



**When parents
use drugs
or alcohol**

Booklet overview

This booklet is intended for use by anyone talking with young people about a parent or carer's drug or alcohol use and is split into three sections:

Section 1 (pages 3 to 21):

This section of the booklet is intended for adults to read prior to going through Sections 2 and 3 with children. Section 1 contains a background on the key issues affecting young people who have parents/carers that misuse drugs or alcohol.

Section 2 (pages 22 to 30):

This section is aimed at children aged 4 to 10 years old, however it is important that discretion is used as to whether Section 2 or Section 3 may be more appropriate for the young person you are working with. Section 2 contains scenarios that can be used as stimulus for discussion with the young person about their situation.

Section 3 (pages 31 to 44):

This section is aimed at children aged 11 to 15 years old. Section 3 also contains scenarios that can be used as a stimulus for discussion with the wording more suited to older children.

Each scenario in Sections 2 and 3 is followed by a box like the one below to give guidance on how to approach the section, including key reminders:



If a parent's drug taking is problematic it may impact everyday activities.

How much sleep a young person gets, or how mealtimes are managed, may therefore be an issue.

Encourage the young person to talk about their situation and think about what they would say to someone facing similar issues.

Section 1: For adults that are supporting children

SUMMARY

Some people can become dependent on various types of drugs that can impact their health and behaviour.



It is estimated that [3 million children in the UK](#) are affected by parental alcohol problems and up to 350,000 are affected by parental drug problems. This can have a huge impact on a young person throughout their life including their physical and social development.

Alcohol and drug-use problems can result in [abuse and neglect](#) and so if a professional has a concern for the safety of a child, they are obliged to report this to social services.

There are [legal frameworks](#) in place that promote and protect the rights and welfare of young people in the UK, which gives every child the right to protection from abuse and exploitation. These rights are also protected under [international law](#).

[Resources and useful contact details](#) are included at the end of the adult section (Section 1), which can be used to signpost where additional help and advice can be found for young people.

KEY TERMS

Abuse

the act of inflicting harm, both physical and emotional

Addictive

when something can be difficult to stop

Anxiety

a feeling of fear or unease

Confidentiality

being kept private or secret

Dependence

a situation where you feel like you need something or someone all the time

Depression

a low mood that can last a long time or keep returning, affecting your everyday life

Isolation

being alone or separated from others

Legal framework

a set of laws, regulations, and rules that apply in a particular country or area

Neglect

the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs

Poverty

a state of being extremely poor

Withdrawal

the effects experienced when a person stops using drugs or alcohol

How to use this booklet

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

For **anyone talking to young people about a parent or carer's drug or alcohol use**, to help them understand and come to terms with their situation. For example:

Teachers

Youth workers

Health workers



WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS BOOKLET?

A tool through which a young person can be encouraged to **discuss their life and their feelings and be reassured** that there are people who can help with their situation.

It is not an assessment tool - nor a substitute for professional intervention – but a **source of support** for the young person.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN...

Read through **all of the exercises and discussion points** (pages 21 to 43) so that you are familiar with them before you go through them with the young person.

It is also crucial that you read through this information section (pages 7 to 17). This section gives you background on:

- The key issues affecting young people in this situation
- An overview of the legal framework
- Additional sources of information and support

WHEN WORKING THROUGH THIS BOOKLET

Use each scenario as a **stimulus for discussion**. Look out for prompts and **encourage** the young person to **talk about their feelings** where possible.

If they have any questions, think about **what might lie behind the question** and what emotions or experience could have prompted it.

Reassure young people that:

They are not alone

Other people experience similar things

There are people to talk to that can help



The young person is in **no way responsible** for their parent's drug or alcohol use.

The young person is **not to blame** for parental problems.

Whilst you **cannot promise total confidentiality, you will only pass on information if you need to and, in an effort, to help them**.

By talking things through they are **not betraying anyone** in any way.

Effects on young people

HOW MANY YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED?

It is estimated that there are **3 million children in the UK** living with parental alcohol problems and **705,000** living with a **dependent drinker**.

Between **250,000 to 350,000 children** are affected by **parents misusing drugs**. Source: [The Children's Society](#)

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL DRUG/ALCOHOL USE?

Problematic parental drug or alcohol use can have a **huge effect** on a young **person's health, education, and development**.

