

Lucy's Secret: An Interactive Narrative About Parental Alcoholism  
From A Child's Perspective

by

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## **Introduction**

For my capstone, I created a digital interactive fiction similar to a choose-your-own-adventure book on the topic of parental alcoholism. In general, there are a lack of resources available that offer detailed accounts of an alcoholic parent from the perspective of a child. The majority of these resources come in the form of picture books aimed towards elementary-aged children, so naturally, the details presented in these books will be limited.

I decided to create this project to help close the gap in available resources about having an alcoholic parent from the child's perspective. This gap was also noticed by Tinnfält et al. (2018) who states, "There seems to be a lack of studies examining how children and adolescents themselves describe the experience of being a COA (child of an alcoholic). Little is known about the lives of COA from their own point of view." My goal for this project was to create a resource that will help people who support children of alcoholics, but who have no first-hand experience with alcoholism themselves. This resource will provide these teachers, relatives, guardians, and other trusted adults with a better understanding of what the child may be going through and how it may impact their thoughts, feelings, and reactions to events in their lives.

"Lucy's Secret" tells the story of a young girl, Lucy, who is navigating through her fifth-grade year of school while experiencing the worries and stress of her mom's increasing alcoholism. This interactive narrative offers different paths and experiences for Lucy depending on the reader's choices throughout the game to simulate Lucy's life with a parent addicted to alcohol.

## **Supporting Courses**

There have been quite a few courses that I credit to helping me shape the ideas for this project. The first is *Genres of Creative Writing*. In this class, I wrote a short story that included a

character dealing with alcoholism. This class was also my first introduction to learning how to think about audience engagement and craft stories with the audience in mind.

During the same semester, I was also taking *Professional and Academic Editing*. After brainstorming through a wide variety of topics for our interactive narrative project, the one that finally stuck was a story about a young girl who was left home alone with her alcoholic mom for a weekend. In the beginning, this project was extremely overwhelming to me because it involved using Twine, a software I had never heard of before. However, after many frustrating hours of tinkering with Twine for the first time, my love for interactive narratives was born.

As luck would have it, the following semester the program offered a class titled *Interactive Narrative and Games Writing*. Though my projects for this class were on different topics, this class gave me further opportunities to work with Twine and expand my knowledge of interactive narratives. In this class, we learned about player agency and how to use points of interaction to create a compelling story that will keep the audience engaged. We also practiced ways of mapping out a lengthy interactive narrative with multiple endings and many branching points. To do this, we crafted a choose-your-own-adventure story and used an interactive narrative as a portion of our video game creation project.

Another class I am grateful for is *Research Methods for Writers*. This class was helpful when it came to learning how to do serious planning for this capstone project. Here, we learned strategies for conducting research and for organizing our thoughts and materials throughout the research process. Additionally, we were encouraged to think forward to our capstone project and developed research questions that would guide the project's development. We also practiced various ways of conducting the research. These included exploring archives on the chosen topics

and finding scholarly articles. From this class, I decided to expand on my topic from my previous interactive fiction story and use it for my final capstone project.

### **Literature Review**

Personal accounts of alcoholism can be tricky for young children. According to Park and Schepp (2017), “Participants described themselves as living in perpetual fear, in an environment where unexpected situations could occur anytime. They could not predict what would happen on any given day, so they always felt scared and nervous.” Many children described the experience of their parent becoming an entirely different person when drunk. One child explained, “My dad was a very, very good man until he started drinking alcohol. He was like a good friend of mine until then. But once he was drunk, he looked very scary. Phew! I was terrified” (Park & Schepp, 2017). *Addie’s Mom Isn’t Home Anymore* by Genia Calvin portrayed how addiction can come on suddenly and change the dynamics of the family. In her story, Addie begins by talking about how she had a great mom that would play with her, cook for her, read books to her, etc. Then one day, things began to change and her mom started to become mean towards her. She’d spend all her time in her bedroom and wouldn’t leave. Not knowing what caused this change, Addie blamed herself. This is similar to *The Addiction Monster* by Janet Amptman, which begins with the character explaining how much she loves her mom. However, the character later describes times when her mom gets really mean and scary and wakes up “grumpy.” She discusses how this grumpiness lasts until she gets a “special drink” which makes her act funny and her breath smell funny. Eventually, she becomes mean after this drink (Amptman & Amptman, 2013).

These accounts are similar to Trish Healy Luna and Janey Healy Hellier’s *Timbi Talks About Addiction*, which portrays how Timbi loves his dad while he is sober. However, Timbi later states, “When Daddy starts drinking, things start to change. He starts to sound weird, and he

starts to act strange. When Daddy acts weird, it's scary for me. Sometimes he does things I don't want to see," (Luna et al., 2018). These sudden changes in behavior can be frightening for children as they often have a hard time understanding the cause of this change in behavior. It's not uncommon for the child to take it upon themselves to cure the parent. For instance, in Mary Brady's article, "Daddy's Head is Broken': The Treatment of Children of Severe Alcoholics," a five-year-old boy stated, " I am a super hero and I will find the good potion to make the zombie good." These children don't understand what happened to the parent they loved, and want to do anything they can to get them back. Brady (2021) states the children "attempted to protect the ill parents from their own anger and disappointment." These children love their parents and want to keep them safe, while still feeling safe themselves.

Children are magical thinkers when it comes to their parent's drinking, and they often believe they caused it by being born. They believe that if they do certain things to control the drinking, it will stop (Burke, 1989). For example, they may hide the parent's purse or keys to stop them from driving or going to the liquor store, they may try acting like a grown-up, or they may try acting mean to draw attention away from the family problems (Tinnfält et al., 2018). These children may also take on adult roles such as tidying up the house in hopes of minimizing yelling from the intoxicated parent (Holmila et al., 2010). Some children believe they are able to have an influence over parental fighting. For instance, while the parents are fighting the child may do something to show how mad they are in hopes it will get the parents to realize the pain they are causing them and they will stop arguing (Tinnfält et al., 2018). They may attempt to remove themselves from the situation such as going to their room and closing the door (Holmila et al., 2010).

In addition to attempts to control the situation, children will form coping mechanisms as they try to make sense of their new reality. According to Lakshamma & Kalavati (2018), “Alcoholism creates a series of crises in family; as a result, members may develop dysfunctional coping behaviors.” There are various factors that play into how a child copes with an alcoholic parent. According to Tinnfält et al. (2018), one major factor is whether the child has an available support group and if the parents are ready to take responsibility for their actions and get the help that they need. This was illustrated in *The Addiction Monster* where it acknowledges the fact that the parent has to want to get help from their addiction. Amptman states, “Some parents never get help and don’t quit using drugs and alcohol, some go to jail and some get help but get tricked by the addiction monster again and some beat him,” (Amptman & Amptman, 2013). This idea became an important topic for my story because I did not want to end on a note where one stay in a rehabilitation program cured the addiction for good. Not many children’s books acknowledge that jail could be a possibility, and many make it seem that once a parent goes to rehab they are cured forever.

Due to shame and fear of exposing the family secret, many children will attempt to hide family alcoholism from the outside world. This can lead to children taking on specific roles in their family as a way to deal with the stress (Burke, 1989; Vernig, 2010). As Lucy is the oldest child in my story, I chose to focus on the role of the “responsible child” or sometimes called the “family hero.” These children measure their self-worth by their achievements (Burke, 1989). They often take over the parental roles and are loved by teachers. However, they tend to only feel “ok” when they are able to achieve their goals (Burke, 1989). They are likely to be perfectionists and do not handle mistakes well (Vernig, 2010).

The scapegoat, where the child tends to act out, is another role a child may take on to deal with family addiction. Then there is the family mascot, where the child tends to use humor to get attention. They could also become the caretaker, where the child concerns themselves so much with the wellbeing of others to avoid taking care of themselves. Lastly, there is the lost child, where the child does not cause trouble and fades into the background (Burke, 1989).

In my story, Lucy exhibits a role known as parentification, which is defined as the “inappropriate and premature assumption of adult roles by children or adolescents before they are emotionally or developmentally able to manage those roles successfully” (Vernig, 2010). Here, the child would take on the roles that the parent should be doing such as cleaning, cooking, and taking care of younger siblings (Vernig, 2010).

According to Haverfield & Theiss (2014), there are some long-term consequences for children of alcoholics. One of these became a focus in one track of my story and this is low self-esteem and insecurity (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014). Children growing up in an alcoholic household may experience “high levels of uncertainty and insecurity because of always questioning whether their feelings were relevant or accurate” (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014). This inability to cope with uncertainty often contributes to stress, which is associated with feelings of being overwhelmed by life, lethargy, and giving up” (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014). Constant anger and resentment for life and for the alcoholic parent was another long-term consequence that could become an issue (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014). Here, the child might feel angry and frustrated at the parent for having a problem with drinking (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014).

Communication problems can become a major issue because many children were told to hide what was bothering them and to never discuss alcoholism both inside the family or to anyone else (Haverfield & Theiss, 2014). Children are led to believe that telling the family secret

can lead to serious consequences. Many of the children's picture books attempt to disprove this common belief by having a character that does tell a trusted adult about the problems at home. In turn, the parent gets help through a rehabilitation program and the child is able to get help through therapy or through talking to another adult. For instance, in *Addie's Mom Isn't Home Anymore*, Addie ends up telling her teacher about the problems at home, and the same day the police come and take her mom to a rehabilitation program. Addie is conveniently sent to stay with her grandmother that happens to live right near the school. Addie's grandmother is also able to send Addie to a therapist so she can get help as well (Calvin, 2019). This is similarly seen in *The Addiction Monster*, where the young girl is also able to speak to a therapist with the intervention of her teacher and grandparents. Emmy, in *Emmy's Question* by Jeannine Auth, also sees a therapist. However, this easy access to therapy is not always realistic. For one, it is expensive, and it would mean the family is ready to accept there is a problem and do something about it. Until addiction reaches a certain point, this might not happen as the parents may not want to admit to having a problem nor would they want their child discussing the family issues with a therapist. Then, while the characters in *Timbi Talks About Addiction* and *I Want My Dad* have characters that don't see a therapist, they do have a person who is able to offer support and listen to them such as a parent, grandparent, or teacher. This is something that might not be available for many children out of fear of exposing and discussing the family secret.

