



Alcohol and the Family

NIAAA Social Work Education

Module 10J

(revised 8/04)

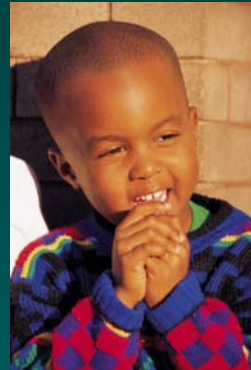


Outline

- Background
- Family Systems
- Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders
- Alcohol Use Disorder Influences on Family
- Families and Recovery

Background

- Approximately 17.6 million American adults abuse alcohol or are alcohol dependent
- Approximately 1 in 4 children is exposed to effects of alcohol abuse or dependence in a family member



Background (continued)

“Family” is relevant because:

- Alcohol may influence family functioning
- Family functioning affects alcohol use/abuse
- Alcohol use disorders “run in families”



Background (continued)

Family takes many diverse forms

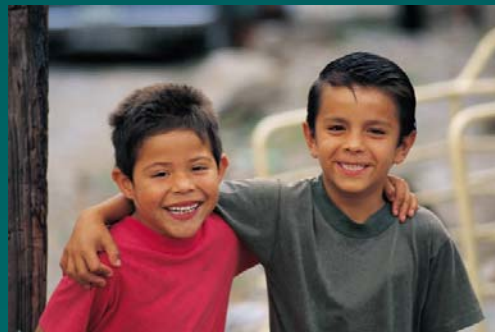
- Nuclear
- Single parent mother
- Single parent father
- Ex- and Step-relations
- Grandparent, Aunt/Uncle as parent
- Foster families
- And others....



Background (continued)

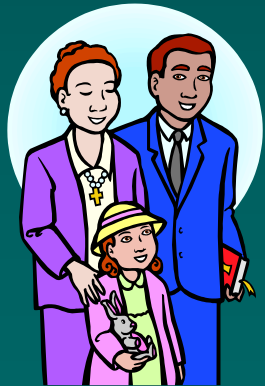
Family and family functions are defined differently in different cultures

- *“Blood” relatives*
- *Legal bonds (marriage, adoption)*
- *Kin (extended family, multiple generations, close friends as kin)*



Background (continued)

Family roles, rules, values about interdependence and relations, support systems vary by culture



Family Systems

Family systems are dynamic, changing over time as:

- membership changes,*
- individuals change,*
- relationships change,*
- context changes*



Family Systems (continued)

1. Family system is more than sum of parts

- Interactions
- Dynamics
- Rules
- Roles
- Boundaries
- Patterns
- Circularity of influence between individuals and whole



Family Systems (continued)

Change in part of a system affects the entire system

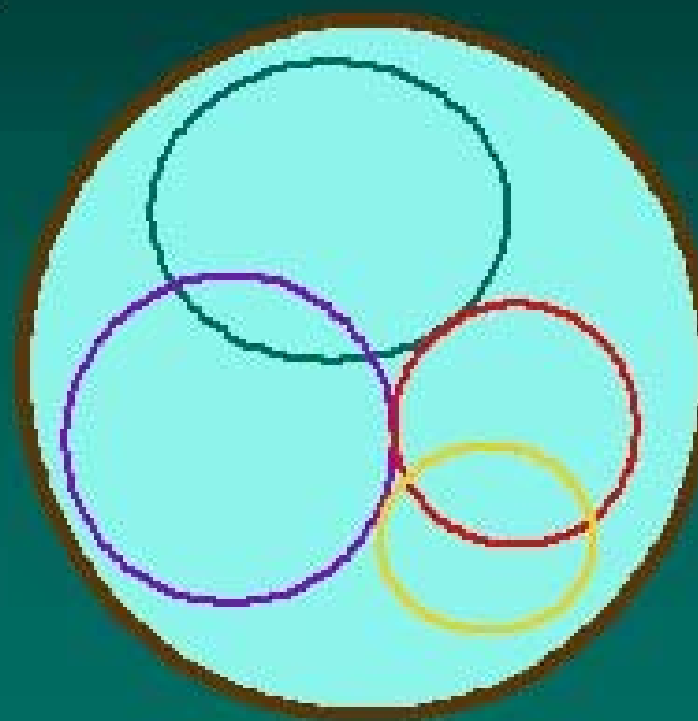
- *Developmental change of individual*
- *Loss of member (death, divorce, runaway, incarceration, cut offs)*
- *Gain new members*
- *Shift in a relationship*



