

ADOPTING A FAMILY APPROACH

Short Guide Series

Children of Parents with Substance Use Disorders

What do we mean by Substance Misuse?

Substance misuse occurs when a person becomes dependent on the use of drugs and/or alcohol, or their use has a harmful effect on the individual, family members and/or their community. It can lead to the individual having health issues or problems at work, school or home. This is sometimes known as substance use disorder (SUD) – a complex condition in which there is uncontrolled use of a substance despite harmful consequences.

Many adults who misuse substances also suffer from mental health problems, which is described as dual diagnosis or co-occurring conditions and there may be several agencies, from both adult and children's social care, who are working with the family.

What is a drug?

A drug is any substance (with the exception of food and water) which, when taken into the body, alters the body's function either physically and/or psychologically. Substance misuse refers to both illicit drugs (for example, cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine etc) and those that may be legal (for example, alcohol, prescription drugs and solvents).

Drugs are sometimes used recreationally for their effects on the central nervous system.

Common drugs 'of abuse' include alcohol, cannabis, opiates (heroin and some prescription drugs), amphetamines, cocaine, crack cocaine, novel psychoactive substances (including SPICE/synthetic cannabinoids).

Why do people use drugs/alcohol?

There are many reasons why someone might use drugs and/or alcohol, including:

- To help them cope with difficult feelings or circumstances.
- To 'self-medicate' mental health problems.

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- Socialising in a context where it is 'normal', or as a result of peer pressure or to 'fit in'.
- To have a new experience (especially during adolescence when young people often take more risks).
- Because they enjoy the feeling of increased confidence, energy or relaxation that drugs can bring.

Source: [Adfam](#)

Some people move from experimental use to regular use, what is sometimes called 'recreational' drug use, as part of their lifestyle. There are risks associated with this, but most people come to little harm. Many people in the UK use alcohol in this way.

Some people regularly misuse drugs/alcohol in 'binges' where they deliberately take large quantities of a substance(s), typically with others, to have fun or as a release from the stresses and strains of everyday life.

The initial decision to take drugs/alcohol is typically voluntary. However, with continued use, some people can develop a physical or psychological dependency on drugs, resulting in addiction.

What are the risks to the child?

Whilst many parents who use and misuse substances care for their children well, substance use can consume a great deal of time, money and emotional energy. This may impact on the capacity to parent a child and can put the child at an increased risk of neglect and emotional, physical or sexual abuse - either by the parent or because the child becomes more vulnerable to abuse by others.

Children's physical, emotional, social, intellectual and developmental needs can be adversely affected by their parent or carer's use of substances.

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How can the risks be reduced/ addressed?

All agencies must work together to safeguard children and promote their wellbeing. It is important not to generalise or make assumptions about the impact on a child of parental/carer substance use. It is, however, important that the implications for the child are properly assessed, including their vulnerability, physically and psychologically, from the neglect they may experience or the negative impact of witnessing parental substance use or its consequences.

To reduce/address any risks:

- Assess the parent's capacity to meet the child's needs, focussing on the impact on the child.
- If concerns are evidenced that a child of a parent/carer who misuses substances may have suffered, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, a referral to children's social care should be made. Please see the contacts page on the Family Approach Toolkit for information on how to refer a concern.
- Practitioners from adult services, or other relevant agencies, should work in collaboration with children's social care.
- If a woman is misusing substances whilst pregnant, a referral to children's social care should be made. Please see the contacts page on the Family Approach Toolkit for information on how to refer a concern.
- Specialist Substance Use Services should be invited to attend and provide information to any meeting concerning the implications of the parent/carer's substance use for the child.
- When a decision to end involvement with a parent/carer who misuses substances, or a child who is living with a parent/carer who misuses substances, other services who are working with the family, must be consulted before the case is closed. Section 5.1 of HIPS Procedures Manual provides more detailed practice guidance on the appropriate response to [Children living in households where there is substance misuse](#).

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Services for people with substance use disorders

Referrals can be made in person or by external agencies. See websites for referral information.

Hampshire

[Inclusion Recovery Hampshire](#) - offers a free and confidential service to residents of all ages in Hampshire. Led by Inclusion, partners provide different elements of the service:

Services for young people aged 24 and under are provided by [Catch 22 Hampshire 24/7](#)

Tel: 0845 459 9405

Email: 247Hants@catch-22.org.uk

Services for adults 25 years and over are provided by [Inclusion Recovery Hampshire](#)

Tel: 0300 124 0103

Support for family and carers is provided by [Parent Support Link](#)

Tel: 02380 399 764

Email: admin@pslcharity.org.uk

For further information, see the HSCP Practitioner Guide on [Substance Misuse Services in Hampshire](#).

Isle of Wight

[Inclusion IOW](#) - provides free, confidential and easy to access services to all age groups on the Isle of Wight who are using or affected by someone else's use of alcohol or drugs.

Tel: 01983 526 654

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Out of hours helpline: 0300 330 2001

Email: inclusion.iow@nhs.net

Portsmouth

The Recovery Hub - provides access to a wide range of support for people and their families experiencing problems with substance use. The service is open access and GP referrals are not necessary

Address: The Recovery Hub, 44-46 Elm Grove, Southsea, PO5 1JG

Tel: 02392 294573

Southampton

Services for adults aged 25 years and over

Change Grow Live Southampton - Drug and Alcohol Service - provides free and confidential services to all adults experiencing difficulties with drugs and alcohol.

Address: 50-52 London Road, Southampton, SO15 2AH

Tel: 02380 717171

Alcohol support line: 02382 002764

Email: southampton@cgl.org.uk

Services for young People aged 24 years or under

Drug and Alcohol Support Hub - DASH (No Limits) - provides information, advice, support and counselling and can offer a variety of treatments, including harm reduction and needle exchange.

Advice Centre Address: 13 High Street, Southampton, SO14 2DF

Tel: 02380 224 224

Email: advice@nolimitshelp.org.uk

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Further information

[5.1 Children living in households where there is substance misuse | Hampshire, Isle of Wight, Portsmouth and Southampton](#) - HIPS Procedures.