

Strategy Document

Parental Alcohol and Substance Misuse and the Impact on the Child

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EAST RIDING SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN BOARD

STRATEGY

1 Introduction and Background

- 1.1 The East Riding Safeguarding Children Board takes seriously its statutory role to ensure that all member agencies co-operate to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in the East Riding of Yorkshire and to ensure that they are effective in doing so.
- 1.2 In 2003, the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (ACMD) published Hidden Harm: Responding to the Needs of Children of Problem Drug Users, which was the result of a three year UK-wide inquiry. This report included 48 recommendations to government, and the following six key messages:
- We estimate there are between 250,000 and 350,000 children of problem drug misusers in the UK – about one child for every problem drug misuser.
 - Parental problem drug misuse can, and does, cause serious harm to children at every age from conception to adulthood.
 - Reducing the harm to children from parental problem drug misuse should become a main objective of policy and practice.
 - Effective treatment of the parent can have major benefits for the child.
 - By working together, services can take many practical steps to protect and improve the health and well-being of affected children.
 - The number of affected children is likely to decrease only when the number of problem drug users decreases.
- 1.3 More recently, the Children's Commissioner published a review in 2012 outlining the misuse of alcohol by parents and how this negatively affects the lives and harms the wellbeing of more children than does the misuse of illegal drugs. This review, Silent Voices: Supporting children and young people affected by parental alcohol misuse, by Adamson and Templeton, concluded that (in summary):
- Parental alcohol misuse is a sizeable problem, far greater than parental drug misuse, and one which permeates far into individual and family life. Alcohol's role in everyday life seems to be a barrier to identifying these children, to facilitating their engagement with services, and to offering them the support and intervention which they need.
 - Parental alcohol misuse impacts upon children in a very wide range of ways, yet is a problem which children and families can remain silent about for many years and which as a result means that children access or reach the attention of services much later and often in relation to other issues.
 - Not enough is known about the impact of parental alcohol misuse amongst specific groups of young people, including Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups, young carers, those growing up with foster carers, grandparents or other kin carers or in residential homes and those affected by bereavement, prison or homelessness.
 - There is a clear distinction by gender with girls far more likely to seek support (for example to call a helpline, use a website, tell a teacher/other adult, or access a local service) than boys.
 - We do not understand in detail how the level, frequency and severity of alcohol consumption and its consequences affect children, nor how natural recovery processes in some families may influence the experiences and needs of children.
 - Parental alcohol misuse is closely correlated with a wide range of issues, which can further influence how children may be affected. It is a problem which seems particularly correlated with violence, abuse and conflict.
 - There is increased recognition that many children are less affected by their experiences than might be expected, yet we do not fully understand the relationship between risk and protective factors, coping and resilience, or how these factors and processes

operate and change over time, now how they are understood by children as they grow up.

- There is a clear and important distinction to be made between 'coping' and 'resilience'. Coping or perhaps more accurately 'getting by' in the short term does not necessarily equate to resilience in the long term.
- Far greater attention has been placed on children who are at risk, and who are usually known to child and family social care services, and who are often seen as coming from particularly vulnerable, complex and chaotic families. This means that there are vast numbers of children who remain hidden and whose needs are unmet.
- The services which are available seem to demonstrate encouraging evidence, albeit mainly in the short-term, that a range of interventions and services can help and support children and families, leading to positive change in a range of individual and familial domains.

1.4 Risk of Significant Harm. The 'Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2011 to 2014' report published in May 2016 (Sidebotham et al) indicates that parental alcohol and drug misuse were both recorded as present in over a third of serious case reviews, with at least one of these in 47% of cases looked at during the review (175 SCRs).

1.5 Cumulative Harm The review also identified that drug and alcohol misuse often sits alongside a number of other factors in the parents' backgrounds which appear to interact with each other, creating cumulative levels of risk the more factors are present. These include: domestic abuse; parental mental health problems; their own adverse childhood experiences; a history of criminality, particularly violent crime; patterns of multiple, consecutive partners; acrimonious separation.