Family Systems (continued)

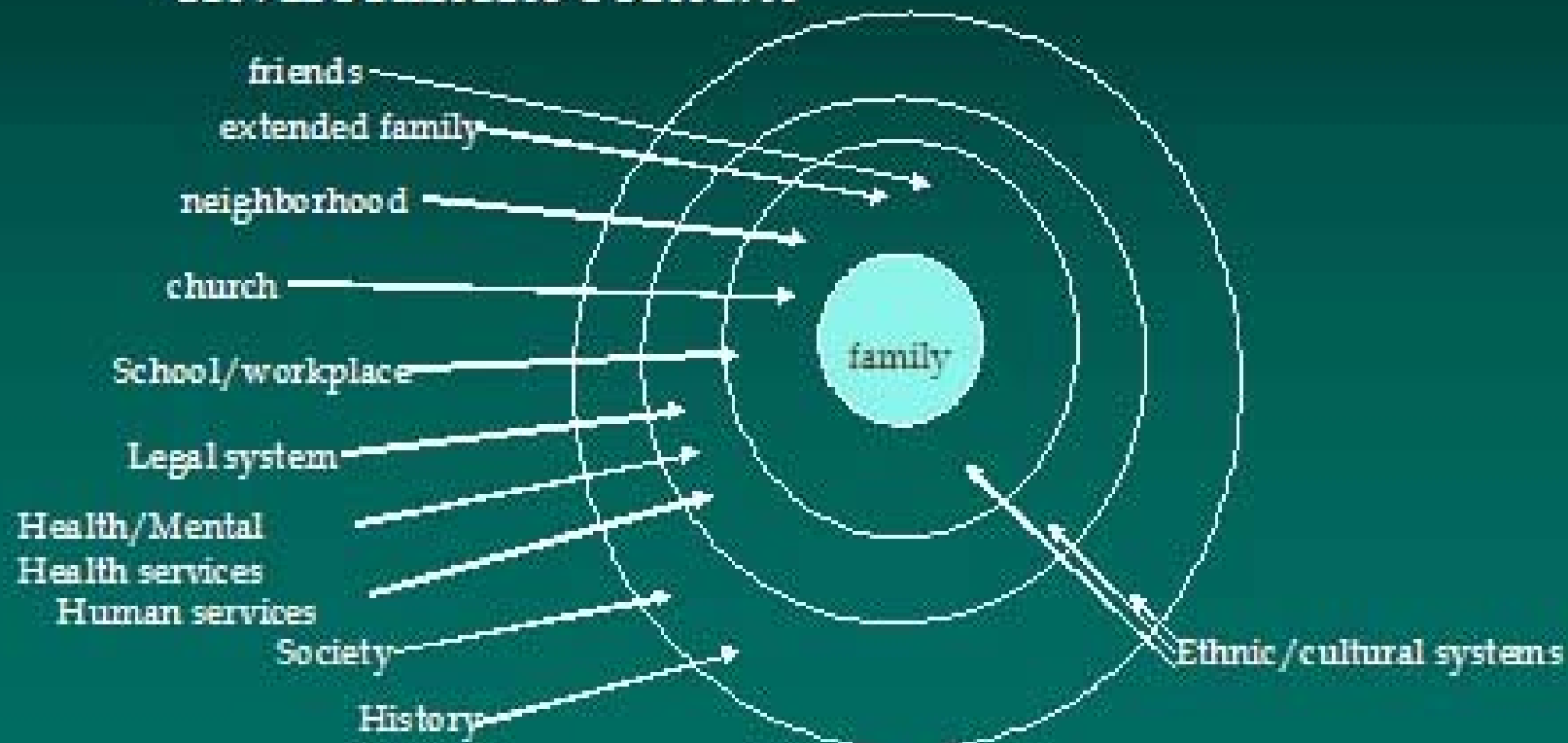
3 Subsystems are embedded and operate in larger system

- Couple
- Parent-child
- Sibling
- Extended family
- Gender dynamics, etc.



