

~ Chemically Dependent Families ~

Children's Roles

The Hero – These children try to make sure that the family appears normal to the rest of the world. They develop a strong sense of responsibility and project an image of competence and achievement. This is often the first-born child, but not always. They learn as children that someone has to be responsible for the family, and if the parents are inducing chaos, it is up to the “hero” to provide stability. These people grow up to be academically or professionally successful, although they are prone to denying their own emotions and feeling like imposters.

The Lost Child – Often the third child or later in an alcoholic family is the “lost child.” This is a child who is unable to have his/her need met, become overwhelmed, and withdraws from the world. In both childhood and adulthood, he or she may be unfocused, unmotivated and appear helpless. “Lost” children may tend to try to attach to partners or others that substitute for their unmet need for a family.

The Placater – These siblings are the ones who learn early to smooth over potentially upsetting situations in the family. They develop a good ability to read the feelings of others, but at the expense of their own feelings. They may go into “care taking” professions later in life, even though this reinforces their tendency to ignore their own feelings.

The Scapegoat – These are the children who become known as the family problem. They are the ones who get into trouble, including alcohol and drug abuse, as a way of expressing their anger at the family. They serve as the “pressure valve” in the family. When tension builds, they misbehave as a way of relieving pressure while allowing the family to avoid dealing with the parent's drinking and/or drug problem. When they grow up, they are unaware of feelings other than anger.

