

For some kids, schools closing early due to coronavirus equates to an extended summer holiday, but for those with alcoholic parents, it's nothing but dread knowing that their safe space, their escape, is being cut off.

The children who go home to alcoholic parents every day are the ones who will be feeling a sense of despair in the pits of their stomachs, thinking that there's no escape during the day.

If that child or teenager is you, I know how you feel. I promise. My mum was/is an alcoholic, and although I'm older than school age now, I looked forward to going to school each day. I was the one who signed up to after school events just to prolong the time from going home to my mum inevitably being passed out on the sofa. So now that school is closed, I know you'll be dreading the extra time at home if your alcoholic parent is also there.

A few things I did when I was home to distract myself from the situation going on downstairs that might also help you, are below, along with some other tips:

Write plays with your brother or sister: No it doesn't involve technology, but it really is fun. I had a little brother who I tried to protect and keep away from where my mum would be drinking, or passed out. We'd go upstairs and make up a story, then write a script for our play and act it out as though we were in a soap opera. It'd keep us occupied and entertained for ages. We'd be conscious of being too loud though! This is a great thing to do if you have a much younger sibling that you need to distract but want to engage with.

Write a story or keep a diary: When I was a kid, we had a very slow internet connection and no laptops, so I would write down all my thoughts and feelings on paper. If you have a laptop then you can type up instead. I used to make up stories of the life I wanted, and I'd also write about the life I had. And you know what? When I went to college I studied Journalism and my final major project was to write the beginning of a book. I used the stories I wrote when I was stuck at home and upset with my mum drinking, as the basis for my project. I got a distinction and didn't even have to do any research because it was all based on what I had been through. I then went onto University to study Journalism and I'm now writing a book for children on living with an alcoholic parent, all alongside my day job. I worked really hard at school so that I could be successful and get away from having to live with my drunk mum, and it worked. So, remember that good things can come out of your horrible situations. It won't always be like this.

Visualise: When you're going through something horrible and all you can think about is not wanting to be in this situation but having no way out, close your eyes and think about the future you want. There's a good tip used by professionals which is to cross your arms and stroke your upper arms while thinking of a time you were at your absolute happiest. Well, this also works if you think about what your dream future would look like. Another tip to combat anxiety is to hold your hand to your heart and take 3 deep breaths, close your eyes and think of a time you were really happy.

Learn: It may seem boring, having to learn at home when you're off school, but it's also really important. Learning something new by watching learning channels on YouTube and making sure you're really clever will mean you'll get ahead at school and this will enable

your future opportunities in the work place. Trust me, if I did it then you can too. Use your frustrations and emotions of being let down, as fuel to do better and come out stronger. Don't blame yourself for how your parent is behaving, it is not your fault. I thought it was mine when I was your age, I thought my mum loved wine more than she loved me, now that I'm older I realise it's an illness, but that didn't stop me from blaming myself.

Play: playing Xbox and PlayStation online with your mates will keep you from feeling so alone during isolation, and ensure you're still in touch with your mates.

I really hope some of these tips work, and remember NACOA are here to help if you ever want to chat.

All my best,
Tanisha