Family Systems (continued)

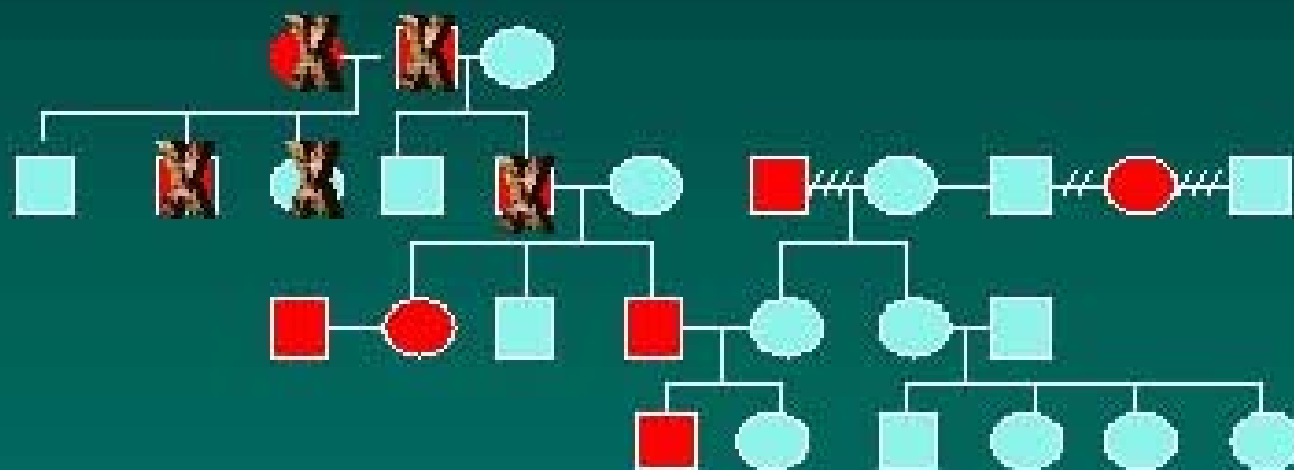
4 Families exist within a larger social environment context





Family Systems (continued)

5 Families are multigenerational



Family Systems (continued)

CHANGE = STRESS

All changes: positive, negative

Change requires adaptive energy, adjustment requires resources

Systems resist change (systems seek and preserve homeostasis, equilibrium, balance)



Family Systems (continued)

Points of difficulty between individual in recovery and family system:

Person tries to regain roles, positions in family system (decisions, authority, sex, intimacy, other reciprocal exchanges)

Difficulties in parent-child relations (discipline, communication)

Developmental changes, family life cycle transitions, situation changes



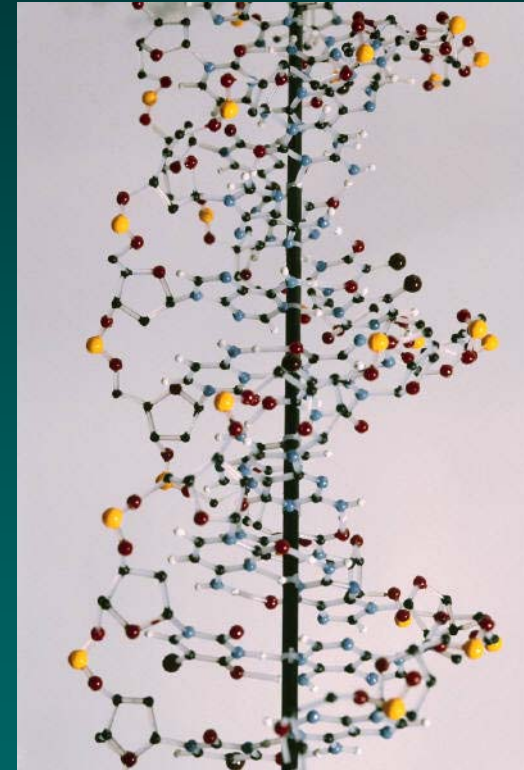
Family Systems (continued)

Conclusions: Family is a context for an individual's drinking problems – may play a role in emergence and maintenance of the alcohol use disorder, may also play a role in treatment and recovery processes; family remains relevant to individuals



Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Genetics

- *Genetics matter in risk and resilience*
 - *Family pedigree studies (4-7 x risk for 10 relatives)*
 - *Adoption studies*
- *Physiological aspects of alcohol use disorders appear to have considerable heritability*
- *Genetics alone do not explain outcomes – not deterministic*





Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Genetics (continued)

- *Genetic factors interact with other biological and environmental context factors*

Genetics x Biology x Environment=Outcome

- *Some factors are risk/vulnerability factors*
- *Some factors are protective/resilience factors*
- *Genetics explain vulnerability, environment contributes to emergence or expression*

Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Genetics (continued)

- *Specific pathways are becoming better understood*
 - *E.g., differences in physiological responses and sensitivity to alcohol*



Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Family Context

- *“Individuals reared with an alcohol-abusing parent are at risk for developing alcohol problems due both to genetic factors and to faulty role modeling” (O’Farrell, 1995)*
- *Some effects are direct, others are indirect effects (e.g., child temperament or hyperreactivity to stress)*





Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Family Context (continued)

- *Exposure to key antecedants to heavy drinking episodes:*
 - *Family arguments*
 - *Poor family communication*
 - *Inadequate family problem solving*
 - *Nagging at home*
- *Exposure to key consequences for heavy drinking episodes*
 - *Deliver reinforcement*
 - *Remove negative consequences*

"Causes"

"Effects"

Family Influences on Alcohol Use Disorders: Family Context (continued)

Exposure to a parent's alcohol use disorder may:

- Result in easy access to alcohol by children, adolescents, young adults*
- Establish norms of tolerating heavy alcohol use by family members*
- Result in poor/absent parental monitoring of alcohol use by children, adolescents, young adults*
- Lead to development of risky "alcohol expectancies" early in life*



Alcohol Use Disorder Influences on Family

❖ Relationship of alcohol abuse to other family problems may be:

❖ Causal A → B

❖ Reciprocal A ↔ B

❖ Iterative A → B → A → B → A → B

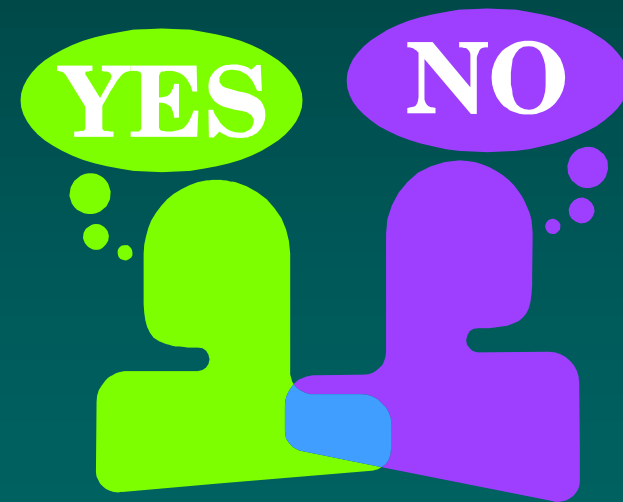
❖ Incidental to other causes A ← C → B



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Couples

Alcohol Use Disorders affect couples'

- *Communication*
- *Conflict levels increased*
- *Nagging*
- *Poor sexual relations*
- *Domestic violence*
- *Partner stress*



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Parent–Child Relations

- Parenting practices can be affected by alcohol use disorders*
- Family life may be chaotic, involve poor quality environments when parents have alcohol use disorders*
- Children's exposure to conflict is common when parents have alcohol use disorders*



Alcohol Use Disorder Influences on Family: Parent-Child (continued)



Alcohol Use Disorder Influences on Family: Children of Alcoholics

*children of
lifetime
alcoholics*

*children of
parental
period
alcoholics*

*children of
current
alcoholics*

Alcohol Use Disorder Influences on Family: Children (continued)

Parental Alcohol Use Disorder

filtering influences

Heterogeneity of Child Outcomes

Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Children (continued)

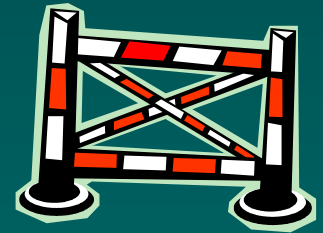
Resilience factors also act as filters that help shape the developmental impact of parental alcohol use disorders



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Children (continued)

Preventive and treatment interventions for children of alcoholic parents face barriers:

