Parents, pints and pills
for young people who live with someone with a drug or alcohol problem
Parents, pints and pills
We would like to thank all of the young carers from Gloucestershire who have been part of this project and whose input has been invaluable. Particular thanks go to Madi, Alice, Libby, Cam, Beth and Kira, the young carers, who helped compile this booklet and who produced the models used throughout.

*Parents, Pints and Pills* has been funded as part of the Young Carers Grant Programme, managed by Carers Trust with funding provided by Comic Relief. Thanks also go to Gloucestershire organisations Family Focus, Castle Gate, InfoBuzz and the Independence Trust and specifically their local practitioners John Hier, Sarah Greaves and Beverley Polson.

Produced by
Gloucestershire Young Carers © 2015
# Introduction
- Welcome: 4
- What is substance misuse?: 5
- Why do people start to use?: 6
- Signs that someone needs help to stop: 7

## Drugs and alcohol
- Cannabis: 8
- Heroin: 9
- Alcohol: 10
- Mixing Drugs: 11

## Information
- Alcohol, drugs and the law: 12
- Young carer story: Jessica: 13
- Knowing YOUR rights: 14
- Your RIGHTS as a young carer: 15
- Who’s who?: 16–17

## Looking after yourself: top tips and getting help
- Young carer story: Rose: 18
- Worried, scared or upset?: 19
- Feeling better… …Keeping safe: 20–21
- When things are getting worse: 22–23
- So where do I go for help?: 24
Welcome to parents, pints and pills

We are a group of young carers who help care for someone in our family who has a ‘substance misuse’ problem.

This could mean they drink too much, use drugs or both. We all care for our Mums and Dads but you might be caring for someone else in your family.

We felt there was very little information out there for young people like us and we know that it can be very difficult to talk to other people about what is going on in your family.

There might be days when everything is okay in your family and then others when things are very difficult.

The most important thing we want you to know is that this is not your fault and you did not cause the problem. You do not have to deal with how you feel by yourself and you do not need to keep it secret. There are people out there to support you and your family.

We hope that you find this booklet useful.

Madi, Alice, Libby, Cam, Beth and Kira
What is **substance misuse**?

Substance misuse is when a person regularly takes something that changes the way they *think, feel or behave* BUT that also causes problems for them and for those around them.

That ‘substance’ can be either drink or drugs.

These problems happen because at first these substances can make a person feel better, happier, relaxed or more in control. However these feelings are only short term so people use them again to try and get these feelings back. Over time a person will have to drink more or take more of a drug in order to get the same feeling. They may find that they can’t cope or become ill without them and this is when we say someone is ‘dependant’ on a substance.

Eventually they can cause real damage to a person’s body and mental health, and really mess up their life.

**Drugs** have lots of different names and come in lots of different forms. There are drugs that are medicines that you can buy in a shop and others that are illegal drugs such as cannabis, cocaine or heroin.

**Alcohol** is the drug that is most commonly misused, probably because it is legal and easy to get.

**Prescription drugs** such as those given by a doctor, or medicines you buy for a headache are usually considered to be safe. However these can be dangerous too if not used correctly.

**Legal highs**, also called psychoactive substances, are very dangerous because no-one taking them can be sure what’s in them or what their effects will be. It is illegal to sell or even give ‘legal highs’ to anyone else.
Why do people start to use?

There are many reasons why someone may start using drugs or drinking. These can include:

- Wanting to fit in with a certain group (this is called peer pressure);
- Curiosity: wanting to find out what it is like;
- Availability; when drugs or alcohol are easy to get hold of;
- Boredom or just wanting to fill time.

Sometimes something horrible or upsetting may have happened in your family and someone close to you may have started to drink or take drugs to help them cope. People may use drugs or drink to forget how difficult and sad life can be.

It maybe that a person grows up in a family where drinking or taking drugs is common or considered normal.

No-one wants their alcohol or drug use to become a problem but sometimes it can happen without them even realising. Someone in your family might have started drinking or taking drugs when they were younger, or before you were born, but then found it difficult to stop.

However drink and drugs cannot make problems disappear and the more a person takes, and the longer they use them, the more difficult it gets to stop.

Taking drugs might seem like the answer at the time but they can make life harder for the person doing it and for their families.

You may already know that someone in your family has a problem or you might have begun to worry that this might be happening to someone you care about.