When it comes to exposing and discussing the family secret, most children found it best not to discuss the family problems (Holmila et al., 2010). Some children stated, "It is best not to talk about these problems even to one's best friends" (Holmila et al., 2010). They feared social stigma, losing their friends, and getting unwanted attention from outside sources such as teachers and child protection services. They also feared angering parents for reaching out to outsiders

(Holmila et al., 2010). While some children did take comfort in talking to a friend or other family member, other children did not have anyone to talk to. These children had “lost their trust in their peers and adults and started to cover up their problems from everyone” (Holmila et al., 2010). These children would commonly turn to writing as a way to process what was happening and as a distraction from their surroundings (Holmila et al., 2010).

While the majority of books were picture books, there was one chapter book, *Emmy's Question* by Jeannine Auth, that was geared towards middle schoolers. In *Emmy's Question*, Emmy's mom is an alcoholic and causes Emmy a lot of stress. Her mom continuously promises Emmy she will stop drinking, but never follows through on her promise. Her mom also experiences problems holding down a job, picking Emmy up drunk, and neglecting household responsibilities such as cleaning and cooking (Auth, 2010). Emmy, being an only child, takes it on herself to feel responsible for her mom's drinking. In addition, her mom consistently puts guilt onto Emmy by saying how if she was better then she'll stop drinking altogether (Auth, 2010).

Some sources criticize this book as being “too hopeful” (Lacy, 2015). Lacy (2015) states the book is too predictable with a family that can afford treatment for the mother and presents a character that is not complex with “no narrative history to explain their present selves.” This is mostly due to the fact that Emmy has close by grandparents, a highly supportive father, access to therapy and support groups, and a teacher that happened to grow up with an alcoholic parent. However, Emmy goes through many disappointments with her mom's drinking as well. For instance, her mom misses her basketball games and is drunk when she has a friend come over. Emmy also struggles through conflicting feelings about her mom during special occasions such as Mother's Day. This story illustrates the conflicting feelings Emmy must deal with such as how

she can both be so mad at her mom for drinking, but also loving her and missing her at the same time. Emmy also lives with the constant feeling of how can her mom claim to love her, but then choose alcohol over her (Auth, 2010).

Children living with an alcoholic go through a lot of stress and uncertainty. They need someone to tell them it's not their fault their parent is an alcoholic. Additionally, they need someone to help them build healthy self-esteem and just be someone they can talk to openly and safely (Burke, 1989). Children also need to be taught the three C's, you didn't cause it, you can't control it, and you can't cure it, to help them cope with their situation (Burke, 1989). Despite their challenging circumstances, one study found that children can still have a positive outlook on life and feel overall happy (Tinnfält et al., 2018). This was due to the fact these children had support available to them and were able to get the help they needed to cope with their situation (Tinnfält et al., 2018). This shows how valuable listening to and asking children questions can be to helping them have the best outlook on life despite the struggles they are facing.

As a whole, exploring these sources became invaluable to me as I began to plan the characters and plot for my interactive narrative. My main character, Lucy, became a way to further explore the struggles of the older child who might be using perfectionism and being over-responsible as a way of coping with her situation. To a lesser extent, I was able to explore what might happen to a younger child. In my story, Adam tends to get lost in the stress and leans towards becoming a "lost child" who tends to fade into the background and not cause any trouble. It was important to me to expand on this research by having a main character that experiences a much wider variety of situations and struggles than is commonly seen in picture books. To accomplish this, I wanted to focus on planning a plot where many situations could occur that challenge the main character and explore the thought process behind her actions and

responses to her daily struggles. Planning characters in this sense was important as I began to create Lucy's world and determine the choices and consequences that she will experience throughout the story.

### **The Capstone Project**

It was a fun journey through the final selection of forming ideas for this capstone project. Ultimately, I decided to create a digital interactive fictional story similar to a choose-your-own-adventure book. I chose to go further with the project "Don't Wake Mom" that I wrote for *Professional and Academic Editing*. However, instead of expanding directly on that project, I wanted to create a new story with entirely new characters. This story became my final project, "Lucy's Secret."

While beginning to craft this story, I knew I wanted the topic to highlight the impact that parental alcoholism can have on a child. Initial thoughts for this project were to create a story geared towards children. This story would help children who are struggling with this situation by providing them with a character they can relate to. This would be a simple story that would follow some of the daily struggles and thoughts these children might face. I was hoping this story would make these children feel less alone and feel like someone else knew what they were going through. However, as I began forming research questions, that initial plan began to change. I decided I wanted the story to be more in-depth than would be possible in a children's choose-your-own-adventure story. I also began to think about the adults that support children in these situations such as other family members, guardians, teachers, neighbors, and friends. I wondered if they had an understanding of what the child might be going through if the child were to come to them and tell them they were living with a parent that drinks too much. I questioned if they would understand the severity of the situation or think that besides the parent acting differently

while drinking, it was no real cause of concern. Ultimately, I decided I wanted to create a story that would still help children in this situation, but would help them by giving the adults in their lives a better understanding of their situation so they can better offer needed support. This idea ended up forming the following two research questions:

- How can a child's perspective on alcoholism be beneficial to adult alcoholics?
- How can understanding a child's perspective on alcoholism be useful for adults who support them?

As I moved further in my research, my goal became to create a story that offers an in-depth simulation of what parental alcoholism is like. To accomplish this, I decided to write this story from the perspective of a child living with an alcoholic mother. I also wanted to create a resource that will help explain alcoholism from a child's perspective that was in a different format from a children's novel or picture book. Twine was an excellent solution to this problem as it is an open-source platform used for creating non-linear stories that are interactive in nature. The interactive nature helps to keep reader interest due to agency, "the control that players feel they have in a game" (Giglio, 2015, p.131). This is due to the fact that the reader will feel they have control over the outcome of the story (Giglio, 2015). In Twine, the player is able to explore different paths, outcomes, and endings that would not be possible in the linear format of a traditional novel. While it could be possible to accomplish this in a choose-your-own-adventure novel, the electronic format makes this more accessible to a wider population because it is easier to gain access and distribute.

It was my goal to create a story that would be available free of charge and easily accessible online, which are also benefits of Twine. For some, it might not be possible to buy a book on this topic purely out of fear of someone seeing them purchase it. All of these factors

would make it much easier for a counselor or teacher to send a link to an online game instead of requiring the player to purchase a printed book.

As a final part of my research, I created a survey that would help guide some of the choices available to the reader. This survey would provide some further insight into the stereotypes of alcoholism from people that may or may not have any personal experience with an alcoholic friend or family member. I chose this approach because there seems to be a common theme with many of the children of alcoholic books where the parent becomes mean. Some books, such as *The Addiction Monster*, do discuss where first the drinking makes the parent act silly and weird before becoming mean. As part of my capstone project, I created a short survey using Qualtrics. I decided to create this survey because I believed that many times people think of alcoholics and getting drunk as something that just makes people act silly. They may not be aware that there is commonly a mean side to a person that only emerges while the parent is intoxicated. This behavior is what is especially detrimental to children who are likely to be on the receiving end of this behavior and not understand what happened to their once loving parent.

### **The Survey**

The survey consisted of fourteen questions consisting of multiple-choice, short answer, and ranking questions. It was divided into the following three sections: Alcoholism - Perceptions and Experiences, Alcoholism — Behavior and Treatment, and Alcoholism — Impact on Children. The complete list of questions and results can be found in Appendix A at the end of this document.

After creating the survey, it was sent to the IRB for review. After approval (FY21-681), it was distributed to participants using text messaging via an anonymous link. Participants were selected using convenience sampling of my friends and co-workers. The only requirement was

the participant must be 18 years or older and give consent to participate in the survey. All answers were completely anonymous. The questions were designed to be completed quickly as I did not want to take up too much of my participants' time. I also figured that the shorter the survey, the more participation I would get.

The purpose of this survey was to explore the perspective of what it means to know or live with an alcoholic from those that likely do not have any experience with it. I was expecting the results to show that most people think of fun and silliness when they think of someone being drunk. It was my theory that most people would not associate anger, violence, and scariness with drinking, as most would normally think of people going out to drink on Friday nights or after work and having a fun time. I believed this survey would solidify my goal for this project because it would show the need of creating literature to show the darker side of alcoholism and the full impact it can have on a family. This would allow for more support to be given to children in these situations because the adults would have a deeper understanding of what these children face.

In total, I had eleven responses to my survey. While going through the anonymous responses, I discovered that there was an almost equal divide between participants that did and did not have any personal experience of living with an alcoholic (Appendix A, Q2). The majority agreed that alcoholism does impact the entire family and it would be extremely difficult for the alcoholic to quit drinking (Appendix A, Q14; Q8). Most of the participants felt that alcoholism should be considered a disease and participants agreed that someone does not need to drink every day to be an alcoholic (Appendix A, Q7; Q6). It was also agreed that rehabilitation programs do not cure alcoholism (Appendix A, Q9).

