

YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE



Opening our Eyes to

# HIDDEN HARM

**EMPOWERING FRONTLINE WORKERS  
TO SUPPORT CHILDREN AND YOUNG  
PEOPLE AFFECTED BY PARENTAL  
PROBLEM ALCOHOL AND OTHER  
DRUG USE**

Teachers • GPs • Youth Workers • Sports Coaches  
Child Care Services • Family Support Services

# ACROSS IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND, THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LIVING WITH THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL PROBLEM ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG USE.

**Children living with parental problem alcohol or other drug use need access to support and advice.**

This impact can have a devastating effect on these children and young people and affect them for the rest of their lives.

**Adults working with these children and young people can make a significant difference *if they know how.***

The experience of children and young people living with and impacted by parental problem alcohol and other drug use has come to be known as **Hidden Harm**. This is because the harm children and young people experience is often hidden, or if seen, is not recognised as harm. As it is not recognised as harm, these children and young people do not get the support they need.

## WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT THE PROBLEM

**Hidden Harm** is often concealed by shame, fear and stigma or is not picked up. Therefore, the exact number of children and young people affected by parental problem alcohol and other drug use is not fully known.

The research indicates, at the most conservative estimate, that 1 in 11 children and young people are living in a situation where alcohol or other drug use is an issue.

Given the scale of the problem, it is crucial that we identify and support these children and young people.



## HOW CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE ARE AFFECTED



The range of difficulties for those affected by parental problem alcohol and other drug use varies and can include enduring stress and an unpredictable home environment. Sometimes violence can become the norm in families.

**'I was already, at nine years old, covering up, pretending that life inside our house was as pretty as the outside.'** *Katy aged 20.*

Young people can have difficulty in developing trusting relationships. Their experience is that adults let them down and they have to do everything, even provide for themselves.

## HOW CAN I RECOGNISE IF A CHILD OR YOUNG PERSON IS BEING AFFECTED?

### Signs to look out for

Poor school attendance or late arrival · Unkempt / dirty / inadequate clothing · Homework not done · Hungry · Overly tired or poor concentration · Unexplainable failure / over achieving · No money

### Behaviours you may observe

Aggression · Getting into trouble · Overly compliant · Excessively vigilant · Seeking approval or affirmation constantly · Withdrawn · Difficulty mixing with other children and making friends · Taking unhealthy risks · Secretive

### Emotions you may notice

Anxious · Sad · Angry · Fearful · Embarrassed · Ashamed · Despairing · Hurt · Flat / Low Mood · Numb

### Some other things to look out for

Poor self-esteem · Avoidance · Getting upset, expressing strong opinions or bravado when alcohol or drugs is discussed · Failure to get excited about events · Getting upset around holidays and birthdays · Taking responsibility for siblings, parents or others

**THESE PATTERNS COULD BE RELATED TO A PARENT'S PROBLEMATIC ALCOHOL OR OTHER DRUG USE. BE OPEN TO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THERE MAY BE OTHER EXPLANATIONS FOR THESE PATTERNS. HAVING CONCERNS SHOULD TRIGGER FURTHER EXPLORATION, SEEKING ADVICE AND OFFERING SUPPORT.**

**It is also important to be aware of parental behaviours**

Parents can display a lack of engagement or interest, for example, consistent lack of attendance at parents' evenings at school. Parents may also show signs of being under the influence or have frequent hangovers.

**WHAT HELPS CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE?**

A stable and supportive adult in their lives, especially a parent who does not engage in problematic alcohol or other drug use

A home high in love, routine, and attention and low in tension, aggression and unpredictability

Good support from extended family members

Supportive wider network such as peers, school and community

Consistent attendance at school

Birthdays and special occasions are remembered and celebrated

Promises are kept and adults don't let children down

Opportunities to build self-esteem, self-worth and confidence

Support to develop coping skills and strategies

Encouragement to believe that they have choices and that they can take some control

Encouragement to make plans for their future and instilment of a sense of optimism

**Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are stressful experiences occurring during childhood, including growing up with parental substance misuse, that have a negative impact on the child which can last well into adulthood. (Bellis et al 2016). The key to addressing ACEs is preventing them or early intervention. For more information see [www.safeguardingni.org](http://www.safeguardingni.org)**

## MESSAGES CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE NEED TO HEAR

You are not alone

You are not to blame

You are not betraying anyone by talking about it

You can still have a good life regardless of your parent's continued drinking or drug taking

There are people who can help you

Your opinion matters

**Resilience is defined as the capacity to transcend adversity** (Gilligan, 1997).

**Coping may not mean being resilient. For some, it may mean doing what you have to do to get by.**

(Silent Voices, 2012)

An essential element that supports resilience is that a young person chooses how they respond and the support they use.



