

VONETTA FLOWERS



fumbling
families

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Bobsled, Olympic gold medalist

In Alabama, family and barbecue just naturally go together. Every week my family would find a reason to have a get-together for a big cookout. I couldn't wait for the weekend. The adults would always play music, dance and play cards. My cousins, friends and I would spend hours running around playing games. My two true loves when I was a kid became sports and family barbecues.

Everyone looked forward to relaxing and being together. We would arrive at my aunt's house every Saturday at three o'clock. The barbecue was fired up. Soon the chicken, hotdogs and hamburgers were sizzling. The kids had plenty of sodas, and the adults had plenty of beer. It always started out so happy and carefree – everyone joking and laughing. But, after several hours of drinking, it would sometimes turn ugly.

A couple of my uncles never knew when to quit. They would drink one beer after another, and when they ran out –they would go to the store and get more. They didn't understand how it changed their personalities and their behavior. They didn't see what I saw. They got very loud and even angry from all that drinking. Sometimes they would fight each other. After hours and hours of drinking, none of them could walk or stand up straight.

Even though I was only about 13, I could see what the alcohol was doing. I decided then that I never wanted to be so out of control. They never remembered what happened or what they did. They would always get headaches. They stunk like booze. It was never how I pictured my life.

Alcohol abuse was a big family problem for Vonetta. Read how runner Aimee Mullins dealt with the pressure to drink at www.GoGirlGo.com



I wanted to be a star athlete. I knew that drinking would not help me achieve my goals. I got my buzz from running as fast as I could and jumping as far as I could. I had big dreams. There was no better high than becoming the first African-American woman to win a gold medal in the winter Olympics. I'm so glad I made the right decisions. I chose sports. I chose a healthy life. It was the only way to get to the top.



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What is a perfect family? Sister, puh-leeze! In real life, there is no such thing. Families are made up of humans, and humans aren't perfect. No matter how much you look up to your parents, they will all make mistakes at times. The bummer of it all is that their decisions can affect your life in big ways. That's when your life can get tricky. What do you do when your parents get divorced? How are you supposed to feel when your Dad goes to jail, when your mom is addicted to drugs, when parents don't have enough money to pay the bills? No one teaches kids what to do when family life gets hard.

Know This:

You're not alone. Every kid in the United States will struggle with something at home at some point. Millions of kids' folks get divorced every year and millions more are dealing with addiction, abuse, money troubles and other emotional stuff this very instant. You may feel like the loneliest person on Earth, but know that someone somewhere is feeling the same way.

Talking Makes it Easier

Find someone you can talk to about the hard stuff you are going through. Embarrassed to talk to your friends? Think they won't understand? How about your coach? A teacher you like? Or how about talking directly to your parents? Let them know how their decisions are affecting your life. Whatever you do, get it off your chest.

You Choose Your Path

Life's struggles tend to do two things: break you or make you. When stuff goes sour at home, some kids react by messing up – getting into alcohol or drugs, skipping school, dropping out of sports, closing themselves off to the world. They let whatever their folks are

I couldn't talk to my parents, so my friend suggested talking to coach - I did and I felt much better.

going through define them and destroy them. It doesn't have to be that way. Plenty of other kids use the tough stuff in life as a way to become stronger. Have to move to a new town? Use it as a chance to make new friends. Is someone you know sad all the time? Use it as a way to learn how to reach out for help. Hate seeing your Mom drunk all the time? Learn that that is not the way you want to live.

Families can be our biggest support or our biggest struggle. We can't choose our folks, but we can choose what we learn from them. Teach yourself to sponge all the love and good qualities from your family. When your folks mess up, learn from their mistakes. Keep talking and sharing. Be tough, but not too tough. And know in the end that only you have the power to decide how life's bumps will affect your life.