In terms of most likely behavior, the participants believed that the ones most likely to occur are lies and secrecy, interrupted schedules, and legal problems with violence ranking consistently last (Appendix A, Q11). When asked to rank specific behaviors, stupid was ranked as most likely with funny and scary almost tied for least likely (Appendix A, Q5). Surprisingly, no one suggested that being loud was part of drinking (Appendix A, Q3). The participants also suggested that a child is not able to tell when a parent drinks or only might be able to tell (Appendix A, Q10). However, they did agree that talking to a trusted adult is the best way for a child to deal with the situation (Appendix A, Q13). Also, over half the participants recorded that the child must feel scared when a parent is drunk (Appendix A, Q12).

It was interesting to me to see how the majority of participants agree that rehabilitation programs are not a cure. So much literature revolves around getting the alcoholic into a rehab program as the final end for them getting better. However, almost one-third of alcoholics will relapse during that first-year post-treatment (“Alcohol Relapse Rates & Abstinence Statistics,” 2021). Beyond the first year, almost 70% will relapse at some point (“Alcohol Relapse Rates & Abstinence Statistics,” 2021). This was an important factor for me to consider while mapping out my story, as I wanted there to be more endings beyond the parent going to a rehab program and getting better. To accomplish this, I have some paths ending with rehab, one ending with relapse after rehab, and others that do not include rehab at all. This variety of scenarios felt more realistic than every path leading to a rehabilitation program as the final stage.

Another part of the response I found surprising was the large number stating a child must feel scared when a parent drinks (Appendix A, Q12). I would have expected more responses thinking the child might be oblivious to the fact the parent is drunk or mostly confused as to what is happening. To incorporate this into my story, I chose to highlight experiences where the main

character is confused about whether or not the parent is drunk, as well as many other instances where she is frightened by the behavior. I felt it was important to highlight the fact that the child may or may not be aware in every situation, and it can vary depending on the day and the differing behaviors depending on how intoxicated the parent might be.

I was not surprised at the ranking of violence coming in last after interrupted schedules, legal problems, and lies and secrecy (Appendix A, Q11). Many people would think about legal problems and drinking going together in the form of DUIs. Lies and interrupted schedules can also easily be imagined when it comes to spending time in bars and sneaking alcohol. I thought it was highly important to illustrate how violence, including being loud, can turn up in an alcoholic household even when it might not be physical abuse. To show this, I had the main character witness her mom being violent in the way of destructive behavior of smashing and destroying objects around the house. This form of violence can be terrifying for children to witness and is one that is not as commonly thought of like physical abuse might be.

While I did expect fewer responses regarding lies and secrecy and interrupted schedules in an alcoholic household (Appendix A, Q11), I do feel these responses show there is not a solid understanding of alcoholism from a child's perspective. The average person may have a vague awareness that it will cause fear in a child, but will not understand the extent of this fear or what this child might experience as they witness their parent's drunk behavior. I feel this project will help to close this gap in understanding and help people who support these children and/or the alcoholic themselves gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and feelings of the child experiencing this.

## Story Mapping and Game Planning

After my initial research of books and journal articles, I began the process of mapping out the story. While I enjoyed the “Don’t Wake Mom” story I created in my previous class, I felt that plot would be too limited for this project. So instead of continuing with that story, I decided to create one with entirely new characters and a more expansive plot. Before I began mapping out my story, I took some time to further explore existing interactive fictions such as *Depression Quest*, *OCD: A Bedtime Story*, *13 Laurel Road*, *I Too Can Grow*, and *The Average Everyday Adventures of Samantha Browne*. Of these, *Depression Quest* by Zoe Quinn was the most inspirational as I began to build out the plot of my story. This was mostly due to the fact that it was far more text-heavy than any of the other stories and had a wide variety of outcomes. Another aspect that I enjoyed, was that the game did not have a real ending. This was intentional by the author because she wanted to simulate depression as closely as she could while showing that depression does not have a real end.

Initially, I had thought about creating a story that would follow exact coping mechanisms and family roles depending on the choices of the player. However, during the mapping stage, I found this would be too complex for this project and decided to take a different approach. Instead, I narrowed down the number of coping mechanisms and family roles that would be illustrated in this story. The main ones I focused on were the role of “family hero,” which would include perfectionism and parentification. I would also include outcomes of depression and withdrawal. By limiting the project to these three main paths, I would be able to expand the story and go into much more detail than I would have if I had created one with six or more roles and coping patterns. Once this was decided, I began to map out the story in Twine.

While mapping the story, I used elements from the children's books and journal articles for creating the different story plots and endings. For example, in *Emmy's Question*, Emmy gets involved in basketball which becomes a source of disappointment for her because her mom keeps missing the games. In one path of my story, Lucy decides to get involved in dance classes. During these classes, Lucy struggles with perfectionism, her mom picking her up drunk, and her mom missing the recital. In a different path, Lucy and her younger brother get involved in swimming lessons and an acting class that become a source of worry and disappointment for them.

One aspect of parental alcoholism I wanted to capture was the thoughts and feelings of the child being affected by the drinking. In my previous interactive fiction, "Don't Wake Mom," much of the focus was on the mom's behavior and the main character was mostly reacting to the situation and trying to get through the weekend until her dad was home. For "Lucy's Secret," I wanted to put more of the focus on the main character's feelings and thought patterns while having her make choices that determine her chosen coping mechanisms and adaptation methods. This would solidify her role in the family and show how it impacts her entire outlook on life and all of her behaviors.

Though rehabilitation programs are a helpful step for an alcoholic getting sober, they are definitely not the final cure. As I did not want to repeat what many of the children's books did, having the parent go to a rehab program and be instantly cured, I decided to have some paths that did not include rehab at all or involved a relapse. I felt this would be a much more realistic outcome and show that life for a child of an alcoholic would remain in a constant state of uneasiness and worry even after the parent seeks help with drinking. I also wanted some paths to show that not every parent will be willing to seek help or even admit they have a problem to

begin with. Going to jail is a topic not usually mentioned in children's books which is why I felt the need to include that as a possible ending. And lastly, some endings simply ended with no jail or rehab. This was meant to illustrate how many times the parent might refuse help, and the child is left to cope with no hope on the horizon.

In the future, I would like to take this story concept further by illustrating other family roles and dynamics. For instance, I could have a story that focuses on the younger child or have the dad be an alcoholic instead of the mom. At some point, I would like to write these geared towards children where they are able to choose the player, boy or girl, and choose which parent is the alcoholic. I would also have choices available such as only child or siblings and choose the age range of their character. As no two families dealing with alcoholism will ever be the same, I feel these options will allow for the opportunity to reach a wide variety of children in differing situations and help them cope the best they possibly can.

### **Sample Path of Interactive Narrative**

Appendix B showcases one possible path of choices from my interactive narrative "Lucy's Secret." If using Twine to view this story, each page would contain text for that particular section and include some form of navigation. This could be either a set of two choices the player could select from or a "next" button (or something similar) to advance to the next page. To share an example of this narrative in Appendix B, I have included the text from a sample of pages and the player choices that would advance them on this particular path of the story. On pages where there are multiple options, the player choice is in bold font.

This particular path focuses on perfectionism with a strong feeling of needing to become a better and "more perfect" daughter in order for Lucy to win the love of her mom. She hopes that "being perfect" will stop her mom from continuing to drink. Early in this path of the story,

Lucy begins to focus harder on her schoolwork until it takes over her entire life. She begins to feel that unless she makes perfect grades, her mom will not accept her and will never stop drinking. Lucy also begins to show characteristics of parentification (Vernig, 2010). On top of her focus on homework, she becomes consumed with doing all her mom's chores such as cleaning and taking care of her younger brother, Adam.

As the sample path of the story progresses, Lucy decides to take dance classes and eventually joins the dance company. This decision leads to further complications in her life such as her mom continually picking her up from class drunk and driving with her while intoxicated. Lucy's perfectionism extends to dance where she feels that she must do every routine perfectly or she will be a failure. In class one night, Lucy messes up the routine and her teacher snaps at her. Upset, Lucy excuses herself for a moment, pulls herself together, goes back to class, and does the routine perfectly. It is then she decides to never let anyone know how she really feels and to always appear "perfect" and put together. I felt this would be a good portrayal of the perfectionism and parentification noted by Burke (1989) who states, "The child in an alcoholic family is usually under the illusion that if they do things just right, such as keeping the house neat or making good grades, they will be able to keep the parent from drinking." Then finally, while this path does end with the mom going to a rehabilitation program, it does not stop there. A few months pass and the mom begins to drink again. Lucy is devastated and ends with the thought that she will never trust anyone again. This ending allowed for an option where the parent did experience a relapse to show how devastating this can be for a child who was led to believe the parent's drinking problems were now over.

In addition to this sample, there are numerous other paths that can result in a total of eight different endings. By choosing other options than the ones provided, the player can explore these

other aspects of the story and read about different challenges and scenarios in Lucy's life. Playing the game multiple times will allow the player to see how their choices impact the character and lead Lucy through different struggles and life events. This allows the player control over the story by advancing through the choices that meet their interest and allows them more input into the ending of the story when compared to an average picture book or novel.

