

# CHILDREN AFFECTED BY PARENTAL DRUG OR ALCOHOL RELATED PROBLEMS

## A FRAMEWORK FOR REDUCING HARM

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This document provides a framework for implementing the recommendations in the Scottish Executive's report 'Getting Our Priorities Right' (GOPR) and Recommendation 12 in 'It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright'. It also takes account of *Hidden Harm* and related documentation, which all address the issues of children affected by parental substance misuse.
- 1.2 The assistance of North East of Scotland Child Protection Committee in providing information from relevant documentation is acknowledged.

## 2 PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 Whilst not all children with parents or carers who have drug or alcohol problems experience significant hardship, such problems, particularly when combined with other social and personal problems or dissent and disruption within the family, can lead to serious difficulties for children and an increase in a range of short and longer term risks. However research, outlined in Getting Our Priorities Right, has identified factors which can help protect children facing such difficulties.
- 2.2 The relevant overarching principles in law are:
- The welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.
  - Every child has the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect or exploitation.  
(Children [Scotland] Act 1995)
- 2.3 Other Relevant Principles from 'it's Everyone's Business to Make Sure I'm Alright' Scot. Exec. 2002
- All children in Scotland deserve to be cared for and protected from harm and to grow up in a safe environment in which their rights and needs are respected.
  - Every adult in Scotland has a role in ensuring all our children live safely and can reach their full potential.
- 2.4 The Western Isles Child Protection Committee (WI CPC) and Alcohol & Drugs Action Team (ADAT) are committed to ensuring that:
- Implications for children should always be included in the assessment of the service user and appropriate action should be taken where immediate or significant risks to children are identified.
  - The protective factors for children are enhanced and parents or carers with problems are supported in their efforts to provide safe and nurturing environments for their children.
  - A range of services are available which address the needs of parents or carers with drug or alcohol related problems, their children and other family members.

### **3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE WESTERN ISLES CHILD PROTECTION COMMITTEE AND THE ALCOHOL & DRUG ACTION TEAM IN RESPECT OF ‘GETTING OUT PRIORITIES RIGHT’/‘HIDDEN HARM’ /GIRFEC.**

- 3.1 Agencies which are represented on The WI CPC and the WI ADAT have responsibility for ensuring that strategies and action plans are in place to ensure that children who are affected by parental alcohol or drug misuse are identified, and that their needs are addressed.

The Western Isles CPC and the ADAT acknowledge the difficulties involved in discharging these responsibilities, and are committed to supporting the agencies working with either adults or children involved in this complex task by encouraging best practice and integrated working.

- 3.2 The WI CPC and the ADAT will:

- Identify all agencies within the CPC & ADAT area which have a remit to work with adults with drug or alcohol related problems, and will help such agencies in drawing up and implementing action plans to address the implications of “Getting Our Priorities Right”, “Hidden Harm” and GIRFEC.
- Ensure that all relevant agencies have access to the Western Isles Child Protection Inter-Agency Procedures & Guidelines, and know where to obtain advice regarding children’s issues.
- Help all relevant agencies to identify training needs associated with implementing action plans and will assist in sourcing relevant inter-agency training.
- Assist agencies in the auditing of action plans and any associated initiatives which provide services for adults with drug or alcohol related problems.
- Provide additional information and guidance as required.
- Ensure that up to date guidance on best practice regarding “Getting Our Priorities Right”, ‘Hidden Harm’ and Recommendation 12 in “It’s Everyone’s Job to Make Sure I’m Alright” is made available to Children’s Services in the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- Regularly review training in Child Protection.

- 3.3 Along with partner agencies, the Western Isles Child Protection Committee and the Alcohol & Drug Action Team will continue to:

- Ensure that systems are in place to identify pregnant women who have drug or alcohol related problems or pregnant women whose partners have such difficulties (even if the woman does not) and will ensure such pregnancies are managed and the family supported, as appropriate, before and after the birth in the light of up to date guidance regarding best practice.
- Consult and involve parents, children, foster carers and residential child care staff in planning policy and service developments.
- Maintain and develop the links between Drug and Alcohol Team Corporate Action Plans and the Integrated Children’s Service Plan.

## 4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF AGENCIES PROVIDING SERVICES FOR ADULTS WITH DRUG OR ALCOHOL RELATED PROBLEMS

### 4.1 GATHERING INFORMATION

Information about substance misusing parents and their children may come from a variety of different sources – from services focussed on the adult or on the child. These services include:

**Health Services** – Maternity and neonatology, family health nurse, health visitor, school nurses, general practitioners, A&E and paediatric hospital departments. Also those specialist services (e.g. psychiatry and learning disabilities) who are working with adults who have parental responsibilities.

**Substance Misuse Services** (both Health and Social Work) should ask if the service user has children, where and with whom they are living (see below).

**Police** – may be aware that children are living in the house of a substance misuser, and be able to pass this information on.

**Education** e.g. schools, early years organisations, nursery schools – may pick up signs of need from children, or information about parental substance misuse.

**Housing** – visits to family dwellings may point to substance misuse and its effects.

**Criminal Justice agencies** – relevant information from court cases; arrest referral and diversion schemes; supervising probation orders; planning prisoners' release; Throughcare and Aftercare.

**Child Care Services** – Observation of children.

**Antisocial Behaviour Officer** - Complaints to and interventions by the Antisocial Behaviour Officer often reveals substance misuse within families and community environments.

Other Social Work teams – e.g. Community Health teams, Older People's Services, etc.

