

PARENTAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE

DID YOU KNOW?

It is estimated that there are between 250,000 and 350,000 children of problem drug users in the UK – this equates to one child for every problem drug user

It is estimated that there are nearly a million children in the UK who are currently living with an alcohol dependant parent, often with devastating effects for the child or young person.

Parental misuse of drugs or alcohol becomes relevant to child protection when the misuse of substances has an impact on the care that their child is given.

Parental drug and alcohol misuse can include any adult such as an older sibling, uncle or close friend who plays a significant role in a child's life and upbringing.

Young parents under 18 years may be more at risk of developing drug and alcohol related problems depending upon their age, maturity and presenting vulnerabilities.

Substance misuse may include experimental, recreational, poly-drug, chaotic and dependant use of drugs and/or alcohol where misuse has a detrimental impact on the care provided to the child.

Misuse of drugs and/or alcohol is strongly associated with **Significant Harm** to children, especially when combined with parental mental health issues and domestic violence.

Drug and alcohol use during pregnancy can increase the risk of impairment to the unborn child.

Research suggests that familial drug and alcohol dependency can adversely affect all areas of the child's life, including their education, physical, psychological and emotional development and well being and can result in behavioural problems. Effective treatment of the substance misusing parent can be very beneficial to the child.

POTENTIAL RISKS

- Neglect of parental responsibilities, leading to physical, emotional or psychological harm
- Family resources are used to finance the parents' dependency – this may be characterised by inadequate food, heating and clothing for the children
- Unsuitable care givers or visitors
- Exposing children to criminal or other inappropriate adult behaviour
- Chaotic drug use which may lead to increased irritability, emotional unavailability, irrational behaviour and reduced parental vigilance

- Withdrawal symptoms including mood disturbances
- Effects of substance misuse which may lead to uninhibited behaviour e.g. inappropriate display of sexual and/or aggressive behaviour and reduced parental vigilance
- Unsafe storage of drugs, alcohol and paraphernalia thus exposing the child to the risk of blood borne viruses or an overdose
- Delayed growth and development of an unborn child
- Possible permanent dysfunction of the brain and central nervous system of foetus and infant.

Parental non-compliance with treatment plans should raise professional concerns about the risk to the children.

WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP

By working together services can take many practical steps to protect and improve health and well being of children affected by parental substance misuse.

Professionals should:

- ✓ Liaise with relevant partner agencies, if they consider that a child is, or is likely to, suffer **significant harm**
- ✓ Ensure that an adult substance misuse worker attends or contributes towards all case conferences involving their client's children
- ✓ Ensure that **Strategy Discussions** and **Child Protection Conferences** must include workers from any drug and alcohol services involved with the family

Professional staff in drug and alcohol services should:

- ✓ Exchange information with Children's Social Care, GPs, health visitors, school nurses and midwives so as to be able to assess the risks for an unborn baby or children within the family
- ✓ Include the needs and risk factors for children in any care programme meetings concerning the substance misusing parents. Children's Social Care must be given the opportunity and should contribute to such discussions

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS AFFECTED BY PARENTAL SUBSTANCE MISUSE

PROFESSIONALS SHOULD:

- ✓ Assess the level of risk of harm to the child or young person
 - If the child is suffering or likely to suffer **significant harm** refer to Children's Social Care
 - If the child is in imminent danger contact the police on 999

- If the child has unmet needs undertake a CAF – seek advice from the CAF Co-ordinator (01908 252016) if required
- Make a referral to Children's Social Care if a pregnant woman or her partner is involved with significant substance misuse

If a baby is born suffering from withdrawal symptoms the midwives must refer the baby to Children's Social Care immediately. The baby has suffered **Significant Harm** and normal procedures described in chapters **Referral and Assessment, Section 47 Enquiries** and **Child Protection Conferences** apply. Unless the baby is already subject of a **Child Protection Plan**, a **Strategy Discussion** should be held with medical professionals and any other relevant professionals

DURING PREGNANCY

When a professional is aware a pregnant woman or her partner is involved in significant substance misuse, e.g.

- The woman's use is characterised by use of multiple drugs / drugs and alcohol
- The family's lifestyle is known or reported to be chaotic and / or unhygienic
- Another household member is known or reported to be involved in significant substance misuse
- The absence of extended family / friends able to provide extensive support to the substance misusing prospective parent/s

Professionals need to ask themselves:

- Is there evidence of risk to the unborn?
- What can be done to reduce that risk?
- Is a CAF up and running or does one need to be undertaken?

However, a referral must be made to Children's Social Care if the above has been completed and 1 of the following criteria are met:

- A previous child has been removed or is living permanently with another carer
- The woman has been using heroin, methadone, cocaine or comparable substances for a significant period
- The woman is continuing to use heroin or misuse methadone and making insufficient preparations for her baby's arrival

If you require specialist advice on parental substance misuse contact:

COMPASS

01908 379673

COMPASS Young People's Drug Service in Milton Keynes delivers targeted and specialist drug interventions to young people up to the age of 18, including young parents. Referrals can be made by phoning 01908 379673 and referrals are taken from any source. Contact is made with the young person within 24 hours and they are seen within a maximum of five working days. The service is confidential within guidelines and joint working can be facilitated where it is in the best interest and with the agreement of the client.

As well as working with young people who use substances including alcohol, COMPASS also work with young people who are affected by another's substance misuse to offer advice, guidance and signposting. COMPASS YP service is available to offer drop-in's and workshops in schools, youth clubs and community centres and also deliver professional training for other services.

CRI Milton Keynes Recovery Service

01908 250730

Working in partnership with Safer MK, Drug and Alcohol Strategic Group and other local health providers and stakeholders CRI's Milton Keynes Recovery Service provides problematic drug and alcohol users with clear end to end recovery pathways from first engagement to the successful and sustained reintegration to the communities of Milton Keynes and beyond.

A multi-disciplinary team provides a full range of treatment interventions including prescribing, shared care, 1-1 key working, counselling, structured day programme, group work, employment, training and education interventions, needle exchange, BBV screening and immunisation, primary care, harm reduction and assessment for inpatient detoxification and residential rehabilitation.

From the outset of an individuals recovery journey service users are encouraged to get involved in all aspects of service development and delivery in the form of service user forums, peer mentor programme and peer led services (e.g. SMART Recovery, NA, AA, CA etc).

Confidential advice and support is also available for parents, carers and loved ones.

Whilst Cripps Lodge acts as the main site, satellite provision is being developed across a range of community and criminal justice settings across Milton Keynes.