

Many people use substances, or drugs, for a variety of reasons. Often this occurs without any negative impact and does not affect ability to care for children. Sometimes however, use of substances can affect a person's life. This is sometimes referred to as substance misuse.

What do we mean by substances?

When we talk about substances we are talking about drugs, or psychoactive substances. This means the substance has an "active" effect on the persons "mind" - e.g. once the substance is consumed, it affects the person's mood or changes their experience. For example, when a person consumes alcohol they can feel relaxed, more sociable, or intoxicated.

Some substances are currently classified as illegal. Examples of these are heroin, cocaine, cannabis, amphetamine, LSD, ecstasy and SPICE (synthetic cannabis). Some substances are currently classified as legal. Examples of these are alcohol, nicotine, prescription drugs and caffeine.



What do we mean by Parental Substance Misuse?

Substance misuse occurs when use of substances has a harmful effect on a person, their family, relationships, physical or psychological health and/or their community. This may affect the ability to parent or care. Excessive harmful levels of substance use can in some cases lead to dependence, sometimes known as addiction. When this happens there are services that can support parents/carers to make positive changes.

What are the risks to the child?

National Serious Case Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews have identified domestic abuse, parental mental ill health and substance misuse as significant factors in families where children have died or been seriously harmed.



One Minute Guide Safeguarding Children with Parents and Carers who use Substances



Parental substance misuse can consume a great deal of time, money and emotional energy. This may impact on capacity to parent. This may increase risk of neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse, either by the parent or because the child becomes more vulnerable to abuse by others.

Be curious - Key questions to explore?

Many parents who use substances care for their children well. Using substances doesn't automatically mean a parent/carer is unable to safeguard their children. The right approach and support can strengthen families.

A good assessment of parental needs, their parenting ability and the impact upon the child's needs and development is essential. This should be supportive, curious, and conducted with empathy.

- What substances are being used, how, frequency, are substances/equipment stored safely away from children?
- What is the direct impact on the child? What is a typical day for the parent and child? Consider social, emotional and home environment.
- What is the child's understanding of the parental need; are they able to voice worries/ask for help? (Explore this sensitively and age appropriately).
- Does the child have regular routines? i.e. school, health appointments, bedtimes, food, clothing, warmth.
- Does the child have a positive relationship with parent/carer, and/or other family and friends? Does the child have one parent/carer who does not use substances?
- Does the child experience frequent separation from parent/carer due to parental hospitalisation, prisons, or other occasions of separation?
- The parent/carer meets their own physical, mental and emotional needs, can they offer help, and do they have support?
- Does the wider family acknowledge the difficulties of the parent/carer, the impact of this on ability to meet the child's needs and can they offer support?
- The parent/carer acknowledges their difficulties and seek/accept support.

Safeguarding a Family - Escalating your Concerns

Where it is believed that a child of a parent/carer using substances may have suffered, or is likely to suffer significant harm, contact the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH): Phone 023 9268 8793, email MASH@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk, out-of-hours service on 0300 555 1373.

- It is essential that staff working in adult substance misuse services and Children's Social Care work together collaboratively to ensure the safety of the child and management of the adult's needs.
- Children's social care must assess the individual needs of each child and within this incorporate information provided by Recovery Workers.

For further information:

Portsmouth Children and families: [Keeping children safe - Portsmouth City Council](#)

HIPS Family Approach Toolkit - <https://www.hampshirescp.org.uk/toolkits/adopting-a-family-approach-joint-toolkit/adopting-a-family-approach-joint-toolkit-landing-page/>

Support Services

Portsmouth Recovery Hub - Substance misuse service. No appointment needed just 'drop in'.

Website: [» Recovery Hub \(ssj.org.uk\)](http://www.ssj.org.uk) Address: The Recovery Hub, 44-46 Elm Grove, Southsea, PO5 1JG - Tel: 02392 294573 - Opening hours: ☐ 9am-5pm, Mon – Thurs, ☐ 9am-4.30pm on Friday.

Pushing Change Peer Led Community - [HOME - Portsmouth Push Recovery Community \(pushingchange.org\)](http://www.pushingchange.org)