Drug or alcohol use during pregnancy can **affect foetal growth** and cause several physical problems, with maternal drug injecting carrying the risk of **transmission of HIV and viral hepatitis**.

After birth, a child may be further exposed to the hazards of problematic parental drug or alcohol use. These can include:

Poverty

Physical and emotional abuse or neglect

Dangerous lack of supervision

Separation from parents

Inadequate housing

Frequent changes in residence

There is also the risk of **interrupted education, exposure to criminal behaviour, social isolation**, and toxic substances and alcohol being **left around the home**. Such hazards can have serious negative impacts on children of all ages and **at all stages of development**.

What a young person might be going through

Children whose parents use drugs or alcohol are likely to experience **all kinds of feelings**. Some children may be very demonstrative in their moods and emotions, others may not. But it's important that you understand **what a young person might be feeling**, and **why they might be feeling that way**.

LOVE AND LOYALTY

Children often want to help their parents **in any way they can**. Even when parents are violent or abusive, a child's love can be enduring.

This means that they can often be **reluctant to disclose** anything they feel might get their **parents into trouble**.

In some cases, you may need to **press home the key messages about disclosure and confidentiality** before trying to encourage them to talk.



FEAR AND ANXIETY

Experiencing problems at home can cause young people a significant amount of worry. More than anything, **most young people want to feel safe**.

Domestic violence or substance misuse can threaten this **sense of security** and often lead to **emotional stress and anxiety**.

A child's fears for a parent **may be heightened if a parent's ability to look after themselves is impaired** through problematic drug or alcohol use or illness.



ANGER AND FRUSTRATION

Children whose parents take drugs often report feeling angry and frustrated **by their situation**. These feelings can be both **directed towards their parents or towards themselves**.



GUILT, SHAME, AND STIGMA

Children can feel guilty about their parents' experiences and problems, **believing they are to blame** for what goes on at home.

Some young people feel that parental drinking and drug taking is **due to their own behaviour**.

In families where **domestic violence or substance misuse** is a problem, children can feel **embarrassed or ashamed of the way their parents behave**.

Where young people are required to carry out **intimate care tasks**, such as helping their parents undress or putting their parents to bed, **embarrassment can be a common reaction**.

Some children **deliberately keep quiet** about their parents' problems, with **embarrassment becoming a rigid barrier to communication**.



LOSS

Loss and fear of loss can be a major feature of a child's emotional journey.

Often, their **primary fear is the loss of their parents** (actual or emotional). But loss can also include the **loss of home, personal space, or sense of belonging**.

Having to take on **additional domestic responsibilities** as a result of parental drug or alcohol use can cause a child to feel that they have **lost out on the simple pleasures of childhood**.





ISOLATION AND DEPRESSION

Depending on the scale of problems in the home, **self-esteem can often be affected.**

Loneliness and depression can often be experienced by children **taking on additional responsibilities.** This may include responsibility for their **parent's welfare** and can **further their sense of isolation.**

In situations of **domestic violence**, they may feel confused and trapped, particularly if they deny the extent of the problem to protect their parents.

The feeling that there is **nobody looking out for them** needs to be countered by **reassurance that there are people they can talk to, and people who can help.**



Assessing the risks

Professionals are not required to report parental drug or alcohol use to the police or Social Services.

Remember, parents who misuse substances do not necessarily pose a risk to their children. However, **if you are concerned for the safety of a child you are obliged to inform Social Services.**

INDICATORS OF CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Signs of neglect, such as a child being **constantly hungry, dirty, tired, or inappropriately dressed** for weather conditions.

Injuries suspected of being **non-accidental**, for example if they are:

On a part of the body not usually associated with accidental injury

Unusually symmetrical

Noticed on several occasions

Suggestive of attack*

*e.g. handprints, cigarette burns, bite marks, bruises suggestive of grabbing, black eyes, etc.

Conflicting accounts of injury, medical treatment or absence.

A child who displays **sexualised, aggressive, depressive, or withdrawn behaviour**, is fearful of adults, runs away from home frequently, or flinches when touched or approached.

A child who **self-harms**.

A child significantly **fails to reach normal growth or developmental milestones** (i.e. physical growth, weight, motor, social and intellectual development).

What to do if there is cause for concern

If a young person's **schoolwork is suffering** or they are being bullied, help them to **identify trusted staff** at school e.g. the Education Welfare Officer.

