

## TIP SHEET FOR RELATIVES AS PARENTS

#2

5/05

### TALKING ABOUT PARENTAL SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Talking to children about their parent's "substance abuse: - drug or alcohol problem – is hard. It never seems to be the right time. You may not want to stir up all that pain and anger in the child. And it is not easy to figure out what words to use so the child understands. But young people need to know about parental substance abuse and they need to talk about it.

### WHAT TO TELL CHILDREN OF SUBSTANCE ABUSERS

- **ABOUT ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG ADDICTION-** Children need to know why people begin to drink or use drugs. How use becomes addiction; how drugs make people do things they normally would not; and how drugs make parents put drugs ahead of everything else, even children.
- **ABOUT RECOVERY AND RELAPSE** – Children need to know that many people who use drugs are able to get help and stop using. But they also need to know that recovery is not easy, and that relapse is common.
- **THE THREE C's** – Children need to know that they did not cause the parent's substance abuse that they cannot control it or cure it.
- **RESILIENCY** – Children need to know that they can learn to cope, even if the parent is not able to stop using. You might want to point out some of the ways that the child has coped in the past, or handled difficult situations.
- **LOVE** – Children need to know that it is okay to love a parent who uses alcohol or other drugs, and that a parent's addiction does not mean that the child is unlovable.
- **RISK** – Children need to know that they are at higher risk for their own substance abuse problems. The need to understand that their bodies respond to alcohol and other drugs differently than other people's bodies and that they need to be very careful.

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