

# Helping Children Impacted by Parental Substance Use Disorder

## About the Report

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## Introduction

When we encounter a child who has a parent struggling with a substance use disorder, it can be hard to know what to do. What should we look for? What can we say? If there are signs of neglect or abuse, what are the steps we should take?

This toolkit is for adults who come into contact with children impacted by a parent's addiction and provides information about how to help. It is meant for anyone—teachers, coaches, pastors, relatives, friends, neighbors.

"It often takes only one caring adult. Clergy, neighbors, grandparents, relatives, teachers, coaches, counselors, primary health professionals and other trusted adults can provide needed support, thereby breaking the silence that reinforces their sense of shame, stigma, and isolation, whether or not their parents find recovery. In other words, these potential influencers in a child's life matter - and they matter greatly. They have the power and opportunity to make the critical difference, to help grow healthy kids. Adults can - and do - change the trajectory of an impacted child's life, simply by caring and being there."

Sis Wenger  
President/CEO, National Association for Children of Addiction

# Parental Substance Use Disorder and Childhood Trauma

Childhood trauma includes events and experiences that threaten the physical or emotional wellbeing of a child. In the U.S., a significant number of children are exposed to traumatic events, often related to parental addiction. Parental addiction can be associated with child neglect and abuse. Parents and caregivers with a substance use disorder (SUD) can increase demand for child welfare services. Since 2000, an extra 1.2 million children have entered the foster care system because of parental SUDs.[1] In a single year, the number of children in foster care because of parental SUD may be as high 30%, and over 60% in some states.[2]

In the U.S., over 8 million children have at least one parent with an SUD.[3] This number may undercount the real amount of impacted children because of reluctance to self identify as children of parents with a SUD.

Children who have a parent with a SUD are more likely to see and hear more fighting, witness more crime, suffer more from poverty, and lose more stable relationships with caring adults. The resulting trauma can last a lifetime, harming physical health, academic performance, employment status, and relationship formation. It also puts children at an increased risk for developing mental health and substance use disorders.

One of the most important things to remember is that parents struggling with drugs or alcohol are not "bad" parents.

They love their kids, work hard to care for them, and want what's best for them. But drugs and alcohol can "hijack" the brain, making a person think that the substance is the most important thing for survival.

Fortunately, there are effective ways for adults to respond to children impacted by parental addiction and begin the process of helping them on a better path. There are also innovative programs and services available to help. Healing from trauma takes time, but the support of a caring adult can make an important difference.





## Understanding Adverse Childhood Events

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are traumatic events that occur between the ages of 0-17.[4]

There are many different kinds of ACEs, including losing a parent, neglect, sexual, physical, or emotional abuse, witnessing a parent being abused, mental illness in the family, and parental SUD. The more ACEs a child has, the more likely he or she is to experience problems later on in life. If left unaddressed, they can have lifelong negative effects, making injury, death, mental health problems, chronic diseases, and unemployment much more likely.

ACEs, like a parent's addiction, cause "toxic stress," which can change the way the brain develops. Some stress is natural and helps children develop the right emotional responses to life. But brain changes from toxic stress undermine this healthy response process while harming learning and decision-making abilities. Over time, these brain changes may encourage bad decisions and dangerous behavior.

There are ten types of childhood trauma measured in the ACE Study that fall into three categories: abuse, neglect and household dysfunction.

### TYPES OF ACEs

#### ABUSE

- PHYSICAL ABUSE
- EMOTIONAL ABUSE
- SEXUAL ABUSE

#### NEGLECT

- PHYSICAL NEGLECT
- EMOTIONAL NEGLECT

#### HOUSEHOLD DYSFUNCTION

- PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER
- INCARCERATED RELATIVE
- DIVORCE
- PARENT WITH A MENTAL ILLNESS
- MOTHER A VICTIM OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



## Children with a Parent Struggling with Addiction: What to Look For

How would you recognize that a child may be struggling? For adults who come in contact with children and teens, signs to look for can vary.

"Children experiencing trauma from a parent's substance use disorder can have very different signs and symptoms," explains Jessica Hulsey, President of the Addiction Policy Forum.