It's important to remember that resilience is a process not a trait and is open to influence. Adults in the lives of children and young people can strengthen their resilience. You can do this by instilling in a child and a young person a sense that

**I HAVE...** people in my life that care for me and help me

**I AM...** a person with inner strengths of confidence, self-esteem, responsibility, autonomy and talent. I am proud of my identity and culture

**I CAN...** manage emotions, solve problems, stick at things and think things through

## FEEDBACK FROM CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN SUPPORTED

“I know that I have to learn to trust people because not everyone is going to let me down.”

“I can talk about my problems more easily now.”

“It made me realise I’ve got plenty of people there for me.”

### A SAFE HAVEN

By providing a safe haven for children and young people whose home lives are high in tension, aggression and unpredictability, you can offer them structure which they may lack at home. Such supports include:

Someone to check they are ok · Somewhere to relax · A quiet place to do homework · Extra support for school work ·

**‘I felt sad and angry. I used to cry at night in bed on my own. Because I didn’t like what was happening... I found it hard to sleep at night... family life was hard and lonely.’**



Identified adult to talk to · Access to pastoral support / school guidance counsellor · Know that other children are affected by their parents’ drinking / drug taking · Access to programmes like breakfast/after school clubs, careers advice and extra curricula activities · The opportunity to play, to have fun, to be a child

### WHAT DO I DO IF I AM CONCERNED ABOUT THE CHILD’S SAFETY AND WELLBEING?

**The most important thing to do is DO SOMETHING**

Some young people will find it very difficult to talk about what is affecting them. One of the most powerful protective factors is for the child to have a trusted adult in their lives. Identify a member of staff who can be there for the child or young person. Build that supportive

relationship and offer practical supports.

Make sure you have a sound working knowledge of your organisation's child protection policy and talk through your concerns with your manager or your **'Children First Designated Liaison Person.'** Decide on what is the most appropriate course of action.

Effective treatment and a range of other supports for children and young people are available. If you are concerned that a child or young person is at risk as a result of their parent's alcohol or other drug use, you should inform your organisation's child protection and welfare

designated person or the relevant statutory bodies.

If you require further information or training in relation to parental problem alcohol or other drug use, there are a number of agencies that can assist (See Contacts below).

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Contact your local office of Tusla the Child and Family Agency

T: 01 771 8500

[www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/concerns/](http://www.tusla.ie/services/child-protection-welfare/concerns/)

If a child or young person is at immediate risk, contact the Gardai on **112** or **999**

## Family Support

Tusla the Child and Family Agency  
[www.tusla.ie/services](http://www.tusla.ie/services)

Children and Young People's Services Committees  
[www.cypsc.ie](http://www.cypsc.ie)

National Family Support Network  
01 8980148  
[www.fsn.ie](http://www.fsn.ie)

Childline **1800 666 666**  
Childline Free Text **50101**  
<http://www.childline.ie/>

Al-Anon **01 8732699**  
Open 10am-10pm  
<http://www.al-anon-ireland.org/>

## Drug & Alcohol Services

[www.drugs.ie/services](http://www.drugs.ie/services)  
[www.askaboutalcohol.ie](http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie)

HSE Alcohol and Drug Helpline for anyone affected by or living with an alcohol/drug problem **1800 459 459**  
Mon - Fri 9.30am - 5.30pm  
E: [helpline@hse.ie](mailto:helpline@hse.ie)

[www.drugs.ie](http://www.drugs.ie) (Information and resources on drugs)

[www.askaboutalcohol.ie](http://www.askaboutalcohol.ie)  
(Information and resources on alcohol)

[www.fsn.ie](http://www.fsn.ie) (Family Support Network)

[www.drugsandalcohol.ie](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie)  
(HRB National Drugs Library, incl. training directory)