REMEMBER: there are people who are able to help both you and your family.
Signs that someone needs help to stop

It can be difficult for someone with an alcohol or drug problem to stop using. They may need help to stop if they:

• Take drugs or drink every day and become ill or angry if they are unable to do this;

• Believe they have to take them to feel OK or cope, even when other people are telling them this isn’t true;

• Spend money on drink or drugs instead of buying food or paying bills;

• Lie to family and friends about what they are taking or how much;

• Ask other people to lie or keep secrets about what is going on or to cover up for their behaviour;

• Have arguments with family or friends or stop talking to them altogether;

• Say or do cruel or nasty things which they later regret;

• Forget where they have been, what they have done or what they have said;

• Fall asleep at odd times in the day or they stay awake all night. They may even pass out.

The most severe forms of substance misuse are normally treated by specialist drug and alcohol services. This may mean a person going into hospital to detox (detoxification) and then into rehab (rehabilitation) for several months.

All of these things can be very difficult and scary for you and for the person you care about, however things can get better with help and support.

Keep reading to check out some tips and ideas.
Cannabis
Also called dope, weed, grass, blow, skunk, ganja, marijuana and spliff.

Effects • Users can feel chilled, relaxed, giggly, chatty or sick and dizzy.
• People are more aware of their senses or have hallucinations.
• Sometimes have craving for food called ‘the munchies’.

Risks • Can make users feel anxious, panicky and paranoid.
• Can cause a psychotic episode where people lose grip of reality.
• It can affect co-ordination, concentration and the ability to remember things.
• It can reduce the motivation to do stuff and participation in things such as work or relationships.
• If you smoke it, it can cause lung disease or cancer.
• Users can become psychologically dependent on it.
• Long term or heavy use can lead to mental and physical health problems.

The Law • Cannabis is a Class B drug.
• It is illegal to have, give it away or sell.
• You can be sent to prison for having cannabis or supplying it to someone else.
Heroin

Also called smack, junk, horse, 'h', china white, brown, whack.

Heroin is a drug made from morphine, which is taken from the opium poppy flower and is one of the class of drugs known as 'opiates'. It is a strong painkiller. Pure heroin is a white powder but it is often mixed with other things so can be anything from white to brown.

'Street' heroin is sometimes sold under the name 'brown' and can be used by people after a night out to chill out. Brown is still street heroin but some people mistakenly think it's not as addictive or dangerous. Heroin can be smoked, snorted or injected.

Effects

- A small dose of heroin gives the user a warm feeling that makes everything seem OK. A bigger dose can make someone feel very relaxed or sleepy.
- Heroin is highly addictive and people can very quickly become dependent on it.

Risks

- Injecting heroin or sharing syringes can be very dangerous. Someone injecting can catch or spread a virus such as HIV or hepatitis C.
- Injecting damages the veins and arteries and this can lead to serious physical problems such as infections.
- There is a risk that as a person's body gets used to heroin they will need to take more to get the same effect. This can lead to a person overdosing or even dying by taking too much.

The Law

- Heroin is a class A drug,
- It is illegal to have it for our own use, give away or sell, even to a friend.
- You can be sent to prison for having heroin or supplying it to someone else.
Alcohol
Also called booze, bevvies, cans, cider, beer, wine, whiskey, lager, alcopops.

Effects • Alcohol can exaggerate whatever mood you are in when start drinking, so if you are angry you may become angrier.
• It can make a person relax and feel less anxious.
• It can make you feel more sociable and confident.

Risks • It can result in a person behaving aggressively and can lead to violence.
• Dependence on alcohol can develop slowly as a person becomes used to the effects making them think they can drink more.
• Long term use can cause liver damage, heart disease, stomach cancer and brain damage.
• It can make a person feel out of control, fall over or be sick.
• It can make a person pass out and feel unwell when they wake up.

The Law • It is legal to buy and drink alcohol in pubs, clubs and shops when you are 18. It is against the law to buy alcohol or ask someone else to buy it for you when you are under 18.
Mixing drugs

Effects

• Mixing drugs can be highly dangerous and unpredictable.

• Different drugs have different effects depending on what’s actually in the drug, the amount taken, your mood, physical health and environment.

• Mixing substances can cause very frightening effects with little or no ability to control them.

• Depending on their form and how they have been taken, drugs are absorbed by the body at different rates. This makes managing the effects very difficult.

Risks

• Mixing drink and drugs can lead to an accidental overdose and even death.

• The majority of people who end up in hospital because of taking drugs have taken more than one type of substance.

• The unpredictable effects of mixing drugs can happen at any time and it may take a while for the negative effects to take place. These effects can even happen when you are asleep.