If in doubt, **raise concerns with your line manager**, making sure that the family's confidentiality is respected. Involve colleagues where necessary and **avoid acting alone**, except in emergencies.

Remember, it is **not your role to investigate whether abuse and/or neglect has or hasn't taken place**, this is the role of Social Services and/or the NSPCC. **Your only role is to report the situation.**

However, **if abuse and/or neglect is suspected it must be reported to Social Services, NSPCC, or the police** for them to investigate.

CONFIDENTIALITY

If a young person's disclosure leads you to become concerned during a risk assessment, care should be taken **not to promise confidentiality.**



A young person's wish for information not to be shared **may not be in keeping with safeguarding their welfare**, which must be the paramount consideration. The young person should, however, be reassured that the information **will not be shared indiscriminately**, and only passed on **to help them.**

When a young person has disclosed abuse and is told that this information will be passed on, they may wish to retract the disclosure. This **usually reflects the level of anxiety they feel about the consequences of the disclosure** and should not be taken as an indication that the original disclosure was false.

Listen to the young person and **try not to ask leading, interrogating, or probing questions.** Ask only questions for **clarification.**

Acknowledge any distress or difficulty in disclosing and **explain what will happen next, and who will be informed.**

WHAT TO DO IF A CHILD IS IN IMMEDIATE DANGER

1. Contact the police by dialling 999.
2. In an emergency, get medical help.
3. Refer the child to your local Social Service team (or Emergency duty team if out of office hours).
4. Give as full an account of the relevant facts as possible.
5. Discuss any future action with them, such as contacting the police, parents, or guardians or planning for immediate care if needed.

Contact the parents or guardians as appropriate. Do not contact them if this could place the child at further risk of harm.

HOW CAN A CHILD SEEK HELP

The best solutions to problems relating to parental drug or alcohol misuse are those that the young person and their family want to happen.



It's important to consider, therefore, how a young person could approach their parents or other family members.

Keep in mind that within volatile family situations, **talking to mum and dad could be a dangerous undertaking even when parents appear calm.**

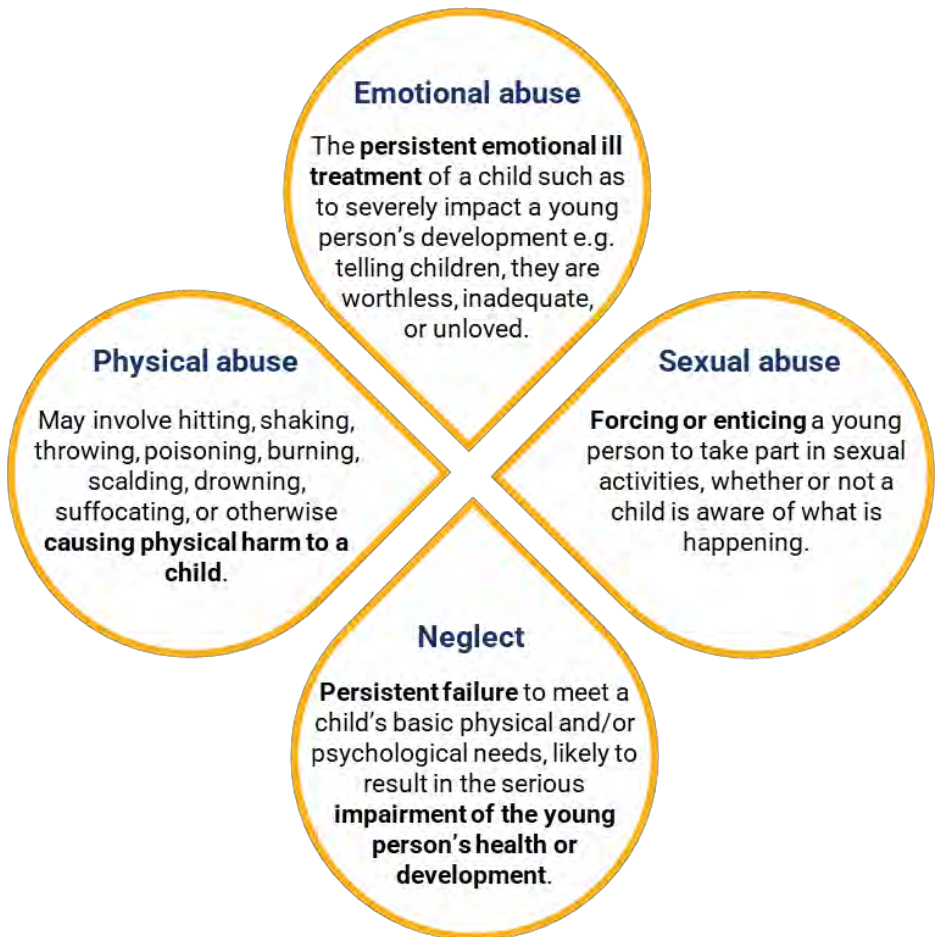
It's okay for young people to seek help and support from outside the family. You may want to help the young person think about the different services on offer, and what may result from contacting them.

