

FACTSHEET: Children and Young People who Abuse Substances

Drugs and alcohol can often play a role in the lives of young people, whether that be curiosity, experimentation, recreational or in some cases problematic use.

Not every young person who uses drugs or alcohol develops problems, many young people experiment with substances and not all experimentation leads to continued use or misuse. For some young people and/or those where there are fewer protective factors, substance misuse can contribute to: Poor mental health and emotional wellbeing, potential issues at school, college or work, breakdown of family and peer relationships, engaging in risky behaviours.

Vulnerable Groups

Research demonstrates that some groups of young people are more vulnerable to problematic substance misuse:

- Children and young people involved in anti-social behavior or the criminal justice system
- Children and young people who are Looked After by the local authority
- Children and young people leaving local authority care
- Children and young people excluded from mainstream education or with frequent missing from education episodes
- Young people without secure accommodation
- Children and young people being sexually exploited
- Children and young people whose parents / siblings misuse substances and / or alcohol

It is important that children and young people receive good education, information and advice about substances and their effects.

Safeguarding Concerns

Drug and / or alcohol use by a young person does not on its own constitute Significant Harm. However there may be circumstances where the young person's drug and / or alcohol misuse raises safeguarding children concerns, for example:

- The substance use is unusual in view of the child's age; consider frequency, amounts, substance type and method of use
- You feel the young person's use becoming increasingly chaotic or risky
- The substance use is / could lead to the young person being involved with criminal behaviour including radicalisation and gang involvement
- You are concerned the young person is being exploited or coerced in any way including sexual exploitation
- An adult is involved in facilitating the use of substances or alcohol
- The young person is caring for another child while under the influence of substances
- The parent or sibling is using drugs and / or misusing alcohol

- During contact with the young person non-substance related safeguarding children concerns are identified.

In cases where safeguarding children concerns are identified due to substance misuse, it is recommended that advice be sought from The Corner Young People's Drug and Alcohol Service 0114 275 2051 in addition to the referral to Children's Social Care.

Sheffield Substance Misuse Toolkit

Sheffield has a substance misuse screening toolkit for use with young people which can be accessed from The Corner.

Practitioners should use the toolkit to help them:

- Identify and respond to a young person's alcohol and / or drug use
- Where need be, obtain specialist help for the young person
- Access advice regarding young people and drug and / or alcohol use by contacting The Corner

The Toolkit should be used when:

- A young person asks for advice or information about any substances
- Following a substance related incident
- Substance misuse is identified within the household
- When the young person is in one of the vulnerable groups
- A young person confirms misuse
- When concerns are raised in the course of any assessment such as a CAF about a Child

Action when there are concerns about a child

If anyone is concerned that a child or young person is at risk of significant harm, for any other reason, or in connection with the misuse of any substances whether alcohol, drugs, gas, aerosol, glue, prescription medication a telephone referral should be made to Children's Social Care as soon as possible. All workers should follow this up in writing within 24 hours.