

# Alcohol Awareness Set

By Levette Parish

Alcohol is a subject that is always avoided, however, it will be recognized during the week of April 11, 1988. A host of seminars sponsored by the counseling center will be open to all students and will take place in the Gallery Lounge.

Christine Leister, Counseling Center counselor, expressed a need for

an alcohol awareness week because, "we (Penn State Harrisburg) have a problem with it [alcohol], but not as bad as other campuses," she said. "College students like to experiment," said Leister, and one of the discussions will demonstrate how to be a responsible drinker.

The main goals of the seminar are to educate the students on alcoholism and to make them aware that resources are available at their disposal, she said.

## Growing Up with Alcoholics

By Sunshine Brown

What do you remember about growing up? If you were anything like me, terror was hanging just around the edges from morning until night. I felt that nobody liked me. I didn't believe my parents really cared; they didn't even know I existed.

If you were anything like me, you grew up in a home where alcohol and lies were the rulers--not love, not open communication, and certainly not trust or safety. Life was unpredictable and chaotic. In time, chaos became almost easier to handle than calm. As a child, there were mixed messages: "I love you, but stay away." Survival became the most important thing, the only thing in fact. The only way to survive was to learn not to feel. It was easier that way. Besides, when I opened up my feelings, it either hurt so much I couldn't stand it, or it was so crazy I couldn't trust what I felt anyway.

Home life was always "pretend," wearing a face that everything was okay--never telling anyone that anything was wrong--that everything was wrong. Reality got distorted. Who cared anyway? It was easier not to care. Besides, if I cared, I had to trust, and if I trusted, there was a chance I just might have to feel. There was always that major chance--that things would go wrong again. The track record was that things usually did go wrong. If only I could have done something, things could have been different. The chaotic cycle continued.

What else could I think?

Imagine this scenario. You're 7, 8, or 11 years old. It's Thursday night, and your dad is sitting at the table, opening his third or fourth can of beer. He's in a pretty good mood, so you decide to talk to him. (Sometimes he's grumpy when he drinks--usually he is.) You make a decision to go shoot baskets Saturday morning. He promises. You dare to believe. As a child, it is so much easier to forget all the millions of times he's said he'd take you somewhere or do something with you, then didn't come through. But you forget yesterday, wanting so desperately to believe he'll come through for you this time. Excited, you skip off to play, dreaming about Saturday.

Saturday comes. You get up early, get your own breakfast--you even brush your teeth (which you usually forget to do). Your parents' door is closed. You sit in the living room and wait. The cartoons are on, but you don't see them--you just wait. The doubt has already begun to edge in on your heart.

The time passes--9:00, 9:30, 10:00. Finally, at 10:30, with fear and trepidation, you knock. Your mother yells, "What? You know she hates being disturbed."

"Where's Dad?" you ask.

Your mother yells back, "What do you mean, 'Where's Dad?' He didn't come home." You know from experience there won't be any baskets today.

Or take the scenario one step further and change it just a bit. Mom and Dad got divorced when you were younger. Or else it's just that Dad left. He calls Wednesday night to ask you to go out to eat with him Sunday. Again you believe, though doubting--knowing secretly, he won't come through for you. But you try to believe, anyway, because you so badly need him to come; need him to be there for you. Sunday morning you're up, ready and waiting. Your mom's up and bustling in the kitchen.

After a couple of hours, she comes into the room and says with her usual cheerful mask, "Oh, you know your father, he probably just forgot. Everything is okay." You both know he didn't forget--you both know it is not okay. You both know very well he got too drunk to remember. You wish that just once she'd stop protecting him--just once, both of you could tell the truth and admit how much it hurts. Instead, you both continue to pretend everything is okay when it isn't. Reality got distorted.

Maybe your story is different. Maybe, as the oldest child, you hurried home from school, never knowing what condition you'd find the house in or whether your mom would be drunk. Afraid, you'd open the door. Your mom was passed out on the floor; beer cans were everywhere and the house was a mess. You'd drag her into the bedroom and help her into bed. Next, you hurried to hide the evidence before your younger brothers and sisters got home on the later bus. You cooked dinner, helped the kids with their homework, and got them into bed. No one would have known you were only a child yourself.

Since your mom's drinking had increased, your grades had gotten worse. Your teacher suspected something was wrong, but of course you couldn't have told her. You had to keep the secret. The big Family Secret.

Or was it the fighting? All the years of fighting, lying awake night after night listening to your parents scream at each other, never knowing what was going to happen, or if one of them would come into your room and smack

## Common Characteristics of Adult Children of Alcoholics

by Janet G. Woititz, Ed.  
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### Adult children of alcoholics ...

1. guess at what normal life is.
2. have difficulty to end.
3. lie when it would be just as easy to tell the truth.
4. judge themselves without mercy.
5. have difficulty having fun, and take themselves very seriously.
6. over-react to changes over which they have no control.
7. feel that they are different from other people.
8. are either super responsible or super irresponsible.
9. are extremely loyal, even in the face of evidence that the loyalty is undeserved.
10. are impulsive

## Did You Grow Up With a Problem Drinker?

- Do you care for others easily, yet find it difficult to care for yourself?
- Do you isolate yourself from other people?
- Do you respond with anxiety to authority figures and angry people?
- Do you feel that individuals and society in general are taking advantage of you?
- Do you have trouble with intimate relationships?
- Do you confuse pity with love, as you did with the problem drinker?
- Do you attract and seek people who tend to be compulsive?
- Do you cling to relationships because you are afraid of being alone?
- Do you often mistrust your own feelings and the feelings expressed by others?
- Do you find it difficult to express your emotions?
- Do you think parental drinking may have affected you?

{Questions from Al-Anon brochure}

you. Or maybe your father, or step-father or uncle, the adults you were supposed to be able to trust, made sexual advances toward you when they were drinking. Maybe they abused you, physically or sexually. And you've never told. You just assumed it was your fault. You still think it is your fault.

Or maybe abandonment is your story, (at least that's what it felt like). Both your parents lived in the house, but it was as if they weren't home. One of them was usually drunk and didn't know you existed. The other one was always so busy taking care of the drunk parent that, even if they had noticed your existence, they wouldn't have had the time or energy to listen or care for you.

Maybe these scenarios do not fit you exactly. Of course, you have your own story. But one thing is certain. If you grew up in an alcoholic home, or any other kind of addictive, compulsive (dysfunctional) home for that matter, where feelings weren't talked about and you never knew what to expect, where denial was the name of the game, you're probably still living and playing out the same games. It's just in an adult-world setting.

Childhood is a time when life is supposed to be safe. Home is a place where you are supposed to feel loved. Instead, in an alcoholic home, life became a war zone, and you, the battlefield.

A child growing up in these circumstances learns that things are not the way they seem, they are usually much worse. But what happens when the child grows up? The difficult lessons learned so well for survival in

childhood, the ones practiced to a fine art in adulthood, these are the survival skills that do not bring healthy relationships or healthy living. These counter-productive behavior patterns are as addictive as alcohol and they stick like glue. They won't disappear just because you have become an adult. They don't change without your first understanding that they're there, then confronting them and learning ways to change them.

Do you see yourself anywhere in this story? If you do, you may need to read more about changing the behavior patterns you learned as a child. It's all right to ask for help. It need not be a secret anymore.

Do you ever wonder why you get so angry about the smallest things? Or, when plans change out of your control, does it literally freak you out? Do you ever find yourself working really hard to please somebody because you want to be accepted? Do you ever feel like the success doesn't satisfy? Does your own drinking scare you? or, do you treat other things compulsively: food, schoolwork, or money?

Children who grow up in alcoholic homes are sometimes referred to as ACOA's (Adult Children of Alcoholics). In the last two or three years, several psychologists have suggested that the same kind of characteristics that fit ACOA's fit children of most addictive families.

Discovering that there are others like us helps.