Parental Substance Misuse: Addressing its Impact on Children - Key messages and recommendations from a review of the literature. National Advisory Committee on Drugs (Oct 2011)  
[http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16115/1/NACD\\_parental\\_substance\\_misuse\\_impact\\_children\\_Key\\_messages.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16115/1/NACD_parental_substance_misuse_impact_children_Key_messages.pdf)

Parental Substance Misuse: Addressing its Impact on Children - A Review of the Literature. National Advisory Committee on Drugs (Oct 2011)  
[http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16114/1/NACD\\_parental\\_substance\\_misuse\\_impact\\_children\\_litreview.pdf](http://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/16114/1/NACD_parental_substance_misuse_impact_children_litreview.pdf)

Hidden Realities: Children's Exposure to Risks from Parental Drinking in Ireland Hope, A. (2011). North West Alcohol Forum Ltd  
[http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/research/2011/NWAF\\_Realities\\_Report.pdf](http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/research/2011/NWAF_Realities_Report.pdf)

A Family Affair? Supporting children living with parental substance misuse - report of a national conference held in October 2011  
[http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/ResearchDocs/Ireland/2011/N\\_NACD\\_2011\\_ParentalSubMisuseConfFinalReport.pdf](http://www.drugs.ie/resourcesfiles/ResearchDocs/Ireland/2011/N_NACD_2011_ParentalSubMisuseConfFinalReport.pdf)

National Children's Consultation Report 2010: "If They're Getting Loaded Why Can't I?" The Irish Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children  
<http://www.ispcc.ie/campaigns-lobbying/publications/if-theyre-getting-loaded-why-cant-i/527>

Contact your local HSC Trust Gateway Team

**Belfast 028 9050 7000**

**Northern 02870 325 462**

**South Eastern 0300 1000 300**

**Southern 02837 415 285**

**Western 028 7131 4090**

**NSPCC (24hrs) 0808 800 5000**

If a child or a young person is at risk, contact the PSNI on **999**

## Family Support

[www.familysupportni.gov.uk](http://www.familysupportni.gov.uk)

Childline Northern Ireland **0800 1111**  
Al Anon **028 9068 2368**

Steps to Cope: A dedicated support for 11 to 18 year olds.

**0800 2545123**

[www.stepstocope.co.uk](http://www.stepstocope.co.uk)

Trauma Informed Practice - Safeguarding Board for NI  
[www.safeguardingni.org](http://www.safeguardingni.org)

Children and Young People Strategic Partnership / Family Support Hubs  
[www.cypsp.org](http://www.cypsp.org)

## Drug & Alcohol Services

[www.drugsandalcoholni.info](http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info)

Drugs Information and Advice Helpline 'Talk to Frank' **0300 123 6600**

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Northern Ireland DACT Drug and Alcohol Teams  
[www.drugsandalcoholni.info](http://www.drugsandalcoholni.info)

Taking the Lid Off: a self-help resource for families [www.ascert.biz](http://www.ascert.biz)

Steps to Cope: Evaluation and key findings. Steps to Cope is a brief psychosocial intervention for young people aged 11 – 18 affected by parental alcohol use.

<http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/DAT-03-2014-0015>

[www.stepstocope.co.uk](http://www.stepstocope.co.uk)

Taking the Lid Off: A resource for families living with addiction and problematic substance abuse  
[http://www.setrust.hscni.net/pdf/48419\\_Taking\\_the\\_lid\\_off\\_book.pdf](http://www.setrust.hscni.net/pdf/48419_Taking_the_lid_off_book.pdf)

Taking The Lid Off - Help for Young People Living with Someone's Drinking, Drug Use or Addiction  
[http://www.ascert.biz/uploads/files/TakingTheLidOff\\_Teen.pdf](http://www.ascert.biz/uploads/files/TakingTheLidOff_Teen.pdf)

Bouncing Back: Building Resiliency in Young People. South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust  
[http://www.setrust.hscni.net/pdf/Bouncing\\_back.pdf](http://www.setrust.hscni.net/pdf/Bouncing_back.pdf)

The Bouncing Back Workbook: Building Skills that Strengthen Resilience South Eastern Health and Social Care Trust  
[http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/inclusion\\_and\\_sen/sebd/sebd-bouncing\\_back-adults.pdf](http://www.nicurriculum.org.uk/docs/inclusion_and_sen/sebd/sebd-bouncing_back-adults.pdf)