"One child may take the caregiver role for siblings and even their own parents. They may exhibit high-functioning skills yet show signs of stress and anxiety. Other children may show signs of addiction in the home through unkempt physical appearance or signs of hunger and malnutrition with no caregiver able to provide for clean clothes and care.

Other signs may include absenteeism and tardiness from school and expressions of stress and concern about their parent or caregiver's addiction directly to teachers, coaches, and pastors," shares Hulsey.

# What You Can Do

## Important Messages for the Child to Hear

- You have no control over your parent's addiction. You didn't cause the problem, and you can't stop it. What your parent does is not your responsibility or your fault.
- You cannot make it better but can take steps to care for yourself.
- You are not alone, and support is here.
- Addiction is a disease of the brain. It causes changes in priorities or behavior, and loss of control.
- Get involved in extracurricular activities and things you enjoy at school or near home, like the school band, sports, Boy or Girl Scouts, or others. These types of activities can help you balance your stress from the problems at home, while learning new things and seeing how other people live their lives.

## Other Things You Can Do

Make sure the child has fun: Children of parents struggling with addiction tend to be stressed and anxious with adult-like problems weighing them down. Helping them "just be a kid" and have fun is important. And by engaging in healthy ways you are showing them how other people live their lives.

Help the child feel understood and validated. Praise or support the child's actions to stay safe. Children impacted by addiction are often taught to cover for the behaviors of family members and as such expressing their emotions and feelings might be dissuaded by caregivers. And encourage them to share their feelings and emotions.

## Teach the 7 Cs

Share the "7 C's" with the child, which was developed by Jerry Moe and the National Association for Children of Addiction (NACoA).

NACoA is a nationwide organization working to stop the bad effects of alcohol and drugs on children and families. The 7 C's is a good way to remember how to talk to children. It is a quick, effective strategy to address what children often worry about deep down when their parents have drug problems. The 7 Cs mantra is:

I didn't **cause** it.

I can't **control** it.

I can't **cure** it, but I can help take **care** of myself by **communicating** my feelings, making healthy **choices**, and **celebrating** me.



YOU CAN HELP

# THE 7 CS

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• I DIDN'T CAUSE IT •

*I Can't  
Control It*

I CAN'T CURE IT

*But I Can Help Take Care of Myself by  
Communicating My Feelings*

MAKING HEALTHY CHOICES

*and Celebrating Me*



# Law Enforcement Responses

For law enforcement officers who come into contact with a child at the scene of an arrest due to drugs or at the scene of an overdose, there are specific guidelines you can follow to safeguard children present.

According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the U.S. Department of Justice, a model policy when a child is present should include specific steps.[12] These guidelines break down recommendations for law enforcement for both arrest and overdose situations.

## Parental Arrest

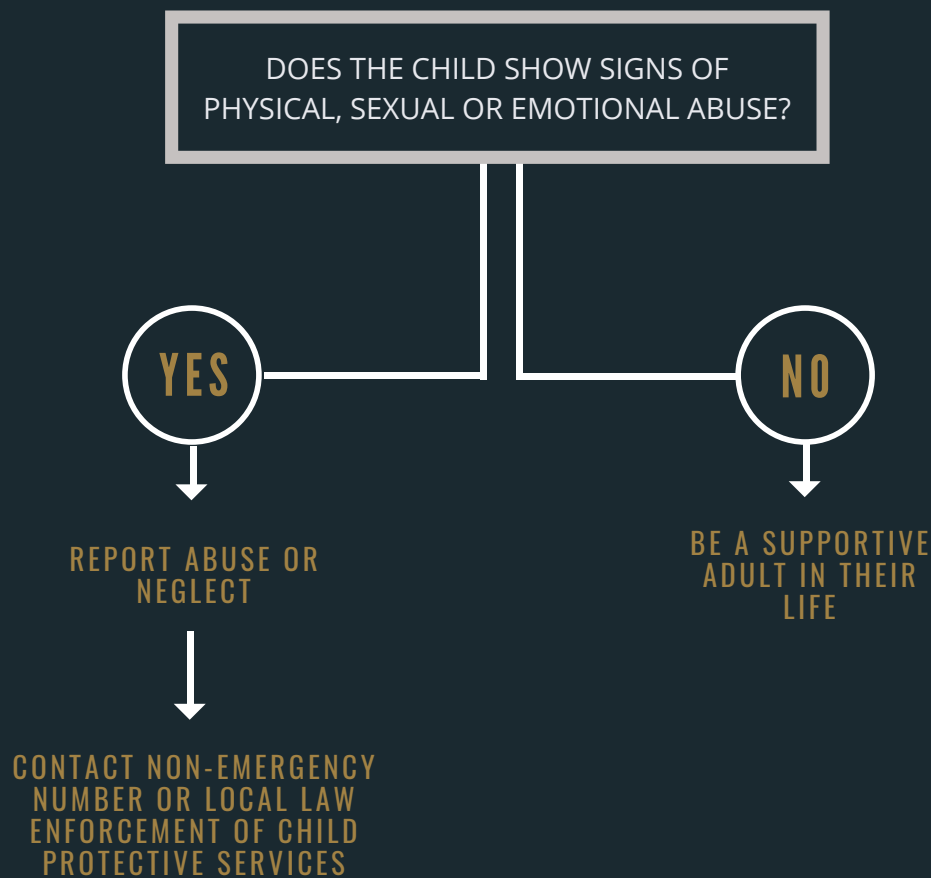
During the arrest of a parent with a child present at the scene, the officer should:

