you are at risk yourself, *risk is not destiny.* You can take steps today to protect yourself from abusing alcohol.

Prayer: Everlasting God, so many people live with the effects of their parents’ alcoholism. Provide them with a loving, hopeful community and the strength to find serenity. Amen.

Resources: Advocatehealth.com • Adultchildren.org (Adult Children of Alcoholics) • www.Niaaa.nih.gov (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism)

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Practical Guide to the Health Care System: How to navigate a hospital

Planning to visit a friend or loved one in an unfamiliar hospital? No need to feel lost! If you have access to a computer, start with a visit to the hospital’s website. Most will provide you with area maps and directions as well as a diagram of the hospital campus with specifics about parking.

Other things to check before you leave home are visiting hours, department restrictions (especially if you are bringing a child) and limitations regarding balloons and foods.

Once on the hospital campus, look for signs. “Good signage makes you feel more comfortable and helps you figure out basics like where to park and enter,” says Susan Schaffrath, Manager Guest Services at Advocate Christ Medical Center.

When you enter the hospital, check in with the information desk or guest services, usually located in the lobby. Pick up a map of the hospital, then follow the posted wall signs and paint colors on floors and walls to help guide you further.

“At most facilities, you can ask anyone for assistance. In our hospital, every employee is happy to direct you to whatever you need,” says Schaffrath. “We are very accessible because we really want to help. We may even walk you to your destination if you seem unsure of where to go.

“If you have planned a visit or procedure, you are usually well prepared for the experience, but navigating a hospital is more challenging if you’re making an unplanned visit. We know a lot about our visitors by which door they enter. If they come in through the ER door, they did not expect to be here today and may need extra help.” Most ERs now have their own guest services, and many have a chaplain on hand.

(To learn more about becoming a hospital volunteer, simply go to advocatehealth.com and search under VOLUNTEER.)

Coming in May: The benefit/burden conversation