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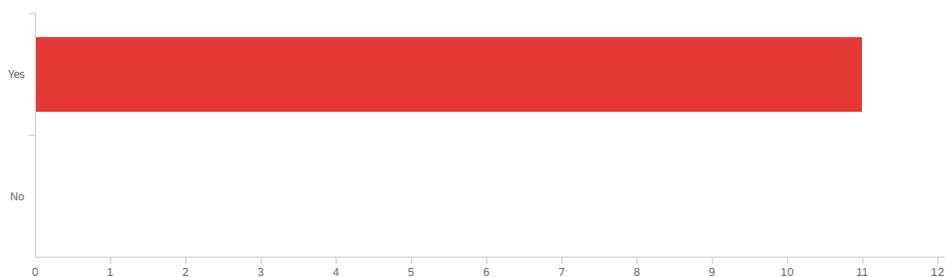
## Appendix A: Survey Results

### Default Report

*Alcoholism and Behavior Survey*

November 10, 2021 12:49 PM MST

Consent - CONSENT I agree to participate in this voluntary survey. I understand that my answers will be used for research purposes. I also understand that the participant's name will not be collected on this survey, and all data will be deleted at the conclusion of this project in December 2021.



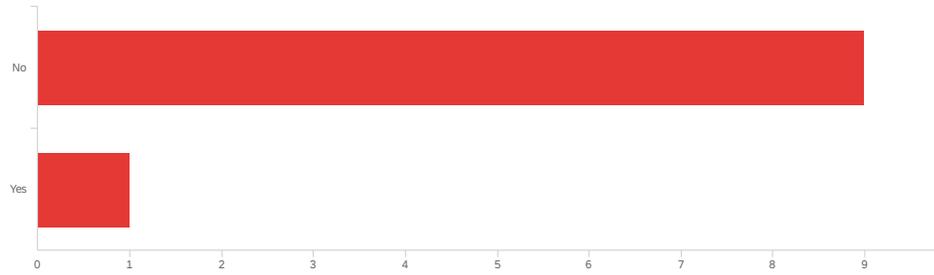
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	CONSENT I agree to participate in this voluntary survey. I understand that my answers will be used for research purposes. I also understand that the participant's name will not be collected on this survey, and all data will be deleted at the conclusion of this project in December 2021.	1.00	1.00	1.00	0.00	0.00	11

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	100.00% 11
2	No	0.00% 0

11

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

Q1 - Do you self-identify as an alcoholic?



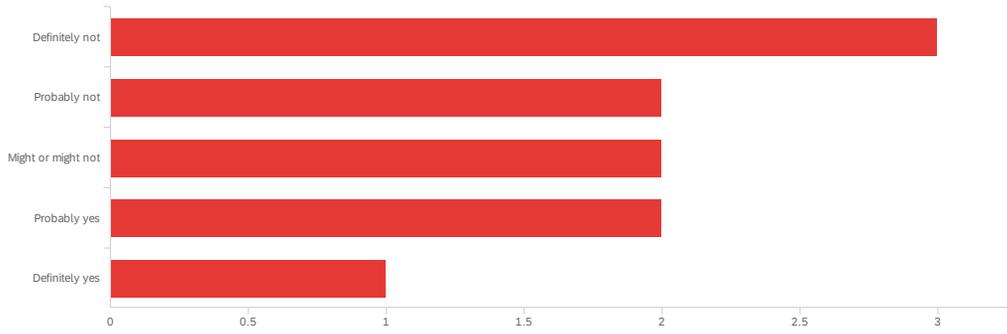
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you self-identify as an alcoholic?	1.00	2.00	1.10	0.30	0.09	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	No	90.00% 9
2	Yes	10.00% 1

10

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

Q2 - Have you ever lived with an alcoholic?

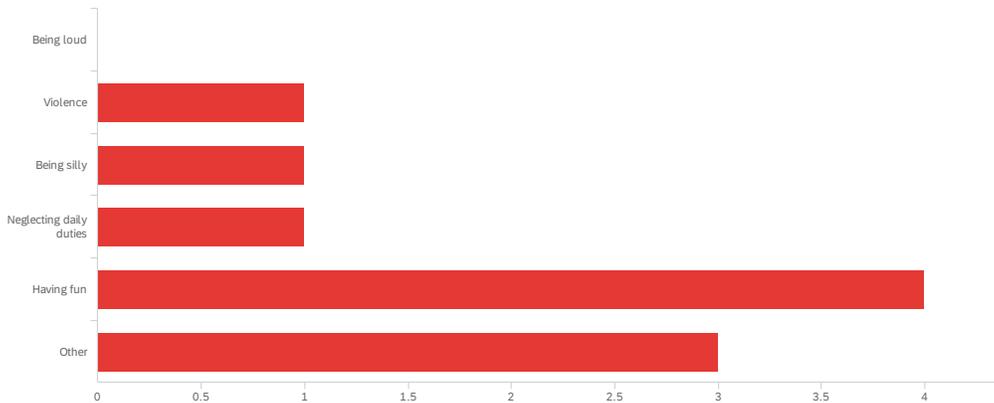


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Have you ever lived with an alcoholic?	1.00	5.00	2.60	1.36	1.84	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Definitely not	30.00% 3
2	Probably not	20.00% 2
3	Might or might not	20.00% 2
4	Probably yes	20.00% 2
5	Definitely yes	10.00% 1
		10

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q3 - What is the first behavior you think of when you hear the word "alcoholic"?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	What is the first behavior you think of when you hear the word "alcoholic"? - Selected Choice	2.00	6.00	4.70	1.27	1.61	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Being loud	0.00% 0
2	Violence	10.00% 1
3	Being silly	10.00% 1
4	Neglecting daily duties	10.00% 1
5	Having fun	40.00% 4
6	Other	30.00% 3

10

Showing rows 1 - 7 of 7

Q6\_6\_TEXT - Other

Other

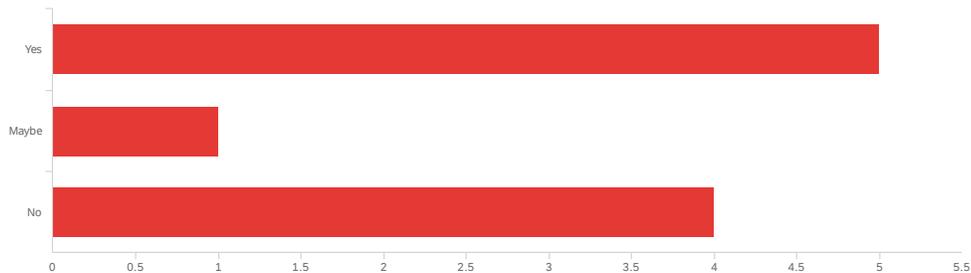
Irresponsible

Other

Any combination of the above but sometimes a person can be functional, quiet, etc.

Being drunk frequently

Q4 - Do you have any friends or relatives who abuse alcohol?

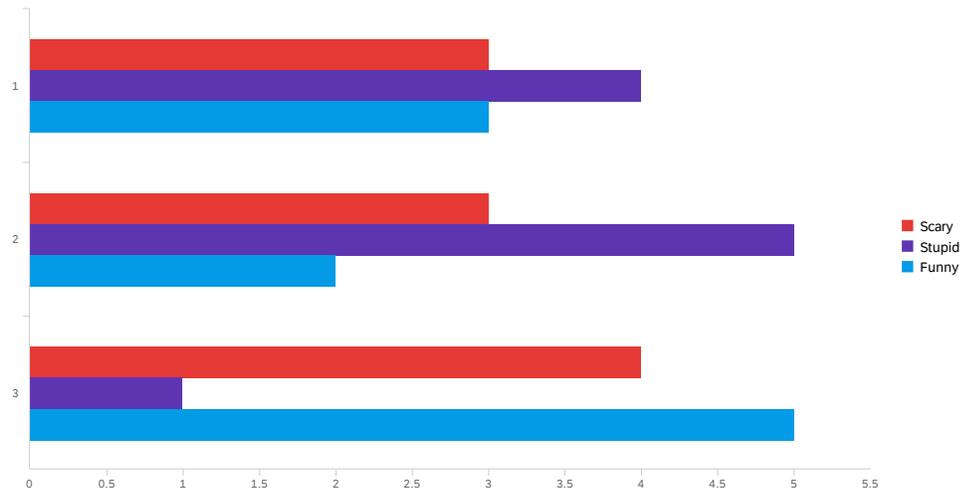


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you have any friends or relatives who abuse alcohol?	1.00	3.00	1.90	0.94	0.89	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	50.00% 5
2	Maybe	10.00% 1
3	No	40.00% 4
		10

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q5 - How would you rank an alcoholic's behavior in order of most likely to least likely?

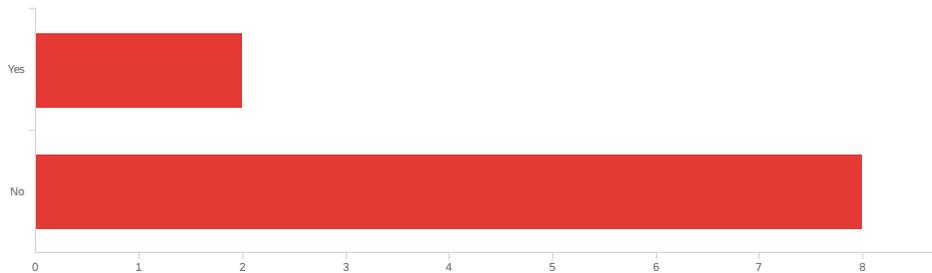


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Scary	1.00	3.00	2.10	0.83	0.69	10
2	Stupid	1.00	3.00	1.70	0.64	0.41	10
3	Funny	1.00	3.00	2.20	0.87	0.76	10

#	Field	1	2	3	Total
1	Scary	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	40.00% 4	10
2	Stupid	40.00% 4	50.00% 5	10.00% 1	10
3	Funny	30.00% 3	20.00% 2	50.00% 5	10

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

Q6 - Does a person need to drink everyday to be an alcoholic?