1. Contact Children and Family Services if there is a threat of imminent danger to the child or signs of abuse or neglect.
2. If no immediate threat is present, try to locate the other parent or another caregiver to take custody of the child.
3. If possible, make the arrest and proceed with handcuffing and questioning away from the child's sight and hearing.
4. Have the parent reassure and calm the child. If not able to speak with the parent, the officer should provide reassurance that is age-appropriate, emphasizing that the child has done nothing wrong and will be safe.
5. The officer should not leave the scene of the arrest until the child is in the care of a caregiver.
6. If possible, the officer can ask the parent about items or objects that provide particular comfort to the child, such as toys, clothing, blankets, photographs or food that can be taken with the child.
7. Ask the parent about any medical or other conditions or treatments of the child that would become the responsibility of a caregiver.

## Parental Overdose

1. Contact Children Services every time there is a child present at the site of an overdose.
2. Even if there is no immediate signs of abuse or neglect, contact Children Services every time.
3. Do not leave the scene of the overdose until the child is in the care of a Caregiver or Children Service worker. A Children Service worker should arrive within an hour of the call.

# How to Respond to a Child Affected by Parental Substance Use Disorder



# Available Warren County Resources

Our roles in these conversations are very important for children impacted by a parent's addiction. When done well, they start the healing process. But healing from ACEs and related problems requires a much broader effort - it takes a village. That's why there are resources available at the local and national level we can direct impacted children to. In Warren County, these resources are available:

## **Ohio Al-Anon**

Peer support for relatives and friends of individuals with alcohol problems to share their experiences, address problems, and help each other. Believes that attitudes can aid recovery and that alcohol use disorder is a family illness.

<https://www.ohioal-anon.org/index.html>

## **Dayton Opiate Recovery Clinic**

Offers counseling and doctor consultation for opioid addiction. Confidential and affordable Suboxone treatment.

<http://daytonsuboxonecenter.com/>  
(937) 813-0888

## **Positive Recovery Solutions Mobile Unit**

Mobile Vivitrol service with 16 service branches in OH. Works with behavioral health service groups to create comprehensive treatment plans and has confidential support.

<https://posrecoveryolutions.com/>  
(412) 660-7064

## **Access Counseling Services LLC**

Offers psychiatric therapy, medication management, play therapy, social skills groups, anger management, substance use counseling, family therapy, couples and school-based counseling, domestic violence treatment, and other mental health services.

<http://www.acscounseling.com/>  
(513) 649-8008

## **Brightview**

Offers personalized outpatient and intensive outpatient treatment programs. Treats the disease of addiction with medicine to give help with withdrawal cravings and other symptoms.

<https://brightviewhealth.com/>  
1-833-510-HELP

## **Lindner Center of Hope Center**

Offers medication, individual counseling, group therapy, peer support, and social services. Accepts Medicaid, Medicare, commercial insurance, and TriCare.