Quick points:

Be a role model for your family:

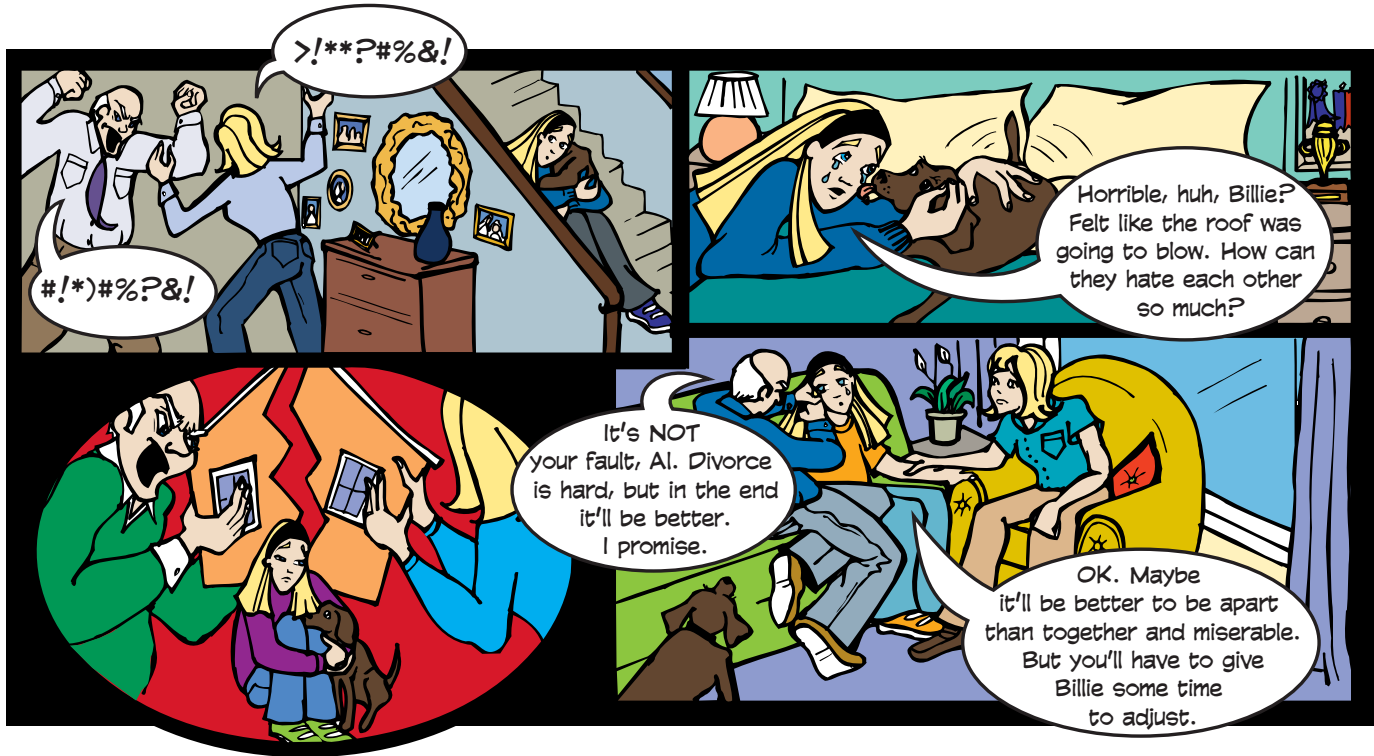
- * Exercise regularly – maybe set up a buddy routine with mom or dad
- * Eat right
- * Get enough sleep
- * Talk about ideas and feelings
- * Don't ignore uncomfy situations
- * Get help when you need it



Resources



www.al-anon.org
www.health.org
www.kidshealth.org
www.ncadd.org
www.teenadvice.about.com/cs/familyissues/



whaddya think?

SEE WHAT THE SPORTS DIVA HAS TO SAY ABOUT IT AT WWW.GOGIRLGO.COM

Why might Alex think her parents' problems are her fault?