Common Myths in Families with Addiction:

- “All families are like ours; there’s nothing unusual going on here.”
- “If we talk about what is actually happening, it will just make things worse.”
- “We need to keep family secrets private; people outside the family won’t understand.”
- “If we ignore problems, someday, somehow, things will get better.”
Common Family Roles:

Drug and alcohol addiction affect the entire family, not just the person who is addicted. The family operates as a system, with each member of the family unconsciously assuming a role to keep the family “functioning” (more accurately, barely surviving) amidst spiraling chaos. If a parent is addicted to substances, the following roles are often assumed by other family members:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Big Caretaker/Enabler         | - Often one of the parents, the partner of the person that is addicted  
- Covers for the substance abuser, picks up the pieces, protects the person who is addicted from experiencing negative consequences  
- Takes on responsibilities that are being neglected by the person with the addiction  
- Often hopes things will change or get better on their own |
| Little Caretaker              | - Miniature enabler, taking cues from the Enabler  
- Gets drinks or drugs for the parent (or family member) with the addiction, cleans up messes, and attempted to soothe the addicted parent  
- Often seeks a partner who behaves like the addicted parent did |
| Hero                          | - Tries to make the family proud  
- Very responsible, typically quite successful at school and work  
- Appears self-confident but often feels inadequate; vulnerable to stress and anxiety |
| Scapegoat                     | - Tries to divert attention away from the addict by acting out in anger and rebellion  
- Accident prone and self-destructive; frequently hospitalized or injured; prone to risk-taking  
- Likely to abuse substances |
| Lost Child                    | - Isolates and withdraws from family through TV, videogames, reading, etc. to escape  
- Requires little attention and appears quiet and content  
- Loner, typically has few friends |
| Clown/Mascot                  | - Brings comic relief by being cute and funny  
- Unable to communicate honestly  
- Immature |

**FAMILY MEMBERS ARE WISE TO REMEMBER THE “3 C’s”:**

1. They did not **CAUSE** the addiction.  
2. They cannot **CONTROL** the addiction.  
3. They cannot **CURE** the addiction.

**Drug and alcohol addictions are...**

1. Chronic (long-lasting)  
2. Progressive (worsen over time)  
3. Fatal (if left untreated)  

**But they are also...**

**Treatable!** Therapy and/or self-help groups can be helpful for all members of the family.

- Al-Anon  www.al-anon.org  
- Alcoholics Anonymous  www.aa.org  
- Narcotics Anonymous  www.na.org

---

**Psychological and Counseling Services (PACS)**

3 Garrison Avenue, Smith Hall - 3rd Floor, Durham, NH 03824  
Tel: 603-862-2090  Website: www.unh.edu/pacs