<http://lindnercenterofhope.org/treatment-options/outpatient-addiction/>  
(513) 536-0050

## **Dayton Opiate Recovery Clinic**

Offers counseling and doctor consultation for opioid addiction. Confidential and affordable Suboxone treatment.

<http://daytonsuboxonecenter.com/>  
(937) 813-0888

## **Atrium Medical Center**

Offers services for anxiety, Bipolar Disorder, Borderline Personality Disorder, Depression, Marijuana Use Disorder, Obsessive-compulsive Disorder, Panic Disorder, Personality Disorder, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, Schizoaffective Disorder, Schizophrenia, and Substance Use Disorder.

<http://www.premierhealth.com/services/behavioral-health>  
(513) 974-5252

## **Mental Health America of Northern Kentucky and Southwest Ohio**

Offers educational resources, peer support services with certified peer support specialists and a center for peer support, employment specialist assistance, pro bono counseling, payee services for budgeting, and support

<https://www.mhankyswoh.org/Home>  
513-721-2910

**BayMark Health Services of Ohio Inc**

Offers opioid treatment programs, outpatient Suboxone treatment, outpatient withdrawal management, inpatient withdrawal management, and opioid treatment for correctional facilities.

<http://baymark.com/ohio/>  
(502) 593-5062

**Butler Behavioral Health Services**

Offers outpatient counseling, child and family services, integrated care, services for seniors, consultation & crisis intervention, vocational services, and Harbor House (a free social club for adults with mental health conditions and addiction that provides activities, field trips, and recreation).

<http://bbhs.org>  
(513) 785-2160

**Solutions Community Counseling and Recovery**

Offers mental health outpatient counseling, addiction outpatient counseling, psychiatric services, case management, child and adolescent mental health services, and prevention services. Also offers same-day access: new adult and adolescent clients can be seen the same day to begin services.

<https://www.solutionsccrc.org>  
(513) 228-7800

**Sojourner Recovery**

Offers individual sessions, group counseling, family counseling, crisis intervention, case management, medication treatment, pre-contemplation services, non-intensive outpatient services, intensive outpatient services, residential services, recovery housing, and a perinatal/perinatal program.

[www.sojournerrecovery.com](http://www.sojournerrecovery.com)  
513-868-7654

**Warren County Compeer and Clinton County Compeer Programs**

Matching individuals in Warren and Clinton Counties who are recovering from mental illness. Michelle Rolf at (859) 431-1077, [mrolf@mhankyswoh.org](mailto:mrolf@mhankyswoh.org)

**Talbert House**

Offers prevention, assessment, treatment, and reintegration services. Outpatient mental health and addiction treatment assessments for adolescents and adults are available on a walk-in and telehealth basis in Hamilton, Brown, Clinton, and Warren counties. No appointment necessary during open access hours.

[www.talberthouse.org](http://www.talberthouse.org)  
(513) 932-4337

**Women's Recovery Center**

For women 18 and older in southwestern and central OH. Offers 12-step programs; adult education; case management; child care services; crisis intervention; family education; domestic violence prevention; dual diagnosis counseling; education, group, individual, and family counseling; living skills classes; nutrition education; parenting skills; prenatal/postpartum care; relapse prevention; and other services.

[www.recoverycentersinc.org](http://www.recoverycentersinc.org)  
937-562-2400

**Center for Chemical Addictions Treatment**

Offers residential and intensive outpatient services, a dedicated physician and 24/7 access to professionally trained nursing staff, Suboxone and Vivitrol services, and recovery community.

[www.catsober.org](http://www.catsober.org)  
513-381-6672

**National Alliance on Mental Illness Ohio**

Advocates for public policy and legislative changes to care and resources for persons with serious mental illness

<https://namiohio.org>

**Mental Health Recovery Board**

Offers prevention services and resources for mental health, addiction, suicide, bullying, and additional resources for first responders, veterans, schools, and trauma informed care.

<https://www.mhrbwcc.org>  
513-695-1695 (administrative offices)  
877-695-NEED(6333) (crisis hotline)

# Endnotes

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