

Parental substance misuse:

Some parents & carers who drink problematically, use drugs or misuse prescribed medication can still provide a safe, secure and supportive family environment for children.

However for some families, drug and/or alcohol misuse can become the central focus of the adults' lives, feelings and social behaviour, and has the potential to impact negatively on a child at every age from conception to adulthood.

Adults who misuse drugs and/or alcohol may face multiple problems e.g.:

- homelessness
- accommodation or financial problems
- difficult relationships
- domestic abuse
- mental health issues
- lack of effective social support systems
- issues relating to criminal activities
- poor health

Assessment of the impact of these stresses on the child is as important as assessing the drug and/or alcohol misuse itself.

Working with families with substance misuse:

- Child focused not substance focused
- How can services support parents/carers to meet the child's needs?
- What is the parent/carer concerned about, what help do they want?
- What can you offer, where can you signpost them to?
- What are the family strengths & weaknesses?
- Work closely with all agencies involved
- Ensure plans are realistic and child focused
- Address any barriers to accessing services

Multi-agency work and reviewing:

Assessments should be:

- completed jointly by the family & involved agencies
- consider each individual's changing needs
- evaluate the progress & effectiveness of intervention
- regularly & flexibly reviewed

All actions should be documented and shared with the family and agencies.

Risk factors:

- Parents/carers misuse substances together
- Parent or carer misusing substances with their prescribed medication
- Pregnant mother misusing substances
- Substance misuse occurring at home
- Home used by other substance misusers
- Family not engaging with services
- Parent/carer believing that their substance misuse doesn't affect their children
- The absence of extended family support
- Inappropriate child care arrangements
- Child exposed to substance use
- Dangers of drug using equipment & ingestion
- Domestic abuse &/or parental mental ill-health

Impacts:

- Inconsistent parenting, boundaries, disruption of routines, not meeting child's needs
- Child has poor emotional development & inappropriate caring responsibilities
- Normalising of substance misuse & criminality
- Poor education attendance and attainment
- Secrecy, stigma, shame & poor relationships

Risks & impacts have a cumulative effect i.e. the more there are, the higher the concern.

Protective factors:

- Parent/carer recognises impact, wants change
- Safeguards are in place at home for the child
- Family demonstrates real engagement with services, support and treatment
- Family have good support networks
- Wider family aware of substance misuse issues & providing support
- Child has a close positive bond with a trusted adult
- One parent/carer provides consistency, attention, support and routine
- Child engages in activities & peer friendships
- Child develops age-appropriate independence, confidence & self-esteem
- Child regularly attends at an education setting

If child protection concerns are identified you must ring [The Sheffield Safeguarding Hub tel. 0114 2734855](https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/childrens-services) immediately.

Young people who misuse substances:

Drugs & alcohol often play a role in the lives of young people through curiosity, experimentation, recreational or problematic use.

Not every young person develops problems; not all experimentation leads to continued use or misuse.

However for some, substance misuse can contribute to:

- Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Issues at school, college or work
- Breakdown of family and peer relationships
- Engaging in further risky behaviour

Vulnerable young people include those who:

- are involved in anti-social behaviour or the criminal justice system
- are or were 'Looked After' by the local authority
- are excluded from mainstream education
- go missing from education, home or care
- are homeless
- are being sexually or criminally exploited
- have family members who misuse substances

All young people should receive good education, information and advice about substance use & early support and specialist help where necessary.

If child protection concerns are identified where a young person is using substances, seek advice from [The Corner Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service](#) tel. 0114 2752051 as well as [referring to Children's Social Care](#) **immediately.**

The **Sheffield Young People & Substance Misuse Screening Toolkit** is available from The Corner (above) and should be used if:

- A young person asks for advice or information about or tells you they are using drugs, alcohol, glues, gases, aerosols or novel psychoactive substances (previously known as 'legal highs')
- A substance misuse related incident occurs, e.g. possession of drugs or young person intoxicated
- A young person is in a vulnerable group above
- Substance misuse is identified in the home
- You have other concerns that the young person might be involved in substance misuse
- A [Family Common Assessment Framework](#) (FCAF) raises concerns about substance use

Risk indicators:

Substance misuse by a young person does not necessarily put them at risk of significant harm, but you should consider:

- The child's age, substances used, amounts, method of use
- If the use is becoming chaotic or risky
- If criminal behaviour, radicalisation &/or gang are involved
- If any exploitation or coercion is present
- If an adult is facilitating the substance use
- If the young person is caring for another child while under the influence of substances

The analysis of **Serious Case Reviews** in England & Wales between 2014 & 17 shows that:

- The frequency of parental substance misuse (36%) was much higher than in the general population, where 2-3% of children are thought to be living with parents who misuse substances
- The frequency of 11-17 year olds misusing substances was also higher: 24% for alcohol, 29% for drug misuse
- **Prompt and effective intervention is vital where substance misuse is known or suspected.**

Useful links:

- [Safeguarding Children Living in Families with Drug and/or Alcohol Misuse Protocol](#)
- [Sheffield Alcohol Support Service \(SASS\)](#)
- [Sheffield Health and Social Care Services](#) (alcohol, opiate and non-opiate services)
- [Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership Drug and Alcohol Misuse information](#)
- [National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome UK](#)
- [Sheffield Children Safeguarding Partnership FASD Learning Brief](#)
- [SEAP Alcohol Screening Tool](#)
- [Drinkaware](#)
- [Know the Score](#)
- [Drugs and me](#)
- [Sheffield Young Carers](#)