

CHILDREN OF WORKAHOLICS (COWs)

Children of workaholics, at any age, can manifest a number of problems stemming from growing up in a family in which one or both parents are/were workaholics. These children are more likely to become workaholics themselves, have more problems in relationships and are often filled with insecurities and doubts about their self-worth. (Adults and children whose parents were not themselves workaholic, but demanded their children be perfect can grow up manifesting the same problems as children who grew up in a workaholic environment.)

COWs work hard to please their parents and others, but are not able to experience the rewards of their labor. They have been taught that even doing things “perfectly” gets no reward(s) because “it is only what’s expected and therefore deserves no special recognition”. Fears of success and fears of failure paradigms often evolve from this lack of appropriate recognition and affirmation. Children of workaholics often become perfectionists. They can also learn to underachieve to cope with the pressure of having to be perfect. COWs are frequently judgmental and critical of others and themselves. It’s not uncommon for these children and adults to have poor self-esteem...to blame themselves when something goes wrong, and to refuse praise when things go well.

Workaholics are often emotionally challenged. Guilt becomes their ever present companion. They try to suppress their frustration and often angry feelings until there is no more emotional storage room left. Then they are predisposed to lashing out their anger at others and/or turning their hostilities on themselves, making them susceptible to depression and other stress-related illnesses such as: ulcers, colitis, insomnia, fatigue, anxiety, headaches, eating disorders. Unfortunately, children of workaholics follow their parent’s lead and keep feelings to themselves.

Many children of workaholics learn that they can’t rely on their workaholic parent(s). They grow up learning that promises often are not kept. They begin to feel that they are not as valued as the workaholic’s work. COWs decide that it’s best to not ask, not hope, or not trust anyone. A byproduct of being shown love one day and rejected the next lead many COWs to have difficulties forming and/or maintaining healthy relationships. Some COWs would rather stay in an unhealthy relationship than risk the pain of abandonment and rejection.

Some children of workaholics use negative behavior(s) to attract attention. These children and adults usually struggle to maintain a positive self-image, and may run into trouble in the classroom or run into problems in their work place because of poor performance (underachievers) and/or displaying problem(s) relating to their supervisor(s) and co-workers.

COWs often do not know how to have fun. They turn fun into a work event and/or a competition. Again they must achieve and/or win in order for them to feel satisfied. Relaxation is seen as wasting valuable time. They live to work vs. working to live.

Children of workaholics can lead happier, healthier lives. The first step in becoming healthier is learning to express their needs and feelings. Asking for help and accepting it when offered, allowing themselves to make mistakes and not making it a crime deserving of punishment, and being honest with themselves and others will lay a groundwork for change to occur. The second step is exploring important issues affecting their lives, such

as how to handle their emotions, learning to trust, and reducing their need to be in control.

Help is available....Just make the time to put yourself "The Priority"....Don't do to yourself what your workaholic parent(s) did to you....

Tuck T. Saul, Ph.D.