



# PARENTAL PROBLEM ALCOHOL USE IS AN ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCE (ACE)

**The phrase “Adverse Childhood Experiences” (ACEs) is used to refer to stressful experiences occurring during childhood.**

Parental problem alcohol use (PPAU), parental mental health problems and parental separation are all ACEs that can cause biological changes in a child’s brain that may have lifelong effects on both physical and mental health. Because alcohol is so pervasive in Irish society, the lifelong impact that PPAU has on a person’s life is often not recognised.

We know now from neuroscience that when a child experiences strong, frequent, and/or prolonged adversity, toxic stress can occur. When the toxic stress response occurs continually, or is

triggered by multiple sources, it can have a cumulative toll on physical and mental health – for a lifetime.

For those who have experienced ACEs, there are a range of possible responses that can help, including therapeutic sessions with mental health professionals, meditation, physical exercise, spending time in nature, and many others.

Reducing stress, building responsive relationships, and strengthening life skills are the best way to prevent the long-term effects of ACEs.



## 200,000

**CHILDREN ARE AFFECTED BY  
PARENTAL PROBLEM ALCOHOL USE**

## 400,000

**ADULTS ARE AFFECTED BY  
PARENTAL PROBLEM ALCOHOL USE**

**For more information  
see ACEs and Toxic  
Stress from the Harvard  
University Center on the  
Developing Child.**

## Impact of ACEs

**Growing up in a home where there is PPAU, life can be unpredictable and chaotic. As a child, you may not have felt it was safe to express the natural feelings of sadness, confusion and anger that arose as a result of living with a parent who drinks in a problematic way.**

Sometimes it might have felt like you had two parents - the one you loved when they were not drinking, and the frightening person they became when they were.

Children who grew up with PPAU often carry the burden of childhood experiences into adulthood. While in many cases, people go on to create good lives, as adults there can still be lingering feelings of confusion, anger and sadness without really knowing why.



**I WOULD BE SENT TO  
THE PUB TO GET HIM;  
THE SHAME OF IT.**

**MAURA - SHARED VOICES**

The [Shared Voices](#) platform offers real stories and the chance for you to share

## Ending the Silence

Co-produced with the Alcohol Action Ireland lived experience group, Silent Voices. Silent Voices was founded by three people who grew up with PPAU with the aim of raising awareness of its impact and ensuring that no person growing up with PPAU will be left unsupported.

Because home life is often tense when a parent is drinking in a problematic way, as children there will have been a lot of anxiety, a lot of the time. When stress occurs too often for children, it can be damaging. It's therefore completely understandable when, as adults, feelings of anxiety occur. For some this can be low level, for others it can cause serious problems in adult life.

People who grew up with PPAU often describe how there were unspoken rules in their families. As children, they knew it wasn't OK to talk about the parent's drinking, even if nobody actually said so.

Because promises were often made by the parent who was drinking but then broken, it sometimes didn't feel safe to trust adults. Or it wasn't acceptable to express feelings and anyway, some feelings and memories were too painful so all the child could do was bury them. With all those ingrained unspoken rules to break through, it's understandable how it can be difficult for those who grew up with PPAU to access help and support.

It's completely normal if you grew up in this situation to have issues in adulthood. The important thing is to find help from someone who understands the issue and how it is impacting you.



**If you feel the experience of growing up with PPAU is impacting on your life as an adult, remember that there is help out there and most importantly, you deserve that help.**

You can find a list of places to seek help [here](#). If you currently see a counsellor or a mental health professional why not let them know that you grew up with PPAU? It might enable you to explore and process your experiences and begin to heal from them.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

**[CLICK HERE](#) FOR A RANGE OF ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND A DEDICATED READING LIST TO HELP DEAL WITH THE TRAUMA OF GROWING UP WITH PARENTAL PROBLEM ALCOHOL USE.**