

Safeguarding 7 minute briefing: Children of parents who misuse substances

Remember...

Living in a household where a parent or carer misuses substances doesn't mean a child will experience abuse, but it does make it more difficult for parents to provide safe and loving care. This can lead to abuse or neglect.

How can I support a parent who misuses substances?

Many adults misusing substances often have a range of complex needs and these will need to be addressed and supported. This can be achieved through appropriate treatment to meet their needs accessed through the local drug and alcohol treatment service such as contacting 0333 2000 325 (available 24 hours) www.wearewithyou.org.uk

What else should I consider?

Parents who misuse substances may also be experiencing other issues such as mental health problems and domestic abuse. The 'multiplicative' impact of combinations of factors have been found to increase the risk of harm to children. Professionals need to be mindful of how these issues interlink and assess the impact of issues both together and separately to ensure the interventions put in place are as effective as possible in promoting the safety and wellbeing of all members of a household.



Introduction

Substance misuse refers to illegal drugs, alcohol, solvents and the misuse of prescription and over the counter medications, the consumption of which is either dependent use, or use associated with having harmful effects on the individual, other members of their family or the community.

What are the risks to children?

If a parent is concerned with funding an addiction, or is under the influence of drugs or alcohol, they are unlikely to be able to meet a child's physical, emotional, and developmental needs consistently. Children can also be at an increased risk of neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse, either by the parent or because the child becomes more vulnerable to abuse by others.

Are substance abusers bad parents?

It is important not to generalise or make assumptions. Parents who misuse substances can be good parents who do not abuse or neglect their children. Professionals should be aware that there are factors that reduce the risk of harm to a child*. However, focus on the child's welfare should be a priority for professionals and the impact of the parental substance misuse on the child should be assessed without delay.

What should I do if I am worried?

If you are concerned that a parent, or someone who is soon to be a parent, and substance misuse is, or may impact their ability to care for their child and that the child is at risk of abuse or neglect contact your school DSL without delay.

[Click on link for quiz](#)