



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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In the future, I see these committees as forming the interviewing panel for all new staff in their respective schools.

In conclusion, parents have goals for their children. The school also has specific goals. Previously these were not always the same, but with parental involvement, one can ensure that the goals for the individual child are the same and that they are satisfactorily achieved.

Educational change is necessary in our schools if full advantage is to be taken by Aboriginal people. Parents are the ones who can force such change, and that, only by their involvement and interest.

Unless parents force change, education for Aboriginals will remain as it always has been, for those so-called "super blacks" who have had the drive, determination, ambition and personality to overcome all the obstacles that do exist in the present situation. These people have lost their identity and are neither Aboriginal nor white.

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FAMILY DISEASE OF ALCOHOLISM

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To speak of alcoholics and alcohol abuse is one thing, and we quite often tend to stick to that area, perhaps because, among other things, it is easier to see and treat. Here I wish to speak of alcoholism, the disease, as it affects the family, mainly the children, and also highlight the early age at which the children are affected. I ask you to try to keep an open mind right from now, because I may not be saying what you expect, but, what you will identify and understand.

**The writer experienced 26 years of alcoholic drinking and has been free from alcohol for more than 10 years. Has a family of four. This article is intended to describe the basic effects on children in an environment of alcoholism, though, as was the case with the writer's family, each child reacts quite individually.*

We all know a lot about alcoholism, although we do not always identify it. We find comfort in diagnosing and treating its symptoms, whilst the disease itself continues to run wild, often to the extent of mental and physical injury, as well as insanity and death.

We often overlook alcoholism in a family because there is no obvious drunkenness. Drunkenness is only a symptom of the disease. It is the alcoholic's attempt to ease the pressures of the illness, which is, briefly, the inability to cope with irregular but constant periods of emotional conflict.

Alcoholics' uncontrolled emotions are *always* passed on to the non-alcoholic members of the family, who are not equipped to handle them. They are affected more because alcohol does not provide temporary escape for them as it does for the alcoholic person.

I don't know precisely what age a child is affected by unstable and conflicting emotional atmosphere, but we all know that it is before they are old enough to walk and talk, so therefore it is very hard for them to do anything but feel guilty. They are unable to run away from unpleasant situations or to say, "O.K. you big bright adults, how about someone telling me what's really going on!" The child is very sensitive to the parents' changes of moods, such as sulking, screaming at each other and being over-affectionate to each other. It is only at the end of the screaming and the loving and during the sulking period that the child is included. During the fights the child will almost always hear the statements, "You were O.K. before baby came along" and, "If it wasn't for *your* damned kid I'd leave you, you drunken sod", and so on.

The seed is sown for a king-sized guilt complex in the child: "If I wasn't here they could separate and be happy. They *were* happy before I came along." The fact is, the child does not cause the increase in drinking or whatever other symptoms are rearing their ugly heads. It is simply the time factor. Alcoholism is a progressive illness. The child *does not*, and the parents probably *do not* know these facts.

When the children from the alcoholic home start to get out with other children, they are usually very active and are continually seeking the love that was not always on tap in the home. It is not long before this love is forthcoming. Everyone can recognise and love a lonely child. It is not long before the alcoholism affected child experiences another brand of guilt - the inability to return the love and kindness.

The uncertainty of the atmosphere prevents the taking home of friends. Therefore, the child becomes withdrawn, and after a series of these experiences, will usually turn to, and play with, animals and dolls. Usually he/she develops a very creative mind. At school this child is very noticeable because of the work patterns. The work usually is at least average, often well above average. The noticeable factors in school work are that the changes are great, either right up, or right down - when the child is unable to concentrate, and appears vague and withdrawn. Teachers naturally try to find the answer to these drastic changes, and will often suggest to the child a number of possible causes. The child, unwilling or unable to explain the reason, will admit to what appears to be an easy one, for instance, a fight with another child. The teacher will usually order a truce, and when the child does not improve, the teacher concludes he is sulking. Because the child is usually honest, the teacher does not suspect that he has lied. The matter is so personal that under no circumstances will the truth prevail. So an outwardly honest child has become inwardly guilty of lying.

Genuine empathy is the order of the day. It will enable the teacher to get on-side, and usually to be invited home for any one of a number of reasons, where it is often possible to identify the real problem along with one or even both parents. An experienced teacher, social worker, counsellor, etc. can often encourage the parents to look at alcoholism the illness, and the treatment for it, which is Al-Anon family groups, Al-Ateen and Alcoholics Anonymous. So let us all start becoming experienced. *We cannot help anybody until we know what it is all about.* Experts in every field do not become experts by reading about their subject in the newspaper or from what they hear down at the local. So let us learn from real experts where it is really happening, and get on with doing a good job well. The best place to start learning about the effects of alcoholism on the whole family and the treatment of same, is to attend several Al-Anon, Alcoholics Anonymous and Al-Ateen meetings.

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