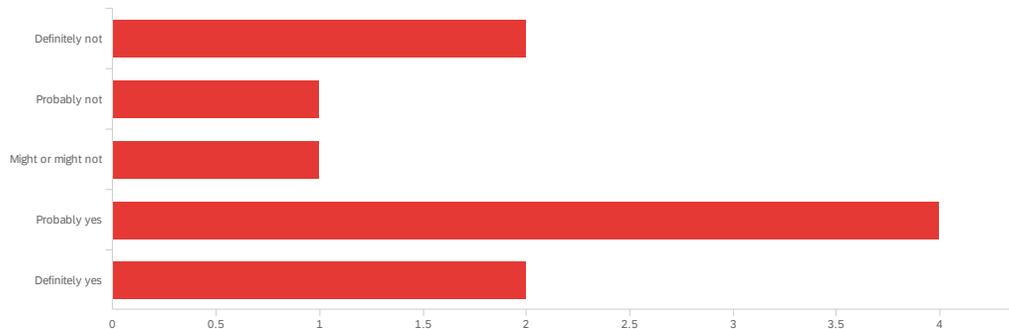
#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Does a person need to drink everyday to be an alcoholic?	1.00	2.00	1.80	0.40	0.16	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	20.00% 2
2	No	80.00% 8

10

Showing rows 1 - 3 of 3

Q7 - Do you feel that alcoholism is a disease?

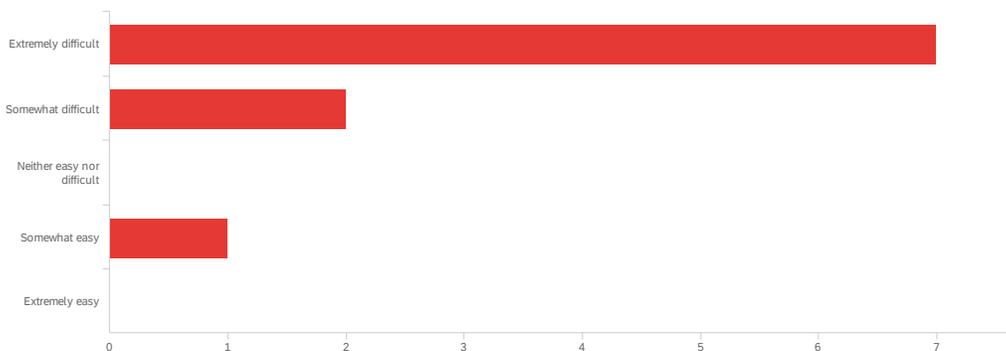


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do you feel that alcoholism is a disease?	1.00	5.00	3.30	1.42	2.01	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Definitely not	20.00% 2
2	Probably not	10.00% 1
3	Might or might not	10.00% 1
4	Probably yes	40.00% 4
5	Definitely yes	20.00% 2
		10

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q8 - How easy would it be for an alcoholic to stop drinking?

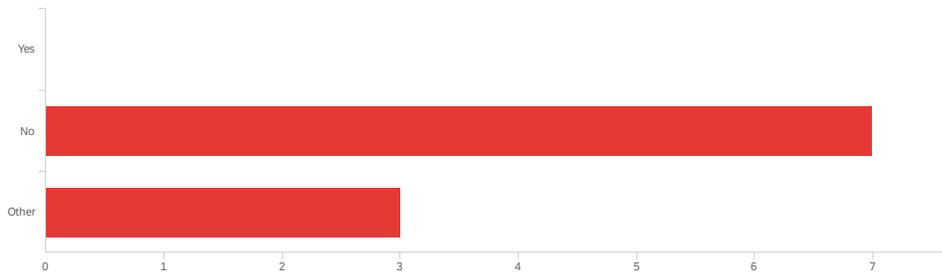


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	How easy would it be for an alcoholic to stop drinking?	1.00	4.00	1.50	0.92	0.85	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Extremely difficult	70.00% 7
2	Somewhat difficult	20.00% 2
3	Neither easy nor difficult	0.00% 0
4	Somewhat easy	10.00% 1
5	Extremely easy	0.00% 0
		10

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

Q9 - Do rehabilitation programs cure alcoholism?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Do rehabilitation programs cure alcoholism? - Selected Choice	2.00	3.00	2.30	0.46	0.21	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	0.00% 0
2	No	70.00% 7
3	Other	30.00% 3
		10

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q13\_3\_TEXT - Other

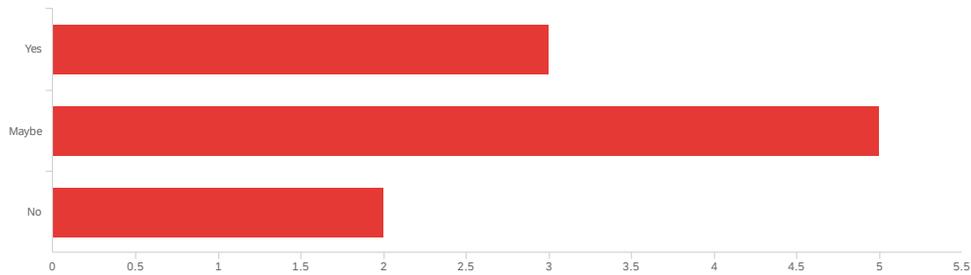
Other

If they are serious about it

Don't know

Never tried

Q10 - Can a young child tell when a parent has been drinking?

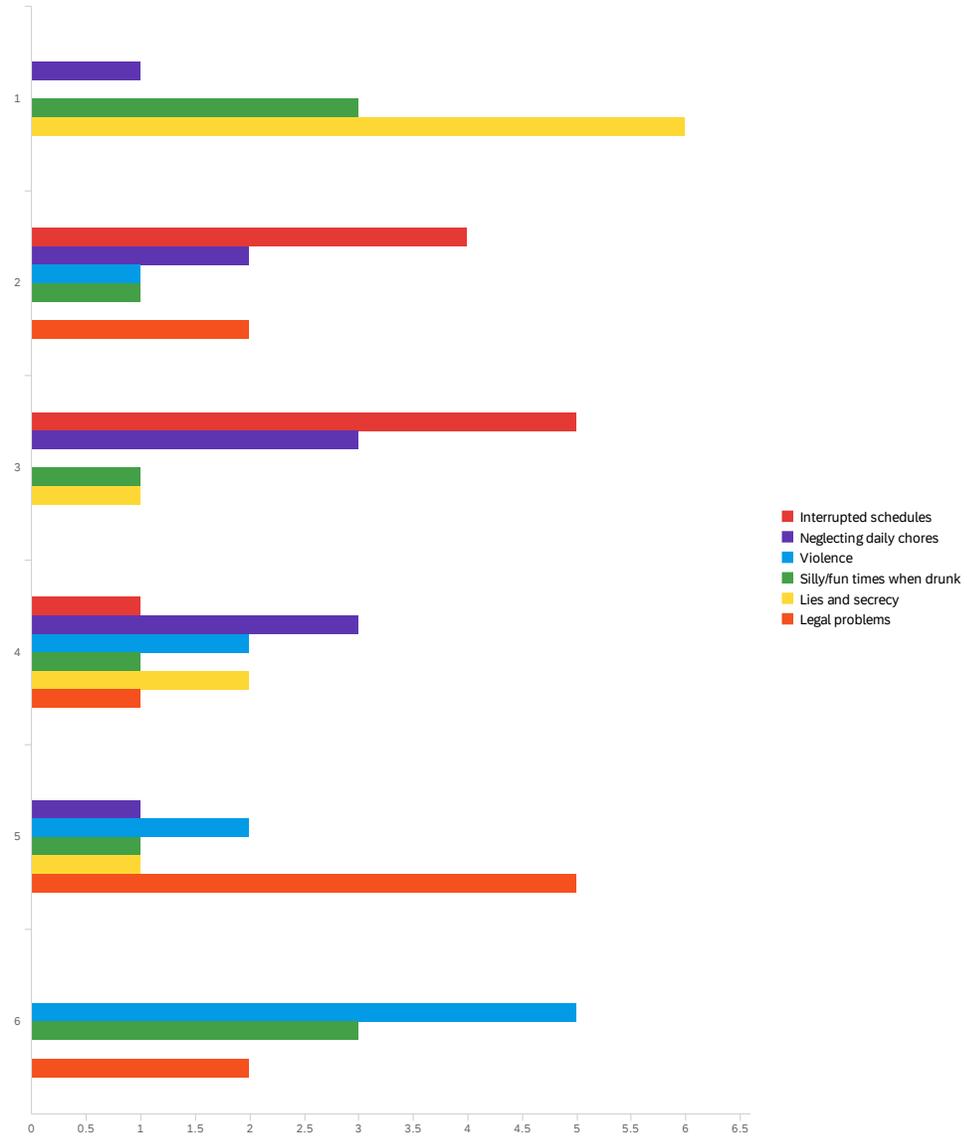


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Can a young child tell when a parent has been drinking?	1.00	3.00	1.90	0.70	0.49	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Yes	30.00% 3
2	Maybe	50.00% 5
3	No	20.00% 2
		10

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q11 - Rank the follow from most likely to least likely to occur in an alcoholic family.