Anonymous listening help can be gained from helplines such as [ChildLine](#) (0800 1111), who will not actively intervene but will listen to anything a young person wants to say or get off their chest.

The [Resources pages](#) at the back of this section signpost routes to further help and information.

Definitions of abuse and neglect

Someone may abuse or neglect a child **by inflicting harm or failing to act to prevent harm**. Abuse and neglect are most commonly carried out **by adults known to the young person**.



What the law says

THE CHILDREN ACT 1989

The Children Act 1989 is part of the **legal framework** that promotes and protects the rights and welfare of young people in the UK.



This Act is based on the **belief that children are generally best looked after within their family**, with both parents playing a full part and without resort to legal proceedings.

The Act gives every child the right to **protection from abuse and exploitation**. Based on the principles that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

The Act also sets out the responsibilities of local authorities and other services such as police and health visitors, for protecting young people and promoting their welfare.

CHILD PROTECTION

All local authorities are required to have an **Area Child Protection Committee** 'to promote, instigate and monitor joint policies in child protection work'.



In situations where a child is deemed at risk, a Child Protection Conference or court hearing can help decide a clear plan of action.

If a Conference finds a child '**at risk of significant harm**', they will be placed on the **Child Protection Register (CPR)**.

Being on the register, which is available only to other professionals, does **not automatically** mean that the **young person will be removed from home**.

THE POLICE

Drug users **may have frequent contact with the police.**

This may be because of the **drug use itself, or because of associated behaviour** such as shoplifting or in extreme cases, public aggression or violence.



The police can arrest anyone for **possession of illegal drugs** under the **Misuse of Drugs Act 1971.**

They can be detained for **24 hours** before being charged or released.

Possession does not automatically lead to a prison sentence, but defendants may be **cautioned or fined.**

A Police Officer can remove a young person from home for **72 hours** if they believe them to be at **immediate risk of harm.**

THE COURTS

Children who are considered at risk of significant harm may be the subject of a court action for a care order. This usually happens when a **parent consistently places the purchase and use of drugs over the child's welfare** and fails to meet the child's needs.



Under Section 1(3) of The Children Act 1989, all courts must have regard to:

- The wishes and feelings of the child concerned (considered in the light of his or her age and understanding)
- Their physical, emotional, and educational needs
- The likely effect of any change in their circumstances
- Their age, sex, background, and any characteristics which the court considers relevant
- Any harm which they have suffered or are at risk of suffering

THE COURTS (CONTINUED)

- How capable each of the parents, and any other person considered relevant by the court, is of meeting his or her needs
- The range of powers available to the court under this Act in the proceedings in question

Courts are entitled to make any order irrespective of the application but must not make an order unless it will positively contribute to the child's welfare.

Young people can also apply for court orders.

Parents are encouraged to seek a **court application as a last resort** when other options (including professional conciliation or mediation) have failed.

Young people should always be consulted (subject to their age and understanding) and **kept informed** about what will happen to them.

Court decisions about their future upbringing should be responsive to their needs.

Parents and the **children's wider family circle** (grandparents and other relations) should **continue to have a role to play in the lives of their children** even when they are living apart from them.



The United Nations convention on the rights of the child

As you work through this document, you can make the young person aware that **they do have rights**, and that these rights are protected in international law.

The human rights of a child, and the standards to which all governments must aspire to, are expressed in a single international treaty: the ***United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child***.

The Convention was adopted and ratified by 192 countries on 20 November 1989.

It defines a child as '**every human being below the age of 18**'.