• Sometimes a person may mix a drug that has been prescribed for them with another substance e.g. alcohol without realising the possible risks.
Alcohol, drugs and the law

People who misuse drink or drugs can get into trouble with the police if they
• do something wrong or violent when they have been drinking or taking drugs;
• have illegal drugs on them or in their house;
• sell drugs to other people or buy drugs not prescribed for them;
• steal to get money for drugs or other things.
• are not able to look after their children properly.

Having a family member arrested or go to prison is a difficult experience.
You might have been there when the person was arrested or when police came to your home. Sometimes, if a grown-up who looks after you is taken away by the police, you may have to go and stay with other family members or into temporary foster care.

If a family member goes to prison you may not get the chance to talk to them first so you might feel angry, confused, sad, disappointed or ashamed. The most important thing to remember is that this is not your fault.

The prison system can be difficult to deal with as there are lots of rules and regulations. To add to this different prisons will have slightly different rules. The person in prison may even be sent to serve their sentence hundreds of miles away making visiting very difficult.

Some of these might help you to feel a bit better:
• Talk to a friend or trusted adult, such as a teacher you get on with.
• Write a letter to the person in prison telling them how you feel and ask any questions you want answered. Letters are often better than trying to talk on the phone as you can be sure to say everything you want and also avoid arguments.
• Contact Action for Prisoners Families (www.prisonersfamilies.org.uk 0808 8082003) who provide free, practical and confidential advice.
Young carer story: Jessica

My Mum’s anorexia and depression led to her drinking. I was scared every time she went out. She tried to take her own life and then the Crisis Team got involved. Also the school and Eating Disorders Team did too.

Although she was getting help she got worse. It was decided she would go to The Priory. She stayed for 6 months.

I missed her. I remember on my 9th birthday I went to see her but we had to travel a long way (a few hours) and on a school day but they gave me the morning off. We would always play dominoes when we went to see her.

Although I knew she was safe and OK, I wanted her home so bad!

I would always wish for her to come home. I would sleep on her side of her bed to keep it warm.

I was so happy when she came home. Now she hasn’t drunk for 2 years and she isn’t anorexic.

I was scared when I decided to talk to my school but I knew I had to talk to someone.

At first my Mum got really angry that I had told school but then we all got more support.

Jessica X
Knowing YOUR rights

All children and young people have rights: It’s the law!

It’s YOUR right to:

• Be able to take a break and enjoy leisure time
• Have an education
• Be heard, listened to and believed
• Be protected from physical and psychological harm
• Have privacy and respect
• Have access to information and advice
• Have access to health and social care
• Be consulted and fully involved in discussions which affect your life
Your RIGHTS as a young carer

If someone in your family has a serious drug or alcohol problem you may find that you are one of the people who helps to take care of them. Perhaps you take responsibility for cooking or shopping, for keeping an eye on how they are or looking after your brothers and sisters. The type of care you are giving may be emotional, physical or practical but all these things count as ‘caring’.

You have the right to:

- An ‘assessment’ to check out what help and support you need
- Make choices about the amount of care you can give
- Practical help and support with caring
- Be recognised and treated separately to the person you care for
- Advice about what to do and who to contact in an emergency

To find out more about how to get an assessment, contact your local Young Carers Project or Support Worker if you have one. You can usually find details by doing an internet search using the county where you live and the words ‘young carers’. You could also speak to someone in school and ask them to help you.
Who’s who

**Family doctor (GP):** The doctor will try to find out what the problem is and how it should be treated. This may mean writing a prescription for medicine or tablets or referring on to a specialist service. These services could include counselling, mental health services or adult drug and alcohol agencies.

**Adult Drugs and Alcohol Worker:** also known as a substance misuse worker. They will support someone to understand why they use and then help them to try and stop. They can help someone to get counselling and help to deal with housing or legal problems. Some workers are trained to prescribe medication or to supervise detox programmes. They can also help with any health problems linked to using drugs. Workers will talk about how to use drugs more safely in an effort to reduce harm to the user and the people around them. Remember, it can take a long time for someone to get drug free and it won’t happen overnight.

Sometimes workers are based in an office where people can just walk in and ask for help, they don’t have to wait to be referred by a doctor or social worker.

**Detoxification (Detox) and Rehabilitation (Rehab) Team:** will help when a person wants to get rid of the drugs or alcohol in their body and they will then support them to try and stay drug free. Detox is when a person gets the drugs out of their system. A person can detox at home with specialist help or they may need to go to a special clinic. This will depend on how much, how often and which drug they have been using. It can be dangerous to try and just STOP without help if someone is dependent on a substance.

Rehab is the next stage of recovery and aims to give someone the coping skills to stop them from starting to use again. Rehab can be done either by going to appointments at a clinic or by going to stay in a specialist unit.

Sometimes this unit can be a long way from home and it often means
not seeing their families for a while. However for some people it is the best option as they will receive more intensive support. Rehab have teams of experts, such as counsellors and therapists, who help someone understand why they drank or took drugs and then support them to get used to a life without these substances.

**Mental Health Team:** sometimes people with drug and alcohol problems can also suffer from mental health problems. There are lots of different mental health teams with different names. These teams might include, social workers, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, mental health nurses and **support workers**. Everyone in the team should work together to help the person get better and should also work with any other agencies offering the family support.

**Social worker:** gives advice and support to people who are experiencing problems in their lives. They can help to get other services involved to support a family. This might be things like help at home or school, counselling, or getting you involved with a local young carers support organisation. You will have a social worker if you are on a Child Protection (CP) Plan, a Child In Need (CIN) Plan or in foster care.

**Family Support Worker (FSW):** offers practical and emotional help to families experiencing difficulties. Sometimes they will work closely with a social worker as part of the CP or CIN plan but that’s not always the case. A FSW can also be part of an **Early Intervention** team who try and support a family before things get really bad. The support they offer will be different for each family depending what they need. It can include helping if a parent is in hospital or prison, supporting a parent if they are struggling with a child’s behaviour or even just coping with the day to day pressures of family life. They will see if there are any other services out there that might be able to help too and then get them involved. A FSW will make visits to the family until the home situation improves.
Young carer story: Rose

Who are Young Carers?

Gloucestershire Young Carers is a charity that supports young children who look after a member of their family. I am a young carer; I look after my mother, father and now my granddad. Gloucestershire Young Carers has helped me and my family so they won’t have to rely on me so much. They sent in services to support my family to allow me some time off and then when they thought that they was getting better they stopped having people going to my house but Young Carers carried on supporting me.

They don’t only take us on days out, they go to social workers meetings for extra support, and they did it with me when I was in a bad place. If Young Carers don’t take us out, we go to their main office and talk about drugs, drinks and different kinds of illness and disabilities.

Before I went to Young Carers I was always getting into trouble, I was unsettled, always worrying and when Young Carers asked if I wanted help I was saying ‘no’ and then I said ‘OK I will give it a go’ and now I have completed school and I am now in college and in September I am going to be doing Health and Social Care because I want to be a learning support assistant. My behaviour has changed so much since I have been going to Young Carers.

That’s who Young Carers are...
Worried, scared or upset?

Do you feel worried, scared or upset about:

- Whether you are safe when you are with someone who is using drugs?
- Whether they can they look after you properly?
- Being taken away from the people you care about?
- Having to look after yourself a lot, spending a lot of time on your own?
- Cooking your own meals or having to cook for the whole family?
- Feeling ignored, not taken seriously or very sad but no-one notices?
- Your brothers and sisters or having to look after them all the time?
- What the person you care about is doing when you are not with them or you are at school?
- Other people who come into your house? They might be friends of your mum or dad but you don’t like them or they make you feel uncomfortable.
- Not knowing who you can trust or who you can talk to about your worries?

There are lots of ways to get help to feel better so keep reading for some Top Tips.
Feeling better...

Why not try some of these to see if they help you to feel a bit better?

- Meet up with friends.
- Join an after school club or youth club.
- Listen to music, watch TV or a DVD.
- Play a computer game.
- Take the dog for a walk or play with a pet.
- Go for a walk.
- Read a book.
- Write a diary or stories.
- Draw or paint.
- Talk to someone about everyday things that have nothing to do with drink or drugs.
- Talk to friends on the internet but it is very important to remember that things you say may be seen by other people so be careful what you share.
- If you just need some space then why not go to your room and close the door for a short while.

Remember it is ok for you to have fun and to do things that make you happy. Sometimes this might seem very difficult to do but it is important to try.

Not everything in your life should be about a problem someone else has. It does not define who you are!