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Interrupted schedules	2.00	4.00	2.70	0.64	0.41	10

#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
2	Neglecting daily chores	1.00	5.00	3.10	1.14	1.29	10
3	Violence	2.00	6.00	5.00	1.26	1.60	10
4	Silly/fun times when drunk	1.00	6.00	3.50	2.06	4.25	10
5	Lies and secrecy	1.00	5.00	2.20	1.54	2.36	10
6	Legal problems	2.00	6.00	4.50	1.36	1.85	10

#	Field	1	2	3	4	5	6	Total
1	Interrupted schedules	0.00% 0	40.00% 4	50.00% 5	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	0.00% 0	10
2	Neglecting daily chores	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	30.00% 3	30.00% 3	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	10
3	Violence	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	20.00% 2	50.00% 5	10
4	Silly/fun times when drunk	30.00% 3	10.00% 1	10.00% 1	10.00% 1	10.00% 1	30.00% 3	10
5	Lies and secrecy	60.00% 6	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	20.00% 2	10.00% 1	0.00% 0	10
6	Legal problems	0.00% 0	20.00% 2	0.00% 0	10.00% 1	50.00% 5	20.00% 2	10

Showing rows 1 - 6 of 6

## Q12 - How do you think a child feels when a parent is drunk?

How do you think a child feels when a parent is drunk?

---

Confused

Lonely

Terrified

Confused

Scared

Alone

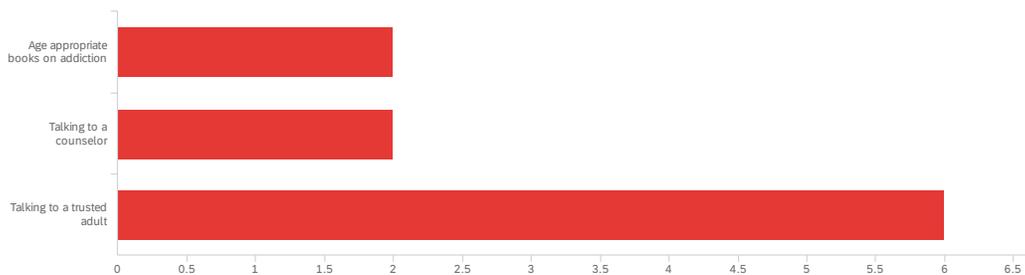
Scared, concerned.

Disappointed and scared

Nah

Party time

Q13 - Which of the following do you feel is the best way for a child to understand alcoholism?

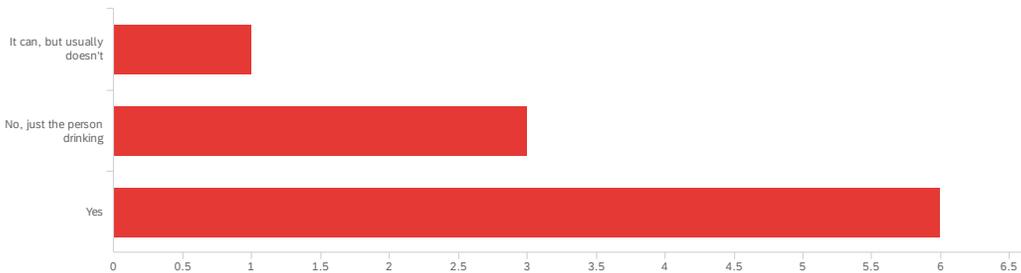


#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Which of the following do you feel is the best way for a child to understand alcoholism?	1.00	3.00	2.40	0.80	0.64	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	Age appropriate books on addiction	20.00% 2
2	Talking to a counselor	20.00% 2
3	Talking to a trusted adult	60.00% 6
		10

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

Q14 - Does alcoholism impact the entire family including children?



#	Field	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation	Variance	Count
1	Does alcoholism impact the entire family including children?	1.00	3.00	2.50	0.67	0.45	10

#	Field	Choice Count
1	It can, but usually doesn't	10.00% 1
2	No, just the person drinking	30.00% 3
3	Yes	60.00% 6
		10

Showing rows 1 - 4 of 4

**End of Report**

## Appendix B : Interactive Story – One Path

Welcome!

"Lucy's Secret" is an interactive fiction about a ten-year-old girl growing up in an alcoholic household. This game follows Lucy as she navigates through life while dealing with daily conflicts resulting from her mom's alcoholism.

It is not a lighthearted, fun story. Instead, this game describes parental alcoholism from a child's perspective. It illustrates the emotional and mental impact that living with an alcoholic parent can have on a child.

Please be aware that this game features emotionally abusive situations. It shows some possible realities children face in these circumstances and how scary alcoholism can be for children. This game does not represent the experiences of every family living with an alcoholic, as no two will be exactly alike.

[[Play Game.->Beginning Character Intro]]

You are a ten-year-old girl named Lucy and are just about to begin your fifth-grade school year. You live in an average middle-class home with your parents and your younger brother, Adam. Up until a few years ago, you were very close to your mom. She would do all your favorite things with you, such as playing games, helping with homework, cooking meals, shopping, and reading bedtime stories. She was everything you could ask for in a mom. Then one day, you saw her drunk for the first time. Since that day, things have never been the same.

[[Next.->Cleaning Day]]

It's a Saturday morning.

You're about to begin your fifth-grade year of school! You are nervous, excited, and a bit sad. Your elementary school is the only one you've known, and next year you'll be at a new middle school. However, something special is happening this year. Your younger brother, Adam, will be starting kindergarten. For the first time, you'll be at school together.

Hoping to enjoy one of your last school-free weekends, you race to the kitchen. It's only 8 am, but you're already fully dressed. Your mom promised you a fun day at the zoo, and you want to get there early so you'll have time to see everything.

[[Next.->Kitchen]]

You skip happily to the kitchen, but then you're hit by a wave of disappointment. Mom isn't cooking breakfast. Your stomach tightens as you walk towards the living room. Your worst fear comes true as you see your mom passed out on the couch with an empty bottle of vodka on the floor. Too sad to move, you stand there in disbelief.

A few seconds later, your dad and little brother, Adam, come in. You know Adam is about to feel crushed. He's been talking about seeing the elephants all week. Your dad rushes over and grabs the vodka bottle before Adam sees it.

"I'm so sorry kiddos. Mommy is sick today. How about tomorrow I take you guys to the zoo.

Okay?" Dad asks.

Your dad's offer easily wins Adam over, especially as dad starts to make his favorite cinnamon pancakes as a distraction. You smile and try to act excited, but you're devastated. This devastation isn't so much about the zoo, but by yet another [[broken promise]].

[[Next.->Clean Room]]

For Adam's sake, you act cheerful through breakfast. Afterward, you excuse yourself to your room so you can have some time alone with your thoughts. You hate feeling sad on what was meant to be a happy day, so you distract yourself with some cleaning. While pulling out a pile of junk from under your bed, you notice an old diary.

You study the cover of it. It's pink with cute little ballerina bunnies. This was one of your favorite diaries because the cover always made you smile.

[[Open it.->Open it]]

You open the diary to a random page near the beginning and read the old entry. This one happens to be from around a year ago and describes a happy Saturday morning.

The page reads...

//Dear Diary,

I had the best day today. Mom took me to see a movie and then we went out for pizza and ice cream. Later, I played "Candyland" with my parents. It was so nice having a day with my mom again. She's been so busy with Adam that I've felt kinda lonely. But today that all changed. I love her so much. She always knows how to make a day great.//

Tears fill your eyes as you think back to these happier times. Your mom was always the best.

How have things ended up where they are now?

You flip towards the end of the diary. There you find the entry of THE day. The day that everything started to change.

Do you...

[[Read it.-> Read it.]]

[[Close the diary.-> Close it]]

You're already feeling sad, so you shove the diary under your bed and keep cleaning. Reading the entry about the happier days was hard enough. You aren't sure you feel like re-visiting the super confusing time when everything started to change.

[[Keep cleaning.-> Open it anyway.]]

You've been cleaning for about thirty minutes. All the junk under your bed has now been put away except for the diary. You pick it up again to place it on a shelf when it falls out of your hands. It lands on the floor open to the entry about THE day. As you pick it back up, you happen to see the words "really scary." Curiosity gets the best of you, and you decide to read about the day you've tried so hard to forget. This is the entry of the first time you remember seeing Mom drunk.

It reads...

//Dear Diary,

Today was really scary. I woke up to a loud banging noise coming from the kitchen. When I went in there to see what it was, I saw Mom kicking the metal trashcan. She had kicked it so much that it was bent and barely even looked like a trashcan anymore. She was also yelling really loud and saying bad words. I couldn't find Dad, so I grabbed the phone and ran back to my room. I called him and told him to come home right away. Mom followed me back there and grabbed the phone out of my hand right after I hung up. She yelled at me for calling him and said I had just betrayed her and she would never forgive me. Then she yelled at me some more. Thankfully Dad came back right then. I was crying so hard. I don't understand what happened because I've never seen Mom yell before. Did I do something wrong? //

[[Next.->The past.]]

Feeling a bit shaken up, you put the diary on your shelf. It's been about a year now, but you still remember what happened a few days after that day. Your mom took you out for ice cream even though you were still not talking to her because she scared you so badly. At the ice cream place, she sat you down and promised it will never ever ever happen again. You believed her because you had no reason not to trust her.

For a few months, it didn't happen again. In fact, you had pretty much forgotten the entire incident. Then one day, you came home from school and she was drunk again. She was hard to understand as her words were all slurring together. She also couldn't stand up very well and kept falling to the floor when she tried to walk. However, apart from this morning, that was the only other time anything had happened. Besides, this morning had been nothing really. For all you know, she was just sick like Dad said.

[[Next.->Water Park or Mini Golf]]

It's a Friday morning.

It has almost been a week since that disappointing Saturday. Mom apologized many times for ruining the day and promised to make it up to you and Adam. Since it's the last Friday before school starts, she offered a choice of going to a water park or going to play mini-golf.

Which do you choose?

[[Water park.]]

