



The impact of substance abuse on kids

There is good evidence that parental substance misuse is highly disruptive to family functioning. Most investigations have concluded that children of substance abuse either being alcohol or illicit drugs of any kind are at elevated risk for negative outcomes with specific concerns.

Parental substance abuse interrupts a child's normal development, which places these youngsters at higher risk for emotional, physical and mental health problems. Because parents who abuse alcohol or other drugs are more likely to be involved with domestic violence, divorce, unemployment, mental illness and legal problems, their ability to parent effectively is severely compromised.

Anecdotal evidence from service providers suggests that children raised in families characterised by illicit drug use can often display a range of dysfunctional child behaviours such as:

- Fear of abandonment, separation and insecurity
- Depression and anxiety
- Fear of losing their carer
- Fear of being left alone
- Self-blame for their parent's departure
- Collecting food and hoarding it; overeating
- Intense fear of sirens and the police
- Inappropriate sexualised behaviour
- Sleeping difficulties
- Aggression
- Diminished ability to concentrate
- Nihilistic or fatalistic orientations toward the future
- Poor attachment behaviour
- A tendency to choose risky behaviour, including the use of alcohol or other drugs later in life
- High rates of child behaviour problems

It has also been suggested that many children exposed to a drug-using lifestyle are misdiagnosed with ADHD when they are actually suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

Parental substance misuse is also connected to child maltreatment. The risk of child abuse and neglect is substantially higher in families with drug-abusing parents.

Consult your family doctor or a mental health professional — getting help early on can help to get back on track and develop more effective coping skills, often preventing further problems.

Bibliography

<http://www.phoenixhouse.org/index.html>

(Johnson & Left, 1999; West & Prinz, 1987).

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