



For children, having parents or family members with addiction can be very confusing.



Children need to feel safe and secure, loved and cared for.



A common difficulty for children growing up with a parent or family member's addiction is a lack of acknowledgement or communication to the child about what's happening.



Talking about their family member's addiction can help children find healthy ways to cope.

Tips for talking with children about addiction

Uncomfortable or unsure what to say? The following may help.

- Before you start the conversation, educate yourself to provide accurate information.
- Make it age appropriate.
- Keep it simple, but honest.
- Use words they'll understand.
- Choose a time when the child is relaxed.
- Pick a place where you won't be interrupted or overheard.
- Let them know the parent/family member loves them even if can't always care for them.
- Ask questions and encourage them to talk about what's happening and how they feel.
- Let them know you're there for them and they can come to you with questions anytime.



Some good messages to include:

- You're not alone – lots of children have parents/family members with addictions
- It's not your fault – you're not the reason your parent/family member drinks or uses drugs
- Addiction can cause good people to make bad choices (rather than the parent is a 'bad' person)
- It's ok to talk about your feelings, fears and concerns and ask for help.

The '7 Cs' help children remember these core messages:

- I didn't **cause** it
- I can't **cure** it
- I can't **control** it
- I can **care** for myself by **communicating** my feelings, making healthy **choices**, and by **celebrating** myself.¹

Books are a great resource to help explain addiction to children – we've listed a few below.

- **The Blue Polar Bear** – for 5-7-year-olds [free download from NSW Government website](#).
- **The Flying Dream** – for 8-12-year-olds [free download from the NSW Government website](#).
- **A Terrible Thing Happened** – for 4-7-year-olds.
- **Critters Cry Too**
- **Addie's mom isn't home anymore: Addiction is scary-especially when you don't know what it is** – for 8-12-year-olds
- **Daddy Goes to Meetings**
- **Floating away: a book to help children understand addiction** – for 8-12-year-olds.
- **Timbi talks about addiction: Helping children cope with a parent's addiction**
- **The Tail of the Raccoon (Part I, Secrets of Addiction; Part II, Touching the Invisible; Part III, Departures)**

These books don't replace having conversations with children about addiction, but are an opportunity to explore the topic more together, encourage them to ask questions and talk about their feelings.



If you would like to find out about alcohol and other drug parenting and family services near you, call the **National Alcohol and Other Drug Hotline 1800-250-015**.

References

1. VeryWell Mind. How to Talk to Kids About a Parent's Addiction [Accessed 24 February 2022]. <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-to-tell-children-about-a-parents-addiction-66633>.