The Convention decrees that every child has the right to:

Education

Their best interests being a primary consideration

The protection and care necessary for their wellbeing

Protection against all forms of discrimination or punishment

Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion

Express their views freely in all matters affecting them, and their views being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child

Not be separated from their parents against their will, except in their best interest

Where can children go for help?

Useful Organisations



Adfam

- Offers information and advice for families affected by drugs and alcohol
- www.adfam.org.uk

ChildLine

- Helpline for young people
- Helpline: 0800 1111 (free, 24 hours)
- www.childline.org.uk

Kooth

- Free online counselling and mental health support for young people
- <https://www.kooth.com/>

Nacoa

- Information , advice and support for anyone affected by a parent's drinking.
- Helpline: 0300 358 3456
- <https://nacoa.org.uk>

NSPCC

- UK charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children
- Child Protection Helpline: 0808 800 5000 (free)
- www.nspcc.org.uk

The Mix

- The UK's leading support service for young people (11-25 year olds).
- Crisis messenger 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by texting THEMIX to 85258
- www.themix.org.uk

Samaritans

- Confidential emotional support for anyone experiencing feelings of distress or despair
- Helpline: 116 123 (free 24 hours)
- www.samaritans.org

Link to [children's book](#), 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Arti' designed for younger children affected by parental substance use

For 4 to 10 year olds



All about drugs

You might have heard people talking about '**drugs**': on the **tv**, in the **playground** or in the **street**. But what do people **really mean** by 'drugs'?

Well, drugs can mean **several** things:

Some drugs can **help people to feel better** when they are ill. You can get these drugs from the **doctor**.

Then there are other drugs, **illegal drugs**, which people take to make them 'high' – to make them **feel different**.

It is these drugs that we're talking about in this booklet.

There is alcohol too, which isn't illegal for adults, but which can be **bad for people if they drink too much**. It can be **upsetting** when people you know, and love get involved in drugs.

But what about when parents take drugs?

My mum and dad take drugs.

So do the mums or dads of all the kids in this booklet.

Maybe one, or both, of yours do too.

Maybe your mum and dad live together or maybe they live apart.

Maybe they do not take drugs but drink too much alcohol.

Or maybe they don't but you're just interested.

In any case, the feelings can be the same.

This booklet is **here to help you**.

As you go through each page, feel free to ask **any questions**.

It's important you're able to talk about **how you feel**.

Talking about what it's like, or might be like, when your mum or dad takes drugs could help you **understand things** a little bit more.



Before going through this booklet, make sure to read through [Section 1](#) to find more detail on the issues addressed in this booklet.

It is important to consider the needs of each individual young person and use your judgement over which section is most appropriate for each young person.

Wherever possible encourage them to talk about their feelings and what happens in their home.

I feel...

If, like me, your mum or dad uses drugs or alcohol, you may have all kinds of **thoughts and feelings**.

Here are some of my friends.



They're each feeling a particular way because one or both of their parents use substances.

Do you ever feel like this?

There's **no right or wrong** when it comes to your feelings.

Everybody's **different**, and everybody feels different things at different times.

Sometimes you might be **angry**.

Sometimes you might be **sad**.

Sometimes you might feel **lonely or embarrassed**.

And that's fine.

It's okay to feel what you feel, and **don't worry** if now and then you get confused about things.

It's **not easy** growing up, particularly if your parents take drugs.



Encourage the young person to look at the six pictures on the previous page.

Ask them if they recognise the different feelings each character is expressing.

Let them talk and see where the conversation takes you. If they are not forthcoming, don't push for a response.

