The following points for consideration regarding the portrayal of spouses, family, friends, and children of alcoholics were developed as a resource for entertainment development and production. They are not meant to limit the creative process.

**Children of Alcoholics**

The stigma and stereotyping of alcoholics and children of alcoholics can be reduced through accurate portrayals and on-screen discussions of alcoholism as a disease.

◆ Remember that while many children of alcoholics are adversely affected by their parents' problems, most appear to be unaffected or minimally affected. These children function well and do not develop serious problems.

◆ Consider depicting children of alcoholics developing autonomy and a sense of independence separate from a disruptive home environment.

◆ Children of alcoholics can be portrayed as gaining positive attention from others and developing a close bond with a sympathetic adult or older adolescent.

◆ Children of alcoholics might be shown seeking help for themselves, independent of attempts to help their drinking parents. When appropriate, show alcoholics beginning the treatment and/or recovery process.

◆ Try showing children of alcoholics successfully resolving emotionally difficult situations involving parental or family drinking, and helping them interpret their painful experiences in a constructive way.

◆ Be cognizant of the increased risk that children of alcoholics will become alcoholics or drug abusers. Another frequent pattern that can be found in these children on reaching adulthood is dating or marrying alcoholics or addicts, sometimes repeatedly.

◆ When appropriate, try to include an adult or young child of an alcoholic resolving a difficult situation involving the parent's recovery from addiction, as well as the changes the recovery makes in the nature of their relationship. For example, the child can no longer draw self-esteem from being the only responsible one. The parent may or may not make amends with the child for the impact his or her past addiction had on the child's life.

◆ Be aware that while some tendencies are common among children of alcoholics, each child's personality and reaction to parental alcoholism is unique. While one may fail classes, another may escape stress by studying to get perfect grades; while some may rebel, others may be overly compliant.
Other Relationship Issues

Alcoholism is often referred to as the “disease of 1 + 4” because of the effects this illness has on the family and relationships (children, husband, wife, partner, friends).

◆ Bear in mind that many family members do not talk to anyone outside of the family about an alcoholic family member.

◆ Try to bring attention to a character's gradual struggle with personal relationships.

◆ When possible, show the struggles a person's alcoholism can lead to with coworkers or bosses.

◆ When portraying alcoholics, remember that work activities are often the last to be severely affected by the alcoholism.

◆ Keep in mind the impact of the alcoholic’s behavior and sickness on family and friends. For every story that focuses on the alcoholic, there may be any number of equally compelling stories that focus on those in the alcoholic’s life.

◆ Where possible, avoid having adult characters, particularly parents, boasting about tales of drinking exploits from their youth.
Family and Other Relationships – Alcohol

Fact Sheet

Children of Alcoholics:
- Seventy six million Americans, about 43 percent of the U.S. adult population, have been exposed to alcoholism in the family.
- Almost one in five adult Americans (18 percent) lived with an alcoholic while growing up.
- There are an estimated 26.8 million children of alcoholics in the United States. More than 11 million are under the age of 18.
- Children of alcoholics are four times more likely than children of nonalcoholics to develop alcoholism.
- Children’s perceptions of parental drinking volume and circumstances appear to influence their own drinking frequency.
- By a very early age, children’s alcohol expectancies reflect recognition of alcohol-related norms and cognizance of parental drinking patterns.
- Family interaction patterns also may influence the child of an alcoholic’s risk for alcohol abuse. It has been found that families with an alcoholic parent displayed more negative family interaction during problem-solving discussions than in non-alcoholic families.
- Almost one-third of any sample of alcoholics has at least one parent who also was or is an alcoholic.
- Children of alcoholics are more likely than children of nonalcoholics to marry into families in which alcoholism is prevalent.
- Parental alcoholism influences adolescent substance use through several different pathways including stress, negative affect and decreased parental monitoring. Negative affect and impaired parental monitoring are associated with adolescents joining in a peer network that supports drug and/or alcohol use.

Other Relationship Issues:
- Separated and divorced men and women were three times as likely as married men and women to say that they had been married to an alcoholic or problem drinker.
- Almost two-thirds of separated or divorced men under age 46 have been exposed to alcoholism in the family at some time.
- Living with an alcoholic in the family can contribute to stress for all members of the family. Each member may be affected differently. The level of dysfunction or resiliency of a nonalcoholic spouse is a key factor in how children are affected.
Children raised in alcoholic families have different life experiences than children raised in nonalcoholic families. Children raised in other types of dysfunctional families may have similar developmental losses and stressors as children raised in alcoholic families.

Source: