

# Young carers of parents who misuse substances

- There are **2.6 million** children in the UK living with a parent who drinks hazardously and 705,000 are living with a dependent drinker.<sup>1</sup>
- Between **250,000 to 350,000** children are affected by parents misusing drugs.<sup>2</sup>
- **40%** of young people caring for a relative with drug or alcohol problems miss school or experience educational difficulties.<sup>3</sup>

Children and young people in families affected by substance misuse can be very reluctant to let people know they are experiencing difficulties. This can be due to the stigma surrounding their parents' drug or alcohol misuse, the illegal nature of some drug use, and the fear of outside agencies' involvement.

The caring roles undertaken by young carers in families affected by parental substance misuse can also include dealing with the aftermath of alcohol or substance misuse, hiding what happens at home and keeping secrets, and impaired patterns of parental care due to the chaotic and episodic nature of substance misuse.

Chaotic lifestyles, and higher risk of domestic violence, may disrupt children's routines and relationships, leading to behavioural and emotional problems. The Children's Society Substance Misuse and Domestic Violence micro-site provides information and advice for professionals and young people [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/)

A '**young carer**' is defined in section 96 of the Children and Families Act 2014 as: '...a person under 18 who provides or intends to provide care for another person.'

This relates to care for any family member who is physically or mentally ill, frail elderly, disabled or misuses alcohol or substances.

The **key principle** is that: 'Children should not undertake inappropriate or excessive caring roles that may have an impact on their development. A young carer becomes vulnerable when their caring role risks impacting upon their emotional or physical well-being and their prospects in education and life.'

The **Children and Families Act 2014** amended the Children Act to make it easier for young carers to get an assessment of their needs and to introduce 'whole family' approaches to assessment and support. Local authorities must offer an assessment where it appears that a child is involved in providing care.

**Children Act 1989: Section 17ZA** 1(a) [inserted by section 96 Children and Families Act 2014] If any child or young person is identified as carrying out a caring role, this should result in an offer of a needs assessment for the adult requiring care and support, and the local authority must consider whether to undertake a young carer's needs assessment under the Children Act 1989. Refer to our 'Supporting Young Carers and their families' introductory booklet for more information.

Not all young people living in families affected by substance misuse will be young carers, however they will still be impacted. You can contact [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse) for more information.

<sup>1</sup> Swept under the carpet: children affected by parental alcohol misuse, A report by The Children's Society and alcohol concern 2010

<sup>2</sup> Hidden Harm: responding to the needs of children of problem drug users. Report of an enquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs. June 2003

<sup>3</sup> Dearden & Becker, Young Carers in the UK 2004

## Young carer's experiences:

'It was a role reversal because you end up looking out for him and making sure he gets ready for the day. And then always worrying about what he was doing.'

'I need school to understand how hard it is and why our homework is late and why we are tired after mum has been on a bender.'

**The Children's Society provides support and guidance on parental drug and alcohol misuse. They support practitioners working directly with children, young people and families, providing relevant information, guidance and protocols, key government documents, alongside bespoke resources.**

- **Help Me Understand:** This booklet aims to help those affected talk to support workers about what the treatment undertaken by a parent or carer means, and how they might be feeling and experiencing it. [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/practice-resources/help-me-understand](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/practice-resources/help-me-understand)
- **You Are Not On Your Own:** This is the first booklet for use by children affected by a parent or carer who drinks alcohol excessively. It is intended to facilitate adults' support for children, and to address ways to keep them safe from harm. [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/practice-resources/you-are-not-on-your-own](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/practice-resources/you-are-not-on-your-own)
- **Feelings worksheets:** A set of 10 worksheets aimed at helping workers talk through a variety of issues with children and young people. Subjects include family life, understanding drugs and alcohol, where to go for help, coping with different feelings and well-being: [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/activities](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence/substance-misuse/activities)
- **Getting it right for children and families affected by parental problem alcohol and drug use (2015):** This toolkit aims to promote good practice so that all children and families can be offered the right help at the right time. The toolkit consists of a philosophy of approach, good practice guidance and practice 'tools', underpinned by evidence-based information and advice. [nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/MediaCentre/Publications/ForProfessionals/ProtectingChildren](https://nhs.uk/nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/MediaCentre/Publications/ForProfessionals/ProtectingChildren)

## Support

**The Children's Society (2016) Supporting Young Carers and their Families:** An introductory guide for professionals, outlines key legislation and best practice guidance. Further resources are available from the Include Programme website [youngcarer.com](https://youngcarer.com).

**The Children's Society Substance Misuse and Domestic Violence Website.** No child's life should be torn apart by parental substance misuse or domestic violence. If you are a young person, family member or a practitioner looking for advice and support on parental substance misuse or domestic violence, we can help. [childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence](https://childrenssociety.org.uk/substance-misuse-domestic-violence)

**Turning Point** is a social enterprise that provides specialist and integrated services which focus on improving lives and communities across mental health, learning disability, substance misuse, primary care, the criminal justice system and employment. [turning-point.co.uk](https://turning-point.co.uk)

**'Parents, pints and pills'** – Fact pack for young people who live with a parent with substance misuse issues. [glosyoungcarers.org.uk/our-resources](https://glosyoungcarers.org.uk/our-resources)

**The National Association for Children of Alcoholics** provides information, advice and support for everyone affected by a parent's drinking. [nacoa.org.uk](https://nacoa.org.uk)

**Children of Addicted Parents** supports an online community for young people, (ranging from 7 to 30 years of age) that have concerns about another family member's addiction. Whether it's substance abuse, gambling, or anorexia. [coap.org.uk](https://coap.org.uk)

**Adfam** provides support for families affected by drugs and alcohol. [adfam.org.uk](https://adfam.org.uk)

**Childline** offers a chance to talk online or on the phone about any subject. [childline.org.uk](https://childline.org.uk)