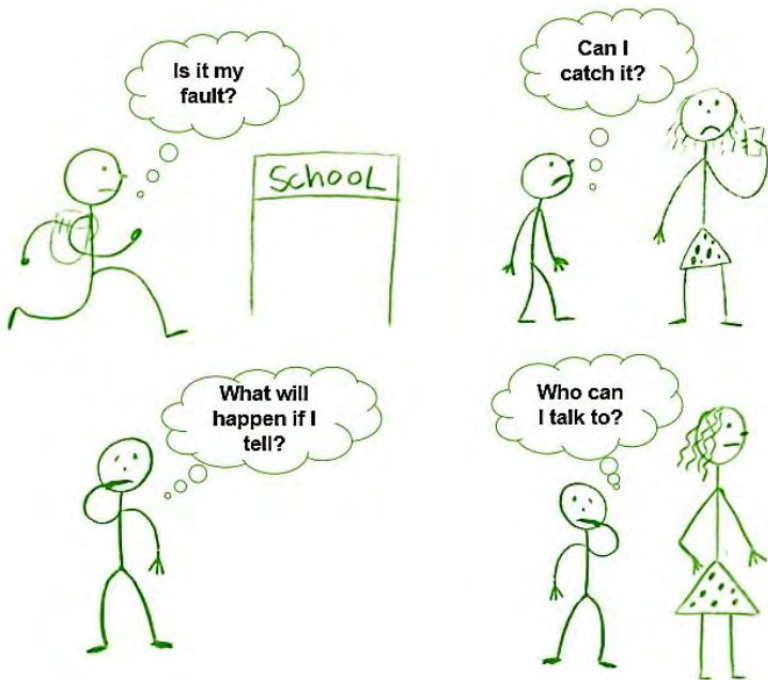
It might be worth asking about the opposite emotions, and the things that make them feel happy, safe, and secure.

This may help you establish a dialogue with them.

What's going on?

Look at these pictures.

In each one, a friend of mine has a question about their parents and drugs.



How do you think they are feeling?

Are there any questions you would like to ask?



In each scenario, establish what's going on.

Try to draw out and discuss relevant issues, emotions, and concerns.

Encourage the child to talk about how the pictures make them feel.

Reassure them that they are in no way responsible for other people's drug use.

Explain that, while you cannot promise total confidentiality, you will only pass on information to help them.

How I feel better

It's not your job to solve your parent's problems or sort things out at home.

But there are a few things that may help you feel better.

Here are a few that my friends and I have tried:

Draw or Write



Sometimes if you are feeling confused or upset it could help to write things down or draw a picture.

You could start a diary, story, poem, or design a comic or cartoon.

You wouldn't need to show this to anyone, it might help you feel less muddled.

Talk to someone

It's good to be able to talk about how you're feeling.



Try to think of someone you feel comfortable talking to like a friend, relative, or neighbour.

You don't have to tell them everything, just whatever's on your mind.

Talking about your parents isn't bad – you're just working things out.

Have fun

It can be hard to have fun when you're angry but, whatever's going on at home, it's still okay to have fun.



Because people around you are unhappy, it doesn't mean you have to be unhappy too.

What do you really love doing? Reading? Skipping? Playing football?

Whatever it is – **MAKE SURE YOU DO IT!**



Talk through these possible activities and discuss the advantages of each.

Explore their own hobbies and interests.

Other suggestions include games, sports, or music projects that they can get involved in.

Concentrate on activities that don't need money.

The message that it is okay for them to enjoy themselves is crucial.

My future

“ If, like me, your parents use drugs or alcohol, it’s important to remember **that it’s their problem, not yours.**”

It’s not your fault that they take drugs, drink alcohol, or behave the way they do, and it’s not your job to get them to stop.

There are things you can do that will help you understand the situation and feel better about things. I’ve found that talking **helps a lot** and remember **you’re not alone.**

There are people out there going through similar things, and people out there you can talk to. The person you’ve been reading this with will be happy to help or talk to you some more if that’s what you want.

Whatever’s going on at home; **it’s important you keep doing the things that make you happy.** And healthy!

Make sure you get **lots of sleep and eat regular meals.**

Play the games you enjoy and try not to worry about what’s going on around you.

It’s okay to think about yourself, your future, and what you want and need. It doesn’t mean you don’t care about your mum or dad. But it’s your life, after all, and **you’re number one!**”

Emma's journey

Introduction

My name is Emma I am ten years old. I have been coming to stars from July the 15th 2002. At school before I came to stars I was having a lot of worries about my Mum going in ~~to~~ hospital and having a lot to drink like beer. I feel that I had no one to talk to. When I met this girl I felt that she was part of the family because her mum goes in hospital as well. I did not tell anyone at school except my best friend. In the class room I cried and got upset. Coming to stars makes me more happier because I can talk to them and I am writing my own story. This has helped me put all of my worries to the back of my head instead of the front of my head. I feel that writing my own story will make my Mum and other people understand how I feel. People like me need places like stars to come to.

Emma

Introduction

My name is Emma, I am 10 years old. I have been coming to stars from July 15th 2002.

At school before I came to stars I was having a lot of worries about my mum going in hospital and having a lot to drink like beer.