[[**Mini-golf.**]]

It was a tough choice, but you're happy you chose mini-golf over the water park. The outing lasted much longer than you thought because afterward, you got to play in the arcade and get pizza and ice cream. Not to mention you also got your first hole-in-one and won enough tickets at the arcade to get this giant teddy bear.

Mom was perfect all day too. She was her normal, fun, joyful self who had a blast playing mini-golf with Adam and you. You begin to feel guilty for even doubting her. With a day this fun, there can't be anything that goes wrong again.

"What a fun day!" you think as you settle into bed that night.

[[Next.->Excited]]

You lie awake for a bit as you reflect on the amazing day you had.

"There's no way she'll ever get drunk again after a day like this," you think, "Plus, Adam will be starting school this year, and Mom was even talking about how excited she is for the chance to go back to work."

Your thoughts wander back to the zoo incident last week, and you decide that she must've truly just been sick that day. After all, she hadn't been drunk for many many months before then. And there's no way she'll do that again. She promised.

You begin to fall asleep while feeling some excitement for the upcoming school year.

Everything's going to be great. You know it will.

[[Next.->First Day of School]]

It's a Monday afternoon in mid-August.

Today was your first day of 5th grade and Adam's first-ever day of school! To celebrate, Mom promised to have a special dessert waiting for you and Adam when you get home. You anxiously watch the clock. You can't wait to get home and tell her all about your first day.

When the final bell rings, you rush to find Adam so you can help him get on the bus. He tells you all about his first day, and then you remind him of the cookies Mom promised to bake.

When you finally reach your stop, you rush off the bus. You challenge Adam to a race, and you both run towards home as fast as you can. You walk inside and find the house [[eerily quiet]].

The kitchen looks untouched, and you don't see cookies anywhere. You tell Adam to go up to his room to put his stuff away while you look for Mom.

"Mom?! Mom! We're home, and we have so much to tell you!" you yell excitedly.

That's when you find her passed out on her bed. A half-empty wine glass sits on her nightstand.

You fight the feelings of disappointment as you decide what to do.

Which do you choose?

**[[Wake her up.-> Wake]]**

**[[Leave her asleep.->Asleep]]**

[[**"Maybe she's just tired,"**]] you think, "Perhaps I just heard her wrong and she meant we're all going to make the cookies together when we got home."

You decide to wake her up so we can start baking because Adam was really looking forward to those cookies. You tap her on the shoulder.

"Mommy? Mommy?! We're home and have so much to tell you! Can we make the cookies now?" you ask excitedly.

No response. Just then Adam comes bouncing through the door and jumps on the bed next to her.

"Mommmyyyyy! Wanna hear bout my first day?!" he asks.

Mom begins to wake up.

"Go away!" she slurs.

"But Mommy, today was so fun!" he exclaims again.

"I said leave me alone!" she yells.

Adam stops. The excitement drains from his face. He doesn't understand what he did wrong and tears begin to fill his eyes.

"Come on, Adam. Mommy's just tired. Let's go play," you say as you pick him up and carry him out of the room.

You call Dad and tell him Mom is sick, and then you take Adam outside for a game of kickball.

[[Next.-> Later that night]]

You try to enjoy your kickball game with Adam, but your stomach is in knots. You know she must have been drinking because she'd never yell at Adam like that otherwise.

"She promised she wouldn't drink again," you think to yourself.

Adam quits playing and looks at you sadly.

"You don't wanna play with me?" he asks.

You know he's had a rough time since getting home, and you don't want to disappoint him more than he already has been, so you push your feelings aside and try to have fun.

[[Next.->At Dinner]]

About an hour later, Dad comes home with dinner and a surprise. Brownies! Adam's face lights up when he sees them, and he rushes to hug Dad.

The three of you sit down for dinner, but Mom never wakes up to join.

"So Lucy, how was your first day?" Dad asks.

"Fine," you say.

Your enthusiasm is gone, and you [[don't feel like sharing anymore]]. Luckily, before Dad can press further, Adam starts happily talking about his first day. You spend the rest of dinner sitting quietly and poking at your food. You're too worried to eat.

[[Next.->Open House]]

It's a Tuesday afternoon.

Tonight is open house at school. You know there's no way Mom would drink when she knows she'll be meeting your teacher, so you aren't worried at all.

As you get off the bus, excitement sets in because you love open house night. You think it's so much fun to give your parents a tour of the classroom and show them your desk. You even have some special art hanging on the classroom wall you made just for your mom. You know she's going to love it!

You walk inside and run to hug your mom. Fear rushes through you when you notice an alcohol smell to her breath. Before you can say anything, Dad walks through the door. He kisses Mom but doesn't say anything about the smell. [[Did he notice? Maybe you're just imagining it?]]

[[Next.->Open House 2]]

An hour later you arrive at school with your parents and brother. Your excitement has turned into worry. What if your teacher notices the alcohol smell? What will she think?

Thankfully, your parents decide to visit Adam's classroom first. His teacher doesn't notice any alcohol smell, so you begin to think that it was all in your mind. However, you still can't help but worry because you have no idea what would happen if someone notices.

After about twenty minutes, your parents finish Adam's classroom tour, and now it's your turn.

Your parents walk into your classroom and greet your teacher.

Do you...

**[[Skip the tour. Leave as fast as possible.]]**

[[Seems okay. I'll show them around.]]

After meeting your teacher, your parents look at you expectantly for the detailed tour you give them each year. You glance around as the parents of your classmates flood the room. You begin to feel embarrassed and terrified of any of them talking to your mom and noticing she's been drinking.

Your heart is racing, and you're no longer in the mood for giving a tour. Instead, you want to get out of there and leave before anyone can notice. As an excuse, you say you have a tummy ache, and you want to go home. Concerned, your parents take you right home.

"Whew," you think, "That was close."

[[Next.->Weekend]]

It's a Saturday morning in mid-September.

Dad invites Adam and you out to run a few errands and then for lunch at a new pizza place.

When you return home, you have a slice of pizza for Mom. When you rush inside to give it to

her, you find her wandering around the kitchen and looking confused. The familiar alcohol smell fills the house.

"Here's your pizza, Mommy," you say timidly.

[[ "I don't want that junk," ]] she slurs and throws it on the floor.

Dad and Adam walk in a second later. Dad looks shocked and angry and tells you to take Adam outside for a bit.

Do you...

**[[Pretend to go outside and listen to the conversation.]]**

[[Go outside and play.]]

You walk Adam outside to the backyard. Curiosity gets the best of you, and you want to hear what your dad says to your mom. You tell Adam you need to grab something from your room, and you quietly open the door and sneak inside. You [[hide behind the sofa]] in the living room and listen to your parents talk.

"Parenting is too hard and too stressful. If they weren't always so much trouble, I wouldn't need to drink. It's all their fault," Mom slurs.

What is said next you don't remember. Those words keep replaying in your mind. You feel like you've had all the air knocked out of you. You know she said "they," but Adam is too young to be any trouble. [[You interpret it as "you." It's "your" fault.]] You're the reason she drinks. How can that even be? But it must be. She just said so. She would never lie about that.

You go back outside and begin to cry. You've never felt so terrible.

[[Next.->It's your fault]]

You're so devastated the rest of the day because you don't know how to make sense of what Mom said about Adam and you. You know that Adam is too young to understand. Plus, he's never bad. This must be your fault and not his. Also, you're the big sister, so you know it's up to you to make sure everything is okay for him.

All these thoughts keep running through your mind as you climb into bed that night. Finally, a realization hits you.

You realize that...

**[[I need to be a better daughter.]]**

[[I hate who I am.]]

You pull the covers over your head and think about the ways you can be better. Maybe if you didn't make any more mistakes, did more chores, did better in school, and helped more with Adam, then Mom wouldn't need to drink. You realize [[it's up to you to fix this.]] After all, you're the reason it happened to begin with.

[[Next.->3rd week of school 2]]

It's late September.

You have a science test tomorrow, and you're dreading it. You want your mom to be proud of you, so you feel that you have to do perfectly on this test. You did everything you can think of to prepare: made flashcards, read all the chapters multiple times, and reviewed class worksheets and notes.

After all that preparation, you can't believe tomorrow is test day. You decide you need to go over everything a few more times to be sure you know it. When you get home, Adam is glowing with excitement. He got this cool game at school, and he wants you to play it with him.

You tell him...

**[[I can't play right now. I need to study.]]**

[[Okay, we can play it quickly.]]

"But all you've been doing all week is homework," he whines.

"I'm sorry. But when you get to 5th grade, you'll understand," you tell him.

Adam's excitement fades into sadness. You feel bad, but there's nothing you can do. You have to do well on this test. You go to your room, close your door, and study until your dad forces you downstairs for dinner. You eat quickly. You usually love dinner, but lately it [[feels like a waste of time.]] All you can think about is how you need to get back to your flashcards.

Once dinner is over, you rush to your room and study more until your dad forces you into bed at 9 pm. However, you grab a flashlight and keep studying well into 3 am. You must know this stuff perfectly.

[[Next.->Test day]]

The day you've been dreading is finally here. Test day! Eeeek!

Your heart races as you stare at the back of the test packet in front of you. You take a deep breath as your teacher tells everyone to flip the test over and begin. You answer every question as thoroughly as you can. There were a few questions you felt a tad unsure about, but you still

managed to answer them. When you finished checking your work for the fourth time you go to hand it in. Tomorrow you'll get the grade back.

[[Next.-> Test result]]

You were so nervous all night that you couldn't sleep. So much depends on this test grade. You feel like if you did well on the exam, your mom will stop drinking. However, if you did poorly, she'll never stop.

Your hands are shaking as your teacher places your test face down on your desk. You hold your breath as you turn it over. You see the grade of 94 with a smiley face and the note "amazing job!" next to it.

