Service sees record numbers of children bereaved due to a parent's drinking

Sunday 11 February, 2024

Charities break the silence for Children of Alcoholics Week, 11-17 February 2024

New research: Service sees record numbers of children bereaved due to a parent's drinking

Analysis of latest helpline data by Nacoa (the National Association for Children of Alcoholics) shows that requests for help from children bereaved due to a parent's drinking have sharply risen from 29% in 2020 to 39% in 2023.

> "It's been so hard to watch my niece and her two children go through this over the years - even harder to watch them walk behind their dad's coffin last week. Thank goodness there are organisations like Nacoa to help".
> Helpline caller

The news comes amidst recent ONS figures showing that alcohol-specific deaths have increased 27% since 2019. Female alcohol deaths have increased 37% over five years.

55% of children of alcohol-dependent parents calling Nacoa describe facing serious mental distress through anxiety (60%), stress (51%), and depression (41%). Also, 26% of callers experienced abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect.

Annual calls to the Nacoa helpline climbed to over 33,000 in 2023.

MPs and charities join forces to plead with the government to reinstate the abandoned government strategy for children of alcohol-dependent parents

The Alcohol Families Alliance and the Chairs of the major alcohol APPGs have written a joint letter to health minister Rt Hon. Andrea Leadsom MP appealing to her to re-prioritise these children after all dedicated support was cut in 2021.

In the wake of each life lost lies a family struggling to pick up the pieces.

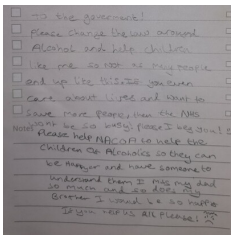
Despite the government investing £267 million into drug and alcohol treatment services, no funds were ring-fenced for dedicated services for children and families. Right now, there is no direct plan in place to support those experiencing this mental distress and abuse.

Emily, 11-years-old, has also written to the government pleading for help:

> "Please change the law around alcohol and help children like me so not as many people end up like this. If you even care about lives and want to save more people, then the NHS won't be so busy! Please I beg you! Please help

Media:





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> Nacoa to help children of alcoholics so they can be happyer [sic] and have someone to understand them. I miss my dad so much and so does my brother. I would be so happy if you help us all please."

The Right Hon. Jonathan Ashworth MP will be announced during the week as a patron of Nacoa. He is a passionate advocate for supporting children of alcoholics.

Children of Alcoholics Week 2024
#COAWeek2024, 11 to 17 February 2024

COA Week (Children of Alcoholics Week) is the annual calendar event to raise awareness for the 2.6 million children in the UK affected by a parent's drinking.

This year's COA Week theme is 'Breaking the silence'. Too many children and young people feel their parent's alcohol problems are their responsibility and a shameful secret to keep. But finding information and support is vital to break the cycle and make healthy choices.

Breaking the silence means finding a trusted person to speak to about the things you are going through. It means finding a moment to yourself to hear the experiences of others. It means educating other adults in society.

Without support, we know that these are some of the most vulnerable children you can imagine in the United Kingdom. Being much more likely to develop addictions themselves, as well as struggle in school, be in trouble with police, develop an eating disorder, or consider suicide. Together, we can help them take a different path.

Nacoa lead the week's activities focused on furthering the wellbeing of these vulnerable children in the UK. Activities are also held across the globe, including Europe, India, Korea and the USA.

Campaign messages

- The UK Government is failing the most vulnerable children of alcoholics, providing no targeted support.
- Being a child of an alcoholic is 'a thing'.
- Living with parental addiction leaves lasting impacts.
- Children deserve to be helped in their own right.

- With help and support, they can go on to break the cycle of addiction.

Calls to action

- Frontline services need to be more aware of the family secret of addiction.
- The Government should reinstate support for children of alcoholics.
- We need to promote the voices of children of alcoholics in the public sphere.
- Challenge stigma that keeps vulnerable children silenced.

Celebrity support

- Nacoa patrons include: Tony Adams OBE, Calum Best, Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP, David Coldwell, Lorri Haines, Geraldine James OBE, Cherie Lunghi, Elle Macpherson, Vicky Pattison, Chanita Stephenson and Camilla Tominey.

Quotes:

“News of huge increase of parental alcohol deaths is devastating to hear for children’s charities like us, who witness the daily impacts of parental addiction on children. COA Week helps us to remember that alcohol problems affect the whole family. Behind these statistics are mothers and fathers whose children will have been living with the chaos of someone else’s drinking. But with greater awareness and support, we will help children to find healthy ways to cope and break the cycle of addiction.”
Hilary Henriques MBE, Chief Executive of Nacoa UK

"I felt so alone growing up with alcoholism in the family. You blame yourself and wonder what you are doing wrong. Why can’t they love you enough to stop? As an adult, I now know that there was nothing I could have done, but I wish I had known Nacoa existed and that you are never alone—there is always someone who understands. Since making my documentary, ‘Alcohol, dad, and me’, I’ve met so many amazing people through Nacoa, and am proud to be part of this work helping some of the most vulnerable children in the UK today."
Vicky Pattison, TV star, author and podcaster

“We need systematic change to protect children and their families from alcohol harm. The government must create a new alcohol strategy to tackle alcohol harm and include specific measures to support families and protect children.”
Professor Ian Gilmore, Chair of the Alcohol Health Alliance

++ Ends ++

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Contact:

Communications:

Communications lead: Piers Henriques, 0785 553 3962,
communications@nacoa.org.uk

Nacoa Ambassador: Josh Connolly, 0790 517 8873,
joshconnolly1987@gmail.com

Nacoa Co-founder and CEO: Hilary Henriques, 07506 744 771,
ceo@nacoa.org.uk

Nacoa: 0117 924 8005
admin@nacoa.org.uk
coaweek@nacoa.org.uk

Editors Notes:

- There are an estimated 2.6 million children in the UK living with a parent who drinks too much.
- Sadly, problems often persist into adulthood. Millions of adults are still affected by their parent's drinking
- Children living with parental alcoholism are:
  - Six times as likely to witness domestic violence
  - Five times as likely to develop an eating problem
  - Three times as likely to consider suicide
  - Twice as likely to experience difficulties at school
  -

Three times as likely to develop alcoholism or addiction

- Twice as likely to be in trouble with the police

- Nacoa (registered charity no. 1009143) was founded in 1990 to provide information, advice and support to everyone affected by a parent's drinking or similar addictive problem. This is provided through a free and confidential telephone and email helpline and website. Helpline: 0800 358 3456, Email: helpline@nacoa.org.uk, website: www.nacoa.org.uk

- Nacoa has responded to over 524,000 calls since 1990.

- www.coaweek.org.uk suggests ways to get involved and contains downloadable resources.

Company Contact:

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Nacoa

T. 0117 924 8005
E. communications@nacoa.org.uk
W. https://nacoa.org.uk

Additional Contact(s):
Communications lead: Piers Henriques, 0785 553 3962

View Online

Additional Assets:
Letter to Minister from Alcohol and Families Alliance

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