I feel that I had no one to talk to. When I met this girl I felt that she was part of the family because her mum goes in hospital as well. I did not tell anyone at school except my best friend.

In the classroom I cried and got upset. Coming to stars makes me happier because I can talk to them and I am writing my own story.

This has helped me put all of my worries to the back of my head. I feel that writing my own story will make my mum and other people understand how I feel. People like me need places like stars to come to.

Emma

For 11 to 15 year olds



All about drugs

Let's face it, drugs and alcohol are everywhere. We hear about them all the time: on the tv, in the playground or in the classroom.

You might know someone who's tried drugs – done this, that or the other.

But what about when parents use drugs? My folks take drugs – so do the mums or dads of my friends in this booklet.

Maybe one, or both, of yours do too.

Maybe your mum and dad live together or maybe they live apart.

Maybe they do not take drugs but drink too much alcohol.

Or maybe they don't, and you're just interested or have a friend who needs your support.

This booklet is here to help you.



Whatever the situation, the feelings can be the same so, when the booklet says 'parents', interpret it in the way that reflects how you live.

All families and homes are different. But there are certain situations and feelings that are talked about in these pages, which may be familiar to you.

It might be worth reading through this booklet with an adult – someone you feel comfortable with and trust.

That way you can discuss the different things that come up, and talk about what it's like, or might be like, when parents take drugs.



Before going through this booklet, make sure to read through [Section 1](#) to find more detail on the issues addressed in this booklet.

It is important to consider the needs of each individual young person and use your judgement over which section is most appropriate for each young person.

Wherever possible encourage them to talk about their feelings and what happens in their home.

If they have any questions, think about what lies behind the question, and what emotions or experiences could have prompted it.

I feel...

If, like me, you have a parent who uses drugs or alcohol, you may have all kinds of **thoughts and emotions**.

Here are some of my mates:



Miserable



Lonely



Angry



Embarrassed



Anxious



Ignored

They're each feeling a certain way because of either their mum or dad's drug use.

Do you ever feel like this?

There's **no right or wrong** when it comes to your feelings.

Everyone's situation is different.

Someone might feel angry where you feel embarrassed, or anxious where you feel sad – and that's completely fine.

Some feelings, such as shame and resentment, can be confusing.

But don't worry, we're all entitled to feel what we feel, whether or not it makes sense.

Your feelings are your feelings, and you're not betraying anyone by having them.



Encourage the young person to look at the six pictures on the page.

Ask them if they recognise the different feelings each character is expressing.

Let them talk and see where the conversation takes you rather than push the young person for a response.

It might be worth asking about the opposite emotions, and the things that make them feel happy, safe, and secure.

This may help you establish a dialogue with them.

What's going on?

Take a look at these scenes.

In each case, one of my mates has a question about their parents' drug or alcohol use.



How do you think they're feeling?

Have you got any questions you'd like to ask?



In each scenario, establish what's going on. Try to draw out/discuss relevant issues, emotions, and concerns.

Encourage the child to talk about how the pictures make them feel.

Reassure them that they are in no way responsible for other people's drug use.

Explain that, while you cannot promise total confidentiality, you will only pass on information to help them.

Feeling better

However much you go on at your mum or dad to give up drugs or alcohol, they may not be able to do so.

You can't force people to give up certain habits, and it's not your job to try to change your parent's ways.

However, there are certain things you can do that may help you feel better about your situation.

Here are a few that my mates and I have tried:

Write



It may help to get your thoughts down on paper. Whether it's a diary, story, or poem, writing can sometimes help you make sense of how you're feeling.

Talk



Talking often helps people feel better about things.

Find someone you trust or contact an organisation for people your age or in your situation.

It's not disloyal to talk about your parents— you're just working things out.

Chat online



There are lots of websites where teenagers can 'meet' and chat.

Chat rooms can be a fun way of interacting with others and sharing views.

Get creative



Art can be a great way to express yourself.

You could make a collage, paint, or design a comic strip – it could be about how you're feeling now or how you would like to feel.

Have a laugh



It can be hard to have fun when you are angry but, despite what might be going on at home or elsewhere – it is still okay to enjoy yourself.

Remember life is about living. Other people's problems don't have to limit your own experience.

Talk to your mum or dad...



Talking to your parents can sometimes help during calm periods, when things aren't too difficult at home.

You'll be the best judge of whether you can approach them – but don't worry if you don't want to, or if it doesn't feel right.