REMEMBER:
You are not the person with a problem and you have the right to live your own life.
...Keeping safe

Lots of young people need a bit of help from others in order to help them feel better. Here are some suggestions about who might be able to help:

- **Try talking to an adult that you trust. This might be a family friend, a teacher or relative.**
- **Contact your local Young Carer Support Service. They will listen to you and help you to get the information, advice and the support that you need.**
- **Ask the person you care about who is supporting them. They may be getting help even though you don’t know about it.**
- **If the drug or alcohol use of the person you care about means that you are not safe you can get support from a social worker. They can help your family to make a plan to make sure that things get better.**

Sometimes people may use drink or take drugs occasionally without it changing their lives completely. This may mean that your mum or dad may still be able to care for you.

**However...** Sometimes alcohol or drug use may mean that no one in your family is able to care for you properly.

- **If this is the case you may need to go and stay with relatives or friends or maybe foster carers.**
- **Or you may need a social worker to put a plan in place to keep you safe. This will be called a Child in Need or a Child Protection Plan.**
When things are getting worse

When you live with someone with a drug or alcohol problem you are often the person who knows the signs when things are getting worse, but who’s out there to listen to your concerns?

Remember that the person you care about may be getting help from a doctor or substance misuse team. Sometimes adults don’t want to worry children by talking about their problems too much or they may want to keep some things private.

If your mum or dad has a serious substance misuse problem a support worker should help your family to draw up a plan of what to do if there is a crisis and who to contact.

REMEmBER: You are not responsible for your parent’s drug or alcohol use. BUT professionals supporting your parent should listen to your concerns.

‘I get worried that my parent’s substance misuse is getting worse - but no one listens to me’
If you feel that things are getting worse and that the person you care for is not asking for help then why not:

- **Talk to a trusted adult. Explain clearly why you are worried.**
- **Talk to a doctor, family support worker or the substance misuse team who are supporting you or your parent. Tell them about the way the person is behaving or the things that they are saying. They should listen.**

If you still don’t feel that anyone is listening then ring your local Young Carers Support Service, if there is one, or your local Youth Service. They will listen to your concerns and help you to identify who to tell.

If you feel that you or the person you care about is in real danger ring **999** and ask for the police. It’s OK to ring as it’s better to be safe than sorry. You can ring even if you have no credit on your phone.

- **Why not make a note of some useful contact numbers – just in case. There’s a handy space on the back page to help you out.**

It’s a good idea to make sure you know your postcode as this will help the ambulance or police find your home more quickly.
So where do I go for help?

**www.babble.carers.org** For young carers under 18 and where you can go for information, advice or to share your experiences. You can access support by browsing the website, emailing or via 1-2-1 webchats.

**www.matter.carers.org** For young adult carers aged 16-25. Brings together older young carers and those who work with them, in a safe space to chat, share experiences and get support.

**www.childline.org.uk** 1-2-1 online chats with a counsellor and message boards to share your thoughts with other young people like you. You could also call the 24 hour advice line FREE on 0800 1111.

**www.nacoa.org.uk** The National Association for Children of Alcoholics website has lots of advice for anyone who has a parent with a drink problem. You can email **helpline@nacoa.org.uk** to start a conversation with someone who can help you or call the FREE helpline on **0800 358 3456**. Your call won’t show up on your landline phone bill and you don’t have to give your name if you don’t want to.

**www.coap.org.uk** A website for children affected by their parent's misuse of drugs or alcohol. There are Message Boards where you can chat to others in the same situation or you can request advice online.

**www.nhs.uk/carersdirect/young** Lots of advice for young carers about dealing with feelings, school bullying etc. Text **0300 123 1053** and ask for a free call back at a time that’s good for you. There’s even an interpretation call-back service if English isn’t your first language.

**NHS 111** Call 111 when you need medical help or advice fast, but it’s not a 999 emergency.

**www.samaritans.org** Confidential support, 24 hours and 365 days a year. Call 0845 790 9090, or drop-in at your local branch. Check the website for details.

**www.myh.org.uk** The Muslim Youth Helpline 0808 808 2008 is open Mon-Fri 6pm-12am, Sat-Sun 12pm-12am. Text: 07860 022 811. Email: **help@myh.org.uk** or write a letter to MYH FREEPOST RLZS-XJCE-JLBH. Advice is free, confidential and non-judgemental.

Or talk to someone you already know and trust such as a relative, teacher, school nurse, doctor or young carers worker. They can all help you make that first step to getting support.
Useful contacts

- G.P. (Doctor)
- Drug/Alcohol Team
- Young Carers Team
- Trusted Adult

Parents, Pints and Pills has been funded as part of the Young Carers Grant Programme, managed by Carers Trust with funding provided by Comic Relief.