

# Alcoholism ~ *From Russia to You & Here in the USA*

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(Orinially "Make the *Connection*" - Condensed & Revised: February, 2004)

In America the skyrocketing use of drugs and alcohol has been targeted as the primary factor in children placed in out-of-home care according to the *National Adoption Information Clearinghouse*.<sup>1</sup> If statistics were available would it be the same in Russia? Likely. In 1996 reports indicate that the average Russian man drinks about four gallons of pure alcohol a year, or about a pint of vodka every other day, nearly twice what Americans drink<sup>2</sup>. Excessive drinking has become the leading cause of death in Russia<sup>3</sup>. The life style includes alcohol. Social custom is a major contributing factor to alcoholism, as drinking has no negative connotations at any age or at any social standing in Russia... except, loosing one's children due to alcoholism! The termination of parental rights documentation for many of the children adopted from Russia refers to "alcoholism" somewhere in their papers. Does this fact place a Russian-American adopted child at risk for alcoholism? Yes.

Every child in America, regardless of heritage, is at risk for alcoholism. Research indicates that 26% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders reported drinking alcohol in any given month, 40% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders and 51% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders!<sup>4</sup> All kids are at very high risk AND their genetics play a role in their level of risk.<sup>5</sup>

Many studies of twins and adoptees have clearly found and demonstrated that genetic factors influence an individual's vulnerability to alcoholism.<sup>6</sup> No conclusive evidence has been found to explain precisely what is inherited, or the overall importance of this inherited material, but most think it is likely numerous genes as opposed to one.<sup>7</sup> There isn't a genetic marker, as yet, but every study indicates there is a *connection... a fact that adoptive parents of children from alcoholic birthparents must take seriously*.

The level of influence the environment has in alcoholism vs. genetics has yet to be determined but we know when both exist it can be lethal. This has major implications for children adopted from Russia just as it does for children adopted from American families with alcoholism in their history. For example, sons of alcoholics were more likely to be alcoholic than were sons of nonalcoholic, whether they were raised by their biological parents or by nonalcoholic adoptive parents. In the same study, a more detailed analysis found that there was a correlation between alcoholism in biological mothers and alcoholism in the adopted daughters.<sup>8</sup>

Other studies show that a parent's drinking behavior and attitudes about drinking have been positively associated with a child's initiating drinking. We know that children reared in alcoholic

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<sup>1</sup> Substance abuse and child maltreatment / National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information.  
Year Published: 2003

<sup>2</sup> "Dead Drunk in Russia" CNN World News, January, 1996

<sup>3</sup> "Alcohol, TB Key to Russian Life Expectancy: Consumption wildly affects mortality rates" By Edward Edelson  
March, 2001 (www.healingwell.com)

<sup>4</sup> National Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse

<sup>5</sup> National Association for Children of Alcoholics

<sup>6</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Curriculum Models on Alcohol and Other Drug Problems for Schools of  
Social Work

<sup>7</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. Curriculum Models on Alcohol and Other Drug Problems for Schools of  
Social Work

<sup>8</sup> National Association for Children of Alcoholics

families are more likely to engage in alcoholic behaviors if they have been exposed to drug seeking/taking behaviors.<sup>9</sup> The risks increase if they have tasted drugs or alcohol (as abhorrent as the thought might be) and engaged or witnessed stealing, lying and cheating behaviors to obtain alcohol or drugs. These are facts that adoptive parents cannot ignore when the adoption documentation reveals some connection to alcoholism and their child spent any significant time living with their birthfamily.

### **A Few More Facts<sup>10</sup>...**

- ✓ Impulsive, restless and distractible 3 year olds seem to be twice as likely as those who are "inhibited" or "well-adjusted" to be diagnosed with alcohol dependence at age 21.
- ✓ Aggressiveness in children as young as ages 5-10 has been found to predict alcohol or other drug use in adolescence.
- ✓ Childhood antisocial behavior is associated with alcohol-related problems in adolescence and alcohol abuse or dependence in adulthood.
- ✓ 6 to 17 year old boys with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder who were also found to have weak social relationships had significantly higher rates of alcohol abuse and dependence 4 years later when compared with ADHD boys without social deficiencies and also to boys without ADHD.
- ✓ In a study of college freshmen, alcohol abuse or dependence was twice as likely among those with anxiety disorders as those without the disorder. The same study yielded that alcoholism is four times as likely in kids with major depression... the depression came first.
- ✓ Children who have been abused or experienced other traumas are at increased risk for alcohol problems.
- ✓ Adolescents in treatment for alcohol abuse reported higher rates of past physical abuse, sexual abuse, violent victimization and witnessing violence when compared to kids who have no problems with alcohol.

### **The Good News...**

Children who are warned about alcohol by their parents AND children who reported being closer to their parents are less likely to start drinking. The person-environment interactions help shape patterns of alcohol/drug abuse or non-abuse. How kids behave with their peers and other reference groups come from you, the parent! Parents are the role models. How you cope, how you handle stress, how you use alcohol, how you view yourself within the family and your community are all relevant to your child's development of their alcohol and drug attitude.<sup>11</sup>

*Early initiation of drinking has been identified as an important risk factor for later alcohol related problems. Believe in your own power to help your child - avoid alcohol use. You have more influence on your child's values and decisions about drinking before he or she ever begins to even think about drinking. Seek out an alcohol and drug prevention/education program in your community.<sup>12</sup> One of the most powerful tools you have is YOU!*

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<sup>9</sup> National Association for Children of Alcoholics

<sup>10</sup> National Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse. National Association for Children of Alcoholics

<sup>11</sup> Center for Substance Abuse Prevention. National Association for Children of Alcoholics

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.health.org/>

Never forget the kids are watching!

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## Action Checklist for Prevention of Alcohol and Drug Use

National Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse

National Association for Children of Alcoholics

### For young children:

- Establish a loving, trusting relationship with your child.
- Make it easy for your child to talk honestly with you.
- Set a good example regarding your own alcohol use and your response to drinking.
- Talk with your child about alcohol facts and reasons not to drink.

### For pre-teens:

- All the above plus...
- Know the signs of a drinking problem.
- Keep tabs on activities. Join with other parents in making common policies about alcohol use.
- Develop family rules about drinking and establish consequences early.
- Encourage your child to develop healthy friendships and fun alternatives to drinking.
- Know whether your child is at high risk for drinking problems. Take steps to lessen that risk.

### For teens:

- All the above plus...
- Know the warning signs of a drinking problem and act promptly to get help for your child.
- Create a plan for peer pressures and role-play how to get out of difficult and high-pressure situations.

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*Doris lived in Germany and while traveled extensively she lectured on parenting through Europe and Eastern Europe via the USO. Later, her travels to China gave her an added dimension. She continues to lecture on parenting, provide workshops for adoption support groups and conducts educational seminars for adoption agencies. In September 2003, Doris released her first book, **Before I Met You** (all profits from the sale of her book are donated to the charitable initiatives of Families with Children from China.). Her book may be ordered through [www.Xlibris.com](http://www.Xlibris.com), the publisher or through her professional website [www.adoptionparenting.net](http://www.adoptionparenting.net). Her second book, **Underground Feelings**, is expected to be released in late 2004.*