Talk through these possible activities and discuss the advantages of each.

Explore their own hobbies and interests.

Other suggestions include games, sports, or music projects that they can get involved in.

Concentrate on activities that don't need money.

The message that it is okay for them to enjoy themselves is crucial.

If the subject of the internet arises, make sure you emphasise the importance of safeguarding personal information when entering chatrooms.

What mum and dad might be going through

Why do they do it?

Many people start to take drugs because it gives them pleasure or to help them cope with problems.

Drugs can often make people feel confident, can help them fit in or forget their worries.

Once they've started, however, some people can find it very difficult to stop. They might find they need drugs or alcohol just to cope with everyday life.



Feelings

Drugs affect how people think and feel.

Despite the initial pleasure ('high') people get from taking drugs, there always comes a low – what's called 'the comedown' or 'the crash'.

People can become irritable, anxious or depressed.

If your mum or dad takes drugs, they might not like the way they're feeling, but there might be very little they can do about it.

Remember, it's the drugs making them feel the way they do – not you.



Behaviour

Drugs also affect how people behave.

Because of drug taking, my parents became very unsociable; they would let the house get messy and would often shout at me and my brother.



In other cases, parents who take drugs might sleep all day, they might shout or cry or stay silent for hours.

Remember, it's the drugs that make them behave that way – not you.

How do you think your mum or dad feels?



Look at what's been going on.

Think about how your parents have been behaving, and what this behaviour says about how they might be feeling.

Take a step back and see if you can work out what's going on inside.

But remember, it's not your job to try to change the way they feel or solve their problems.



Encourage discussion around what their parents might be feeling and why they might want to use drugs.

Reassure them that what they are doing won't get them into trouble.

Empathise with the young person and avoid making any assumptions on their family situation or judgement of any kind.

Tell them there are other people they could talk to if they want, and other places they could go for further help and information.

My life

All these things feature in people's homes and everyday lives.

Are any of these affected in any way by your parent's drug or alcohol use or their lifestyle?



Time



Money



Games



Food



Housework



Sleep



Brother and sister



Shopping



Bullying



School

Away from mum and dad



Wherever you live, all these everyday things can be affected in some way.

Sometimes, living away from home for a while, either with a carer or with a relative, can mean that things have a chance to calm down.

My mate Kevin, for instance, is living with his gran for now. Sure, he misses home, but at least he's getting some space while his parents sort themselves out.



If a parent's drug taking is problematic it may impact everyday activities.

How much sleep a young person gets, or how mealtimes are managed, may therefore be an issue.

Encourage the young person to talk about their situation and think about what they would say to someone facing similar issues.

My future

“Your parents’ drug or alcohol problem is exactly that: their problem. You’re not responsible for getting them to stop taking drugs – they are.

You can do several things to help you understand the situation a bit more and feel better about things generally.

I’ve found that talking about things helps a lot.

Hopefully, by going through this booklet, you’ve seen how discussing what’s going on and how you’re feeling can really make a difference.

There are also special organisations that can help both you and your family. It’s the job of professionals to make sure you’re looked after properly. And there are certain support agencies that can help get your parents off drugs.

Remember: you’re not alone. There are people out there going through similar things, and people out there you can talk to.

Whatever you decide to do, one thing’s for sure; keep your own future and wellbeing in mind. Make sure you get plenty of sleep, eat regular meals and look after yourself.

Thinking about yourself doesn’t mean you don’t care about them. It’s your life, after all.”

“Tell someone you trust about what’s happening. It feels better once you’ve told someone”

“I didn’t want to talk about it because I was embarrassed”

“I felt angry, sad, and lonely”

“I want a new mum like the one I used to have”

“I want to live in a family like the Waltons not the Osbournes”

“My key worker is mint and WAM* are ace too”

***WAM (What About Me) was a voluntary organisation based in Mansfield offering support to young people (aged 5 to 19 years) affected by someone’s substance misuse.**



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This resource has been updated by **Nexus Values**, a specialist value strategy consultancy passionate about supporting the communication of value in healthcare, as part of a pro bono collaboration through **Passion Partnership**.





We want anyone affected by someone else's drug or alcohol use to have the chance to benefit from healthy relationships, be part of a loving and supportive family and enjoy mental and physical wellbeing.

If you require further help and information please visit our website (www.adfam.org.uk).