

Parenting Positively

Coping with A Parent's Problem Drug or Alcohol Use

For children

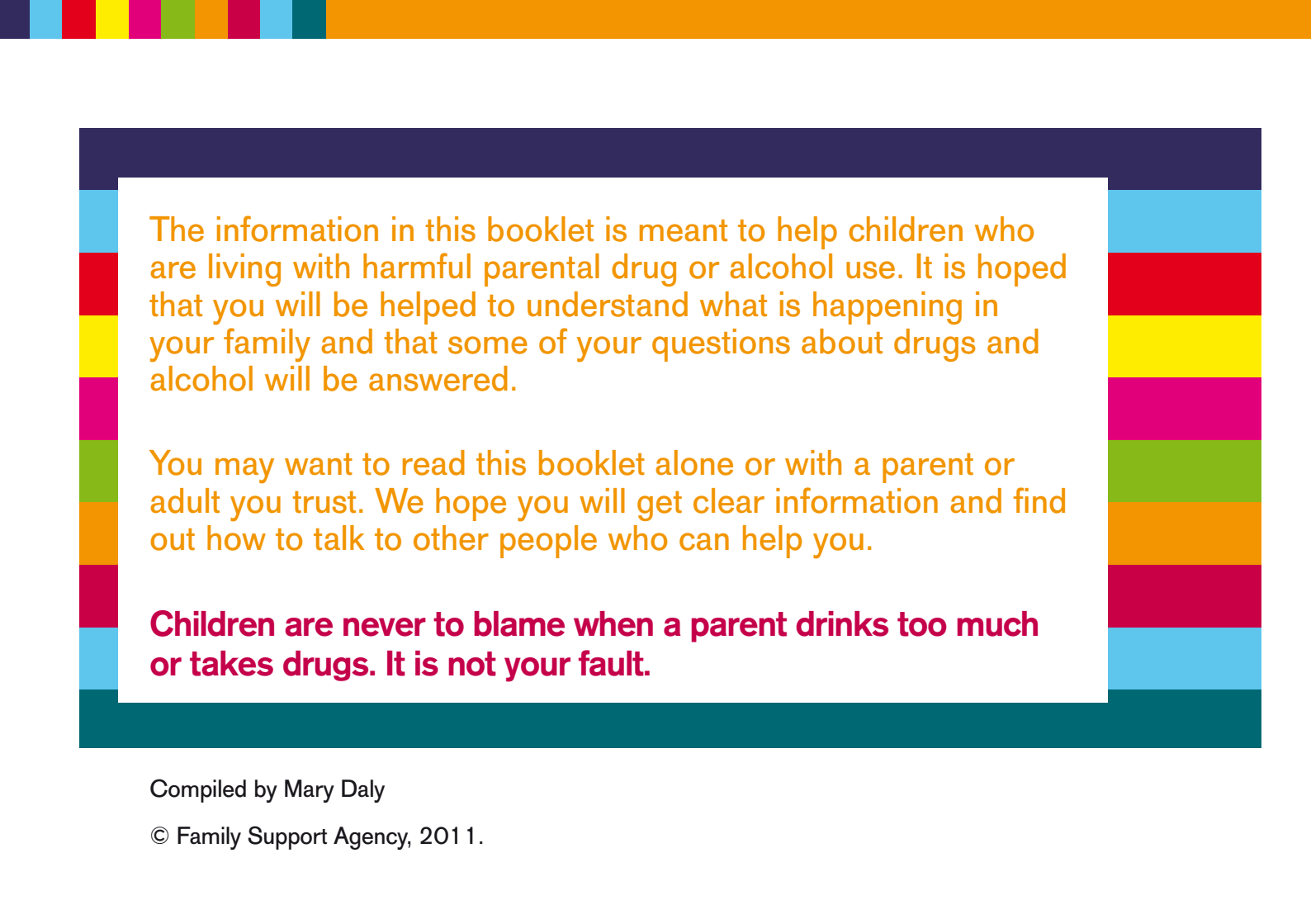
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Family Support Agency



Barnardos



The information in this booklet is meant to help children who are living with harmful parental drug or alcohol use. It is hoped that you will be helped to understand what is happening in your family and that some of your questions about drugs and alcohol will be answered.

You may want to read this booklet alone or with a parent or adult you trust. We hope you will get clear information and find out how to talk to other people who can help you.

Children are never to blame when a parent drinks too much or takes drugs. It is not your fault.

Compiled by Mary Daly

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Children's rights

Children have the right to be kept safe and to have their parents look after them. This is a job that most parents do very well. All children have the right:

- To be safe and cared for, and protected from violence, abuse and neglect.
- To live in their family home with their parents unless it is not in their interests to do so.
- To be listened to and given a say in how they feel about things that affect them.
- To be treated with dignity and respect.



I have so many questions



What do we mean by drug and alcohol problems?

When we talk about drug or alcohol problems (also sometimes called substance abuse or misuse), we mean when someone uses drugs and alcohol even when it is causing harm to themselves or those around them. The people around them who can be harmed are usually family and friends.