### 4.2 EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONALS WHO WILL GATHER AND REPORT INFORMATION:-

- Substance misuse Service Staff (both Health and Social Work)
- Drug Squad Officers
- Other Police force staff e.g. those called to an incident involving a breach of the peace, or domestic violence
- General Practitioners
- Family Health Nurses
- Health Visitors



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- Maternity and neonatal staff
- Specialist A&E addictions nurses and other nursing staff
- Teachers / Early Years staff
- Housing support staff
  
- Child care staff in local authorities / voluntary agencies
- Volunteers involved in, for example, mediation or befriending
- Social workers in Community Health, Adult and Older People's Services.

**Note:** this is not exhaustive it should relate to all who are working with an adult with parental responsibilities.

### 4.3 EQUALITY

Action plans must reflect agencies' commitment to diversity and equality within the context of the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations [Amendment] Act 2000.

(N.B. The above checklist is not exhaustive and reference should be made to references in section 7 as well as Getting Our Priorities Right when preparing action plans.)

## 5 RESPONSIBILITIES OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES

- 5.1 The CPC and the ADAT will ensure that organisations providing services to children in the statutory and voluntary sectors have access to the CPC Inter-Agency Procedures & Guidelines, this framework and other relevant policy guidance. They will also ensure that child care and children's health services have access to advice, assessment and services for parents with drug or alcohol related problems.
- 5.2 Local Authority children's services should respond to all referrals where parental drug or alcohol related problems are an issue and priority should be given to those requiring family support services, as well as those indicating child protection intervention. Appropriate action may involve referral to other services. Liaison should be maintained with the referring service, which should be included in ongoing care planning and reviews, as appropriate. Local Authorities must address the resource implications of this.
- 5.3 All children's services should develop protocols regarding responding when agencies providing services for adults with drug or alcohol related problems make contact seeking information about specific children.
- 5.4 The implications of 'Getting Our Priorities Right' for practice and service development in the statutory and voluntary sectors must be addressed in the Integrated Children's Service Plans and ADAT Corporate Action Plans.
- 5.5 Implications of relapse need to be considered in each particular circumstance. Managers of Children's Services, with support from the CPC and ADAT, should ensure that staff have access to training related to substance misuse issues.

## 6 DEFINITIONS AND EXPLANATORY NOTES

### 6.1 FRAMEWORK - THIS DOCUMENT

- Action plan - Written document, produced by any relevant agency, which details how the recommendations in the framework will be implemented for that agency (to be distinguished from a Child's Care Plan).
- Child - For the purposes of support for children in need and their families under Part II of The Children [Scotland] Act 1995, 'child' means a person under the age of 18 years.
- Family - 'Family', in relation to a child, includes any person who has parental responsibilities for a child and any other person with whom the child is living or has significant contact.
- Drug or alcohol related problems - This phrase covers alcohol, illicit drugs, prescribed drugs, over the counter drugs and volatile substances (solvents).
- Parental drug or alcohol related problems - The critical issue in considering the potential impact on a child is not the adults' use of drugs or alcohol per se, but whether that use causes any form of actual or potential harm to a child. Such difficulties include any short term physical risks or any lack of appropriate physical or emotional nurturing which can be attributed to the use of alcohol, drugs or solvents by anyone responsible for the child's immediate care or
- longer term welfare. With regard to pregnancy, potential risks include harm to the unborn child, difficulties at or following birth or potential problems relating to the appropriate care of the newborn child.
- It's Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright. Recommendation 12 states:

**“There needs to be a new approach to tackling risks and the needs of the most vulnerable. As a first step this should start with an assessment of the needs of all newborn babies born to drug or alcohol misusing parents-----“.**

## 7 SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION AND LINKS

- 7.1 Getting Our Priorities Right is available on:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/gopr-00.asp](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/gopr-00.asp)
- 7.2 Its Everyone's Job to Make Sure I'm Alright- Report of the Child Protection Audit and Review is available on:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/iaar.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/iaar.pdf)
- 7.3 Western Isles Child Protection Committee website  
[www.cne-siar.gov.uk/childProtectionCommittee](http://www.cne-siar.gov.uk/childProtectionCommittee)
- 7.4 ADAT  
[http://www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/promotions/Documents/Multiagency/ADAT%20Corporate%20Action%20Plan%202007\\_08.pdf](http://www.wihb.scot.nhs.uk/promotions/Documents/Multiagency/ADAT%20Corporate%20Action%20Plan%202007_08.pdf)
- 7.5 Children's Charter:  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19082/34410](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/04/19082/34410)
- 7.6 Framework for Standards  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19102/34603](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/03/19102/34603)
- 7.7 Getting It Right For Every Child Scottish Executive 2005  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/background](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Young-People/childrenservices/background)
- 7.8 Hidden Harm Responding to the needs of children of problem drug users. Report of an Inquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) 2003  
[www.drugs.gov.uk/publication-search/acmd/hidden-harm](http://www.drugs.gov.uk/publication-search/acmd/hidden-harm)
- 7.9 Scottish Executive response to the Report of the Inquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/10/20120/45470](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2004/10/20120/45470)
- 7.9 Hidden Harm –Next Steps Scottish Executive 2006  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/05/05144237/0](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/05/05144237/0)
- 7.10 Safe and Well –a handbook for staff, schools and education authorities Scottish Executive 2005  
[www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/0191408/14093](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2005/08/0191408/14093)