Alcohol and the Family

Dependence on alcohol is one of the country's serious national public health problems. It is prevalent among the rich and poor, in all regions of the country, and across all ethnic and social groups. Alcoholism is a family disease because its progression, as well as its treatment, involves all family members.

Alcoholism is a disease that includes the following four symptoms:

- **Craving**: A strong need, or urge, to drink.
- **Loss of control**: Not being able to stop drinking once drinking has begun.
- **Physical dependence**: Withdrawal symptoms, such as nausea, sweating, shakiness, and anxiety after stopping drinking.
- **Tolerance**: The need to drink greater amounts of alcohol to get "high."

Alcoholism tends to worsen over time, hurting both the addicted person and the family members. It is especially damaging to young children and adolescents. Research shows that the risk for developing alcoholism does indeed run in families. The genes a person inherits partially explain this pattern, but lifestyle and exposure are also factors. Remember: Risk is not destiny. Knowing you are at risk is important, though, because then you can take steps to protect yourself from developing problems with alcohol.

Children need support
Children in families experiencing alcohol or drug abuse need attention, guidance and support. They may be growing up in homes in which the problems are either denied or covered up. It is important to talk honestly with children about what is happening in the family and to help them express their concerns and feelings. Children need to trust the adults in their lives and to believe that they will support them.

Things can get better
Alcohol dependence is a medical condition that can be effectively treated. Millions of Americans and their families are in healthy recovery from this disease.

Resources:

- **Al-Anon/Alateen**: 1-888-4AL-ANON  [http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/](http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/)

Sources: Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (CSAT), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), and National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)

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To learn more or to speak with a FSAP professional, call **1.800.935.9551**
The FSAP is a voluntary, confidential assistance program available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, at no cost to employees.