

Did You Know? A column from Dr. Valerie Dripchak, LCSW
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Did you know that when a parent or important adult in your family misuses alcohol or other substances, it can have a profound effect on you?

Although every family is different, there are some common traits that are in families where an adult abuses alcohol and/or other drugs. The “next generation” in these families has been referred to as the *adult child of an alcoholic (ACOA)*.

If one or more of your parents have been abusing substances, then these traits may be affecting you, and you may not realize it. Some of these issues may include on-going arguments, illogical thinking, avoidance of some feelings or a quick response of anger, etc.

Dr. Claudia Black, a principal researcher in the *ACOA* area, describes 4 main *survival roles* that develop in children as they grow up and try to make sense out of their family chaos. Here is a summary of these roles:

Hero: The *responsible* child tries to make the family look “normal” to the rest of the world. However, they try to do this by attempting to excel at everything, never feel adequate.

Scapegoat: This is the *acting out* child or the “family problem.” They function as a release tap for the family; when there is too much tension in the family, the scapegoat acts out, allowing the family to avoid dealing with the substance issues.

Lost Child: This is the child who tends to *withdraw* and is alone a lot. They learn to never expect anything and tend to follow without question. These individuals are fearful about making decisions and have difficulties with initiating relationships.

Mascot: The “*entertainer*” tends to seek attention and takes away from the family’s substance problems. They tend to be perceived as “immature” and have difficulties in focusing on any one thing.

It is difficult to sustain these roles. Individuals, who are *ACOA's*, tend to do better if they are able to get some help in tackling these issues.

If you have any questions about this topic or other personal areas, please contact *your student assistance counselor*. *The services are free and confidential to all UConn Waterbury students.*