1.6 Neglect of children's needs through continued emotional or physical unavailability of a parent is a major cause of the harms connected with parental substance use. This can cause significant harm to children at all stages of development but the long-term impact may not be immediately apparent, The Future in Mind report (DoH 2015) recognises the impact hidden harm causes. These vulnerable children, young people and their families may find it particularly difficult to access appropriate services, or services may not be configured to meet their psychosocial needs. In addition, they sometimes find it more difficult to access services they may find alienating and may have a lifestyle that is not conducive to meeting regular appointments.

1.7 An assessment is therefore required in order to determine the extent of need and the level of risk of harm for each child within the family. Children and young people can best be safeguarded by all the agencies working with parents, carers and children working together to determine the needs of the whole family. By working together, focussing on what life is like for the child/ren in the house and putting the family at the centre of their shared work, the risks can be reduced and the family supported to make choices and take control of their lives individually and as a family.

2 Strategic Aim

2.1 The aim of this document is to ensure all children and young people in the East Riding live in a safe environment which promotes their health, wellbeing and development. In order to achieve this, it is crucial for all services to be fully aware, and take ownership of their responsibilities to consider the needs of children and young people. Agencies and services should ensure all relevant staff are fully supported and equipped with the knowledge and skills to enable this to happen.

2.2 This strategy document should be read alongside the Hidden Harm Procedures and Guidance Document - Working with Substance Misusing Parents and those who come into Regular Contact with Children and Young People.

3. Why are we concerned about parental alcohol and substance misuse?

- 3.1 We know that many children and young people who live in households where their parents and carers are using alcohol and/or illicit substances suffer in silence, are not known to services and either do not know who to turn to for help or fear telling anyone about what goes on at home.
- 3.2 Parental substance misuse is characterised by the use of either illicit substances and/or alcohol to a degree where the physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural well-being and care-taking capacity of the parent is compromised. It can often have a deep and long-lasting impact on children and young people's lives which may not fully emerge until young adulthood and beyond. The potential impact includes:
- Harmful physical effects on unborn and new born babies such as Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS) or Foetal Alcohol Effects (FAE) as well as the increased risk of death by overlay.
 - Impaired patterns of parental care and routines which may lead to early behavioural and emotional problems in children
 - Higher risk of emotional and physical neglect or abuse
 - Lack of adequate supervision, inappropriate care givers, poverty and material deprivation
 - Repeated separation from parents/multiple care arrangements/episodes of substitute care including fostering and care homes
 - Children taking on inappropriate substitute caring roles and responsibilities for siblings and parents
 - Social isolation; disruption to schooling and school life
 - Early exposure to alcohol and drug misusing culture and associated illegal activities and lifestyles; and poor physical and mental health in adulthood.

4. Raising awareness of Hidden Harm

- 4.1 All professionals working with a child, including those working with adults where there is a child/ren in the family, should understand their responsibilities in order to achieve positive outcomes, keep children safe, and complement the support that other professionals may be providing (Lord Laming, The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report).
- 4.2 Protecting children from harm and promoting their welfare depends on a shared responsibility and effective joint working between different agencies.
- 4.3 The welfare of the child must be the first consideration for all adult services when working with substance misusing parents/carers. It is important that, where parents are receiving drug and alcohol treatment and support, the needs of their children are fully considered, in order for their welfare to be safeguarded.
- 4.4 Professionals working with adults should be appropriately trained to identify and assess the needs of, and the risk of harm to children and young people.
- 4.5 Parental alcohol/substance misuse is a consistent feature of serious case reviews. Learning and good practice must be shared, considered and relevant actions taken across all services that work with children, young people and families.

5. What do we want to achieve in the East Riding?

- 5.1 East Riding Safeguarding Children Board understands that getting the right people, working together at the right time, is key to safeguarding children from harm. This Strategy (and the associated Action Plan) will establish effective links with children's

services, adult services, relevant health services and adult treatment services. This will ensure that families are offered timely and coordinated support to prevent the need for children and young people to be looked after wherever possible.

- 5.2 A Hidden Harm Group has been established by the East Riding Safeguarding Children Board to develop and deliver the strategy and to monitor effectiveness of the strategy to ensure Hidden Harm remains a key consideration within the day to day delivery of all the above named services.
- 5.3 An Action Plan has been developed by the Hidden Harm Group and will be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis to provide assurance of continued progress against the identified actions.

Agreed by East Riding Safeguarding Children Board:

Review Date: December 2020