

Alcoholism affects the entire family

Children are at risk to repeat parents' behavior

By Ann Efimetz

Statistics indicate that more than 40% of Americans report having been exposed to alcoholism in their family.

Alcoholism is a huge problem and it affects the entire family. Many people may not realize those hurt most by alcohol abuse and alcoholism often don't drink - they are the children of alcoholics.

Next week is national Children of Alcoholics Week. It is observed to focus attention to children's needs and to foster awareness about the best ways to help them.

The local SpiritWorks Foundation is joining in the nationwide observance entitled, "A Celebration of Hope & Healing."

Jan Brown, executive director of SpiritWorks Foundation, will appear on "Virginia This Morning" this Wednesday, Feb. 14. She will discuss children of alcoholics and the Children of Families at Risk program offered at the SpiritWorks Center.

CFAR is offered in conjunction with the Historic Triangle Substance Abuse Coalition. It is a children's recovery program geared toward building resilience in children and youths. The program focuses on kids through high school age who are growing up in families with or at risk for alcoholism or other drug addictions.

SpiritWorks will also be showing the movie "Lost Childhood: Growing up in an Alcoholic Family" at 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 14, at the James City-Williamsburg Community Center. It is free and open to the public.

■ Children of alcoholics may be hampered by their inability to grow in developmentally healthy ways.

■ There are an estimated 26.8 million children of alcoholics in the United States. Preliminary research suggests that more than 11 million are under the age of 18.

■ There is strong, scientific evidence that alcoholism tends to run in families. Children of alcoholics are more at risk for alcoholism and other drug abuse than children of non-alcoholics.

■ Genetic factors play a major role in the development of alcoholism. There is an expanding base of literature that strongly supports a heritable basis for alcoholism and a range of family influences that may direct the development of children of alcoholics.

■ Alcoholism usually has strong negative effects on marital relationships.

■ Alcohol is associated with a substantial proportion of human violence, and perpetrators are often under the influence of alcohol.

■ Based on clinical observations and preliminary research, a relationship between parental alcoholism and child abuse is indicated in a large proportion of child abuse cases.

■ Children of alcoholics exhibit symptoms of depression and anxiety more than children of non-alcoholics. They may have lower self-esteem in childhood, adolescence and young adulthood.

■ Children of alcoholics exhibit elevated rates of psychopathology. Anxiety, depression, and externalizing behavior disorders are more