The problems that plague many children of alcoholics remain invisible because their coping behavior tends to be approval seeking and socially acceptable. However, a disproportionate number of those entering the juvenile justice system, courts, prison, and mental health facilities, and those referred to school authorities are CoA’s.

▼ As a Matter of Fact

• An estimated 28 million Americans have at least one alcoholic parent.
• Approximately one-half of all alcoholics have an alcoholic parent.
• One of three families currently reports alcohol abuse by a family member.
• Children of alcoholic parents demonstrate an unusually high risk of becoming alcoholic themselves or of marrying someone who is or who will become an alcoholic.
• In up to 90 percent of child abuse cases, alcohol is a significant factor.
• Children of alcoholics (CoA’s) are frequently the victims of incest, child neglect, and other forms of violence and exploitation.
• CoA’s often adapt to the chaos and inconsistency of an alcoholic home by developing an inability to trust, an extreme need to control, excessive sense of responsibility, and denial of feelings — all of which result in low self-esteem, depression, isolation, guilt, and difficulty maintaining satisfying relationships. These and other problems persist or exacerbate throughout adulthood.
• Children of alcoholics are apt to experience a range of psychological difficulties, including learning disabilities, anxieties, attempted/completed suicides, eating disorders, or compulsive achieving/failing.

▼ Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACoA’s):

• Guess at what normal is.
• Become isolated and afraid of other people, especially authority figures.
• Tend to judge themselves harshly and consequently suffer feelings of low self-worth.

• Have difficulty acting; they more often react to others.

• Often are dependent and fear abandonment.

• Become alcoholic, marry alcoholics, or do both — or they tend to find some other compulsion, such as work, eating, gambling.

• Frequently become “addicted” to excitement after having lived for many years in a traumatic and sometimes dangerous family soap opera.

• Tend to confuse love with pity, and often “love” those whom they can rescue or pity.

• Feel responsible for their unstable families and have difficulty living independently.

• Frequently suffer guilt feelings if they consider their needs rather than the needs of others.

• Become approval-seekers, losing their identity in the process.

• Tend to deny or repress the feelings of their traumatized childhood — which separates them from all feelings, making it difficult or impossible to recognize/accept adults.

• Are sometimes unable to separate truth from fiction in their lives.