It is never your fault when someone has problems with alcohol or drugs.

What are drugs?

A drug is a chemical which we take into our bodies and it can change how we think, feel and behave. In the same way there are lots of different types of vegetables or cars, there are lots of different types of drugs.

Some drugs are there to help people when they are sick or not feeling well. These drugs are called medicines or prescription drugs. Medicines are usually taken on a doctor's advice. They can be bought in a chemists and help people to get better. When taken properly, medicines are not harmful.

What is alcohol?

Alcohol is a drug. It looks like a drink and is legal for adults to use in Ireland. Beer, wine and spirits are all alcoholic drinks.

What about other types of drugs?

There are other drugs that have unusual names such as marijuana, cocaine and heroin. People who use these drugs often have nicknames for them such as 'weed', 'pot' and 'coke'. These drugs can be swallowed, smoked or sometimes injected into the body using a needle.

I thought drugs are illegal?

Illegal means against the law.

Alcohol is not illegal for adults. In Ireland, alcohol is considered unsuitable for children. It is illegal to sell alcohol to anyone under 18. The government hopes that adults will drink sensibly and make good decisions about alcohol as drinking too much can cause a lot of problems.

When we talk about problem drug use, we usually mean when people are either misusing legal drugs (by taking too many or taking drugs that a doctor prescribed for someone else) or taking illegal drugs such as those mentioned earlier, marijuana, cocaine, heroin and others.

It is illegal for anyone to use these drugs as they will cause harm to the person taking them and also to the people around them. Children often worry if their parent is using illegal drugs that they

might go to prison. There is nothing you can do to stop your parent using drugs and it is not your responsibility to look after them.


It is the job of parents to look after children, not the other way around.

How do alcohol and drugs affect people?

When people use alcohol or drugs they may change and not behave the way they normally would. They can behave in a silly way or make bad decisions. They can say things which they would not usually say and hurt the feelings of those around them.

Sometimes using drugs or drinking too much alcohol can make people feel sleepy and look tired. They may not seem to notice what is happening around them. Other times people speak louder, even shouting and becoming angry.

People can behave differently when they take drugs or alcohol and it can make a child feel scared.



If a person has a problem with alcohol or drugs they can start to behave in a way that could be dangerous and could hurt or harm themselves or others around them.

● When a person drinks too much alcohol they are described as 'drunk'.

● When a person has taken drugs they are described as 'high'.

You cannot make someone drink too much alcohol or use drugs.
It is not your fault and you cannot make them stop.

Why does my Mum or Dad drink and why can't they stop?

Your Mum or Dad is not in control of their drinking.

When a person cannot control their drinking or drug use and continues to do it even though they have had enough or it is harming themselves or others, they may be addicted. When people become addicted they are not in control.

At times a person may not be 'addicted' but may have problems with alcohol such as drinking a lot at the weekends. When a parent drinks in this way it is sometimes called 'binge drinking'.

Addiction is like an illness as people need special help to get better.

Addiction means a person cannot control or stop the drug use or drinking. They feel they cannot give it up and may rely on it to get through the day or to manage difficult feelings. A person who drinks in this way is sometimes called an alcoholic.

Some people think that drinking lots of alcohol or taking drugs will make their problems go away but this does not work. Drinking and taking drugs does not solve problems.

Drinking too much or using drugs will not really help to manage bad feelings or problems. It will not make them go away.



Why can't my Mum or Dad see how bad things are?

Often the person who has problems with drugs or alcohol does not see things as they really are. They think that they need the drug or alcohol too much to imagine living without it.

If you are worried about someone you love drinking too much alcohol or taking drugs, it would be a good idea to talk to an adult you trust.

When a person is addicted they need to get special help from a doctor or a special person who is called an Addiction Counsellor.



Remember we cannot make someone else change. We can only change how we behave and manage our own feelings.

You are not alone.

Harmful drug and alcohol use is a big problem in lots of families and there are lots of children living in this situation. It is hard living with this in your family.

Children may not like to talk about their family in public because they might feel embarrassed or worried.

Sometimes children are afraid to talk as they may have been told not to talk to anyone about what happens in their family. So sometimes no one outside the family knows about it. This is sad because nothing is going to change if the family doesn't ask for help.

It is always a good thing to talk to an adult you trust.

If you have a parent who does not have a problem with alcohol or drugs, you need to talk to them about how you feel. It may be hard to talk at first but they won't know how you feel if you don't tell them. If you can't talk to a parent try to talk with someone else in your family like your granny or grandad or think of another adult who you feel you can trust.



This is Jack. He is 9 years old.

Jack's Dad drinks too much. When this happens he can get angry and do things that Jack does not like.

He might shout at Jack or his Mum or even at someone who calls to the house.

When Dad is drinking there can be bad fights at home. Sometimes he falls over and breaks things. Jack does not know what mood his Dad will be in when he is drinking.

The next day Jack's Dad does not seem to remember what has happened. He is kind and promises to go to play football with Jack.

Jack wants him to stop drinking.