- Children having access, transportation*
- Payment, resources*
- Fear, anxiety, embarrassment, trust, other emotional hurdles of children*
- Parent's minimization and no consent*
- Developmental appropriateness of program*



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Children (continued)

Fetal alcohol exposure concerns are important considerations with regard to alcohol use disorders and their potential impact on children



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Siblings

- *Sibling research helps address heritability questions – there is a genetic influence combined with an environmental influence*
- *Siblings act as agents of socialization through:*
 - *Modeling*
 - *Reinforcement/punishment*
 - *Rule enforcement*
 - *Shaping developmental environments*



Alcohol Use Disorders Influences on Family: Siblings (continued)

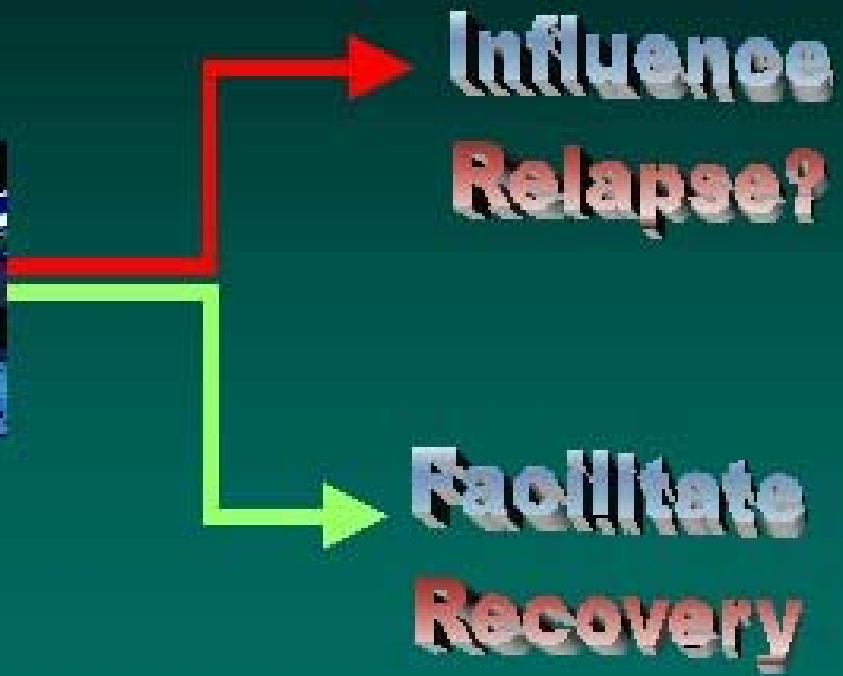
- A person's drinking can affect relationships with brothers and sisters*
- Siblings may be role models for each others' drinking behavior*
- Siblings may be a source of access to substances like alcohol*
- Structured sibling support interventions may help*



Families and Recovery



Family



Families and Recovery (continued)

- *Family Systems Models: family homeostatic functions preserve balance for system as a whole, regardless of “cost” to individual members*
- *Individual’s alcohol use disorder “serves” a family “stabilizing” function and system maintains the behavior to prevent change*



Families and Recovery (continued)

Behavioral Family Models: based on social learning theory, alcohol use disorders are learned and maintained through interaction with social environment

- *Observational learning*
- *Operant learning*
- *Presence/absence of opportunities*



Families and Recovery (continued)

Family can affect recovery if they:

- *Provide drinking stimuli/cues (-)*
- *Model drinking (-) or other “coping strategies” (+)*
- *Influence vulnerability (+ or -)*
- *Reinforce or punish sobriety efforts (+, -)*
- *Prevent negative consequences from being experienced (-)*



Families and Recovery (continued)