"Amazing job?" Is she serious? You failed. How can she think that's amazing?

You're so devastated that you did that poorly on this test. Mom will never quit drinking if she's stuck with an almost B student. You can't believe you are such a failure. You feel an urgent need to leave the classroom.

You raise your hand, and your teacher comes to you.

You...

[[Ask to go to the bathroom.]]

**[[Say you feel sick.]]**

You're too devastated to function right now. All you want to do is go home, cry, and hide under the covers of your bed. Your teacher sends you to the nurse's station, and she calls your dad to pick you up. When your dad gets there, you fake looking sick and pathetic, so you can go to bed

as soon as you get home. For the rest of the night, you hug your teddy bear and wish your mom had a better daughter than you.

[[Next.->September.]]

It's early October.

Pressure at school is increasing as you realize you can't handle making a mistake of any kind.

You feel like you have so much responsibility. You're doing all the chores at home, taking care of Adam, and studying like crazy. You believe if Mom has nothing to do, then she can't be stressed.

She also keeps talking about [[going back to work]], but that hasn't happened yet. You wish she would because then she'd have less time to drink. Of course, you feel that if you were doing a better job at school and around the house, the drinking wouldn't be an issue to begin with.

[[Next.->Go Home ]]

You rush home from the bus stop. There's a big project due this week, and you want to have as much time as possible to work on it. Mom has been drinking more days than not lately, and you've made up this new routine. You beat Adam to the front door, then you slowly crack the door open and listen. If you hear a lot of yelling, cussing, or banging, then you know Mom is drunk and in a [[mean mood]]. If you hear [[total silence]], you know she's been drinking and is probably passed out. If you hear just a [[normal amount of noise,]] you know she is fine and has not been drinking. Today you hear total silence.

You walk inside to find the house an absolute mess. It looks like she's been on one of her [[destructive drunk episodes]]. She has thrown books, plates, toys, and food all over the floor.

Currently, she's passed out on the living room rug. You secretly hope she stays there because it's not good for her to be awake when she's feeling mean. Plus, you're not in the mood to be yelled at right now.

You survey the mess and decide what to do.

Do you...

[[Leave the mess and work on your project.]]

**[[Clean up the mess and do the project later.]]**

You look around at the house and decide to clean up. The project will just have to wait until later tonight. The last thing you want is for Dad to come home, see this mess, and get mad at Mom. She doesn't deserve to be yelled at for it. You decide that [[she's just stressed out and had to get some anger out somehow.]]

You get Adam entertained with a game, and then you get to work. You get the mess cleaned up and Mom off the floor and into bed just as Dad walks in. You even had time to get some stuff out for dinner to make it look like Mom was about to start cooking.

And best of all, your cleaning paid off. Dad didn't say anything to Mom about drinking or neglecting her chores.

[[Next.->Need an Extra curricular activity]]

It's a Sunday morning.

Mom is drunk already and [[on the phone with a friend]]. You decide to listen to her conversation.

"I don't see why no one will hire me. Not that I care too much as I don't have much to live for. I just have no motivation for anything in life right now. With Adam in school, I'm just useless, and no one needs me. There's no purpose to my life anymore," she complains.

You spend all day thinking about her conversation. That's when you remember some flyers you saw on the school bulletin board. One was for a dance class, and one was for swimming. You think that maybe her taking you to a class would give her this purpose she needs.

You decide to...

**[[Ask for dance classes.]]**

[[Ask for swimming lessons.]]

You decide against swimming because the dance classes would have a recital to work towards.

You imagine that your mom would feel special for getting to help you get dressed for the recital and later watching you perform on a beautiful stage in front of an audience. You can't help but smile when you think of the pretty dance costumes and your mom putting your hair into a ballerina bun before each class.

"This is the answer. This is what I must do," you think.

You work up the nerve, and at dinner, you ask about taking a dance class. To your surprise, your parents say yes without any hesitation!

[[Next.->Company or Just for Fun?]]

It's a Thursday afternoon. Dance night.

You've been taking dance classes for a few weeks now, and you're having so much fun! You're packing up your dance gear when the teacher asks you to stay after class for a moment.

"Lucy, you have a real talent for dance. I know you just started, but I wanted to know if you're interested in joining our dance company? It would be a much bigger time commitment with three classes a week, but I know you could handle it," says your teacher.

This offer has caught you off guard, and you aren't quite sure what to say.

You think for a moment and then tell her...

**[[I'd love to!->Make the company]]**

[[Thank you, but I just want to do it for fun.->Just for Fun]]

"Sure! I'd love to!" you tell your teacher without any hesitation.

Your teacher smiles and talks to your mom about what this commitment will mean. Your mom seems excited and even congratulates you on your achievement.

[[Next.->Make the company 2]]

It's a Monday afternoon. Another dance night.

You feel so privileged to be on an actual dance company! But wow, it's a lot of work. You didn't expect three classes a week to be this demanding. To make matters worse, Mom picked you up drunk four times. Fortunately, she's never come inside to get you, so no one has noticed.

However, Dad kept having a fit when he realized she was driving drunk with you in the car.

After the third time, he'd had enough. Now, Dad has to leave work early on the days you have dance class so he can take you. Knowing he's missing work for you makes you feel even more pressure.

You want to be great at this. You imagine how disappointed everyone would be if you got kicked off the company for not being good enough. You never want that to happen. To make sure that

never happens, on days you don't have class, you practice for hours after school. Between dance, homework, and taking over Mom's chores, you barely ever have a second to breathe or rest.

You're feeling extremely stressed, but you know you must keep going. You can't mess this up.

[[Next.->Have an off day]]

It's a Friday night. Dress Rehearsal.

You think about how awful yesterday was. Your mom was drunk before you left for school and still drunk when you got home. And not just drunk, but violent and mean. She kept yelling at you and calling you names like "stupid brat." Then, [[she'd rip paintings off the wall, pull books off the shelves, and smash fragile items like flower vases.]] You were really scared, and you barely got any sleep because she stayed that way until around 4 am. Now, you are feeling emotionally, mentally, and physically exhausted. You're also very worried because you feel that she is getting worse each week. You can barely even remember a day when she hasn't been drunk.

You try to get focused as you begin dress rehearsal for your first recital. However, due to lack of sleep and being so emotionally drained, you can't concentrate. Steps you should know like the back of your hand have escaped your mind.

"Lucy! This recital is TOMORROW! You need to focus. You can't be messing up right now," your teacher snaps at you.

You stare at the floor for a second and you...

[[Break down crying. This all too much for you to handle.->Rehab surprise]]

**[[Apologize. Smile. And do it again. You can't let anyone know you are struggling.->Fake it.]]**

You are ashamed, and you apologize for messing up. You step away for a moment to get a drink of water.

"No one can know you are struggling. You can't let them see," you repeat to yourself.

You take a deep breath and walk back to the dance floor with your head high and a big smile on your face. You concentrate, and this time you nail it without even one mistake. Your teacher gives you an approving nod.

"You did it. [[Now no one will ever notice again]]," you think.

[[Next.->Surprise Rehab Stay]]

You get home from school today, and your mom isn't there. Instead, your dad is. He tells you and Adam to have a seat.

"I know things have been hard lately. It's okay for you to feel angry at your mom right now. Just know that she still loves you very much. She doesn't want to hurt you guys anymore, so she's agreed to go to a rehab program for people who can't stop drinking," your dad says.

"What? She's leaving us?" you ask.

"Just for a little bit. She'll be gone for a month or two, and when she gets home, she won't need to drink anymore," he tells you.

"You mean she'll be Mom again?" Adam asks.

"Yes, she'll be Mom again," Dad says.

Your anger suddenly vanishes, and you feel more joy than you remember feeling for a very long time. You try again to process what he just said. In a month or two, all of this will be behind you.

You've never felt happier.

[[Next.->Month Passes]]

The month passes quickly, and it's finally time for Mom to come home.

Dad says she's been doing great, and she's ready. You were [[angry at first]], but now you're too excited. With Adam's help, you spent all weekend making her a surprise. You decorated the kitchen with a "Welcome Home" banner and even made her a cake that says, "We love you, Mommy!" Dad also took you both shopping to pick out a special gift for her. She loves hummingbirds, so you picked her out a beautiful hummingbird necklace.

Once everything is ready, everyone gets into the car with Dad, and he drives to the rehab center.

[[Next.->At Home 2]]

When you get home, Mom loves her surprises. She even wears her hummingbird necklace. Mom sits Adam and you down and explains that she learned so much during her stay at the rehabilitation program. She also apologizes for everything she's done over the last few years. She swears that she's different now and everything is going to be so much better.

You give her a huge hug and then cut her a huge slice of the special chocolate cake.

You feel happier than you've felt in a long time. You know this time she truly means it. You finally have your mom back.

[[Next.->Devastated]]

It's been three months, and everything has been going so well. Mom hasn't had even a drop of alcohol since being home.

Today you come home from school and find her sleeping on the sofa. You're so confident that she's given up drinking for good that you assume she is sick. You go closer to check on her, and

that is when you see the empty vodka bottle on the floor. You collapse to the floor. How can this be starting again? You truly believed she stopped, but now you feel that was another lie. You feel like you will never trust her or anyone again.

[[End.->End 8]]

Thank you for playing! I know it may not have been the easiest story to read through, but I appreciate your participation in this game.

I chose to end this story with no exact resolution as there is never really a set ending for a child in an alcoholic household. While rehab programs, jail sentences, therapy, and AA meetings can help the problem, there is always the chance of everything slipping back to where it was or even getting worse than before.

However, that is not to discourage programs offering help, as they do provide hope for positive change.