This is Amy. She is 11 years old.

Amy's Mum takes drugs. When Mum is taking drugs she does not look after Amy or her brother properly.

She falls asleep when she should be awake. She forgets to buy food for the dinner and even forgets to cook meals.

Amy has to mind her brother a lot and she misses a lot of school. When Amy is in school she worries that everything may not be alright at home.

Sometimes her Mum has friends over and they all take drugs. Amy doesn't like it and is worried something bad will happen.



Jack and Amy are not feeling happy about what is happening in their families.

How might this make me feel?

- Sometimes you might feel **angry** and just wish your parent would stop drinking or taking drugs.
- You may feel **confused** when one day Mum or Dad is kind and loving and the next day they are angry.
- Other times you may feel **scared** that something bad might happen.
- Or you may feel **sad and lonely**, as no one seems to have time for you.
- You may also feel **embarrassed** in front of your friends by how your Mum or Dad behaves.

Angry



Confused



Scared



Sad and lonely



Embarrassed



All feelings are ok. There is no right or wrong feeling. It is a good idea to talk to someone about how you are feeling.

What can help me feel better?

You may love your Mum and Dad but feel confused by how mixed up your feelings are about them. It is good to get your feelings out.

If you are feeling upset by your Mum or Dad taking drugs or drinking too much, try to talk to someone who can help such as your other parent, a grandparent, a family member, a teacher or a family friend.

Sometimes it helps to go somewhere quiet where you can have time away from what is happening. This could be the garden or a room in the house or even a walk near home. You may like to listen to music or read a book in a calm place. Sometimes it helps to write down how you feel.

It is also important to keep doing things that you enjoy and join in hobbies and sports with your friends. This will help keep you feeling happy and well.



What about school?

Remember that school is a really important place and all children need to go to school. It is a place where you can learn about things, have fun and make friends. It will help you to cope and give you time for yourself outside your family.

If you are worried or confused about your Mum or Dad while you are in school it can affect your schoolwork and you may not be able to concentrate. This could even mean you get in trouble for something that is not your fault.

Sometimes you may feel like you are being treated differently by some other children, maybe they won't play with you or say mean things about your Mum or Dad. This is bullying and it is hurtful. There is a booklet in this series on Coping with Bullying that may be helpful to you.

If you are worried or upset in school you need to talk to a teacher you trust or a close adult who will understand and help you.

Keeping Safe

If there is fighting at home it can be very scary. If you have been hurt, it is important to get help. You can do this by telling an adult you trust, such as a grandparent, an aunt or uncle, a teacher or family friend.

It is never ok for a parent to harm a child.

Sometimes it is good to keep yourself safe by staying away from what is happening, especially if there is fighting or a lot of drink and drugs around the house.

If you do not feel safe or if there is fighting, try to go somewhere else such as a neighbour's house or the home of a family member.

Do not try to make the fighting stop as this is not your job. Try to find an adult who can help you. If you do not get help from the first adult you talk to, do not give up. It is important to find someone who will listen and give you the help you need.





I want this to stop. Who can help my mum or Dad to stop?

There are lots of ways that a person who drinks too much or takes drugs can get help.

The first step is when they make the decision to get help. No one can make the decision to get help for them or 'make' them change. It is not easy to stop something when you become 'addicted'. Usually it helps if the adult talks to the family doctor who can suggest how best to deal with the problem.

Parents don't always agree that they have a problem with drugs or alcohol or may take a long time to seek help or stop. It is good for you to have an adult to talk to about what life is like for you.

Is it really hard to get better when you are addicted to alcohol or drugs?

There are special people whose job it is to help. Usually there is more than one type of person involved. There could be a doctor, a nurse and a counsellor. A counsellor is a trained person who helps people by listening and talking to them.

There are places that people can go and live for a few weeks or even months to get treatment and support. Sometimes people get support by attending groups where people 'help' each other by talking. Sometimes family members go to groups where they can talk and get help too.

You can be in control of how you feel and who you talk to.

Always remember that the situation can change.

Remember

- **You are not responsible for your Mum or Dad taking drugs or drinking too much alcohol... You didn't cause it.**
- **It is your right to feel safe at home.**
- **Talk to someone who can help.**

Family Support Agency, St. Stephen's Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2
T: 01 611 4100 E: info@fsa.ie www.fsa.ie

Barnardos' Training and Resource Service, Christchurch Square, Dublin 8
T: 01 454 9699 E: resources@barnardos.ie or training@barnardos.ie www.barnardos.ie

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The Family Support Agency provides support to families through locally based Family Resource Centres, through supporting organisations providing Marriage, Relationship, Child and Bereavement Counselling Services and by directly providing Family Mediation through its 16 family mediation centres to couples going through a separation or divorce. It carries out research, provides information and advises the Minister on family related matters. The Family Support Agency was established as a statutory agency in 2003.

Barnardos supports children whose well-being is under threat, by working with them, their families and communities and by campaigning for the rights of children. Barnardos was established in Ireland in 1962 and is Ireland's leading independent children's charity.



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