



# Children of parents who misuse substances

## 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.

## Where can I find additional information?

- [WM Child Protection Procedures – 2.3 Children of parents who misuse substances](#)
- [Hidden Harm: Responding to the Needs of Children of Problem Drug Users](#)

## 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.

## 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: [Change, Grow, Live](#).

## Are substance users 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 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.

## What should I do if I am worried about a child?

If you are concerned that a parent's 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 [Warwickshire's Children & Families Integrated Front Door](#).

\* For factors that reduce the risk of harm to children where parent's misuse substance, please review 'Issues' in 2.3 Children of Parents who Misuse Substance of the WM Child Protection Procedures in box 7.