

Protecting Our *Children*

When Mom Or Dad Does Drugs Or Drinks Too Much

(NAPSA)—He could be your neighbor's child. She could be your little girl's best friend. They look like regular, fun-loving kids. But behind those sweet young faces they have a secret, one they're not talking about—Mom or Dad uses illicit drugs or drinks too much.

When children grow up in a household with a substance-abusing parent, they can develop problems that last a lifetime. They are at risk for depression and anxiety, often lack social and other skills and are more likely to develop substance abuse problems than children who don't have a drug-dependent parent.

Children of substance abusers may also feel isolated, embarrassed or afraid to bring friends home. Experts say these kids need caring adults to help them, maybe just to talk, to let them know they're not being disloyal to their families by talking. Trusted adults, (such as relatives, friends, teachers, coaches or school nurses) can help children of substance abusers feel less alone and unloved and confused by their parent's actions. These caring adults can help kids learn that their parent's drug use is not their fault, they can't cure it or make it better.

Adults can spot troubled kids by being aware of signs like withdrawal, tardiness at school, fluctuating academic or other perfor-



Children of substance-abusing parents often need an additional network of support.

mance and/or physical ailments such as headaches or stomachaches with no apparent cause.

Sometimes just talking about the problem at home or school is enough for a child. Other times kids need help through a support group such as Alateen. One 12-year-old girl in a support program for children of substance abusers said, "Group is like a family to me. I'm safe there and it's filled with young people who understand. Each time they remind me that it's not my fault and give me hope."

Adults who help a child of a substance abuser offer a lifeline that can last a lifetime. For more information, including resources that can offer adults information on assisting kids of substance abusers, visit www.theantidrug.com or call 1-800-788-2800.