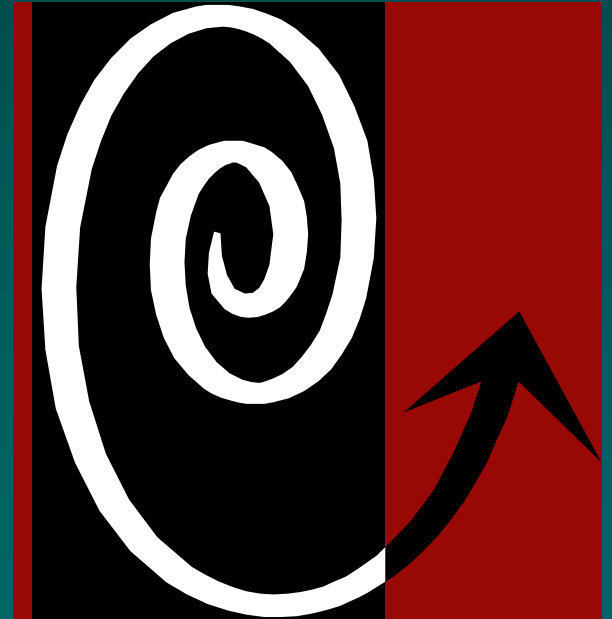
- *Family Disease Model: Alcohol use disorders represent diseases that affect both individuals and the family*
- *Treatment from this approach helps family members heal themselves*



Families and Recovery (continued)

*Family “Readiness to Change”
parallels individual change process*

- *Precontemplation*
- *Contemplation*
- *Preparation*
- *Action*
- *Maintenance*



Families and Recovery (continued)

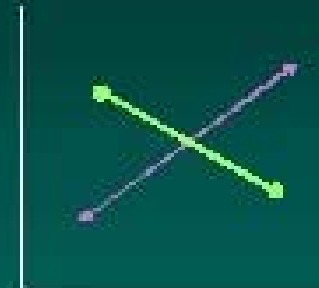
Interventions involving family and “significant others” are more effective (better compliance, better outcomes) than treating individuals with alcohol use disorders in isolation

- SSO=supportive significant other



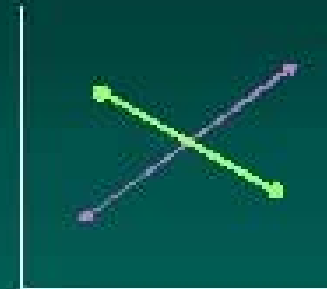
Families and Recovery (continued)

- ❖ Relative effectiveness of intervention type interacts with nature of the social support networks (e.g., family at home)
- ❖ MET>TSP if low support for drinking, TSP>MET if support for drinking in social network
- ❖ SO intervention and family therapy improves outcome for individuals with low abstinence support



Families and Recovery (continued)

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Families and Recovery (continued)

When both partners have alcohol use disorder, advantages gained by working simultaneously

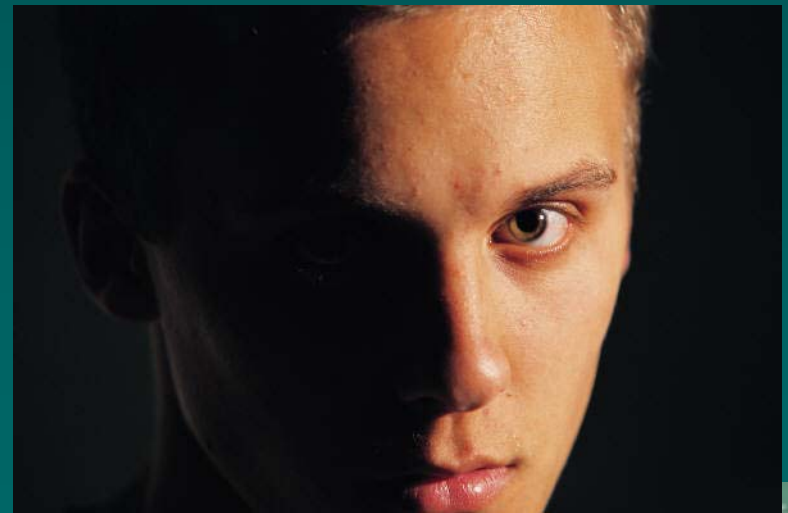
In all couples, priority should be addressing alcohol abuse before relationship work, then address family problems caused by alcohol



Families and Recovery (continued)

*Most important “significant others” might not be the most obvious
For a particular individual, it might be:*

- Parent*
- Partner*
- Friend*
- Grandparent*
- Sibling, cousin*
- Son/daughter*



Families and Recovery (continued)

Barriers to family intervention with alcohol use disorders:

- *Potential for violence/safety risks*
- *Legal restrictions*
- *More than one family member actively abusing substances*
- *High blame levels*
- *Practical barriers (geography, separations, schedules, child care, reimbursement)*

