

CHAPTER 5
SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AS PARENTS

AT THE INTERSECTION OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND SUBSTANCE USE
A Toolkit for Hope, Healing, and Advocacy for Family Justice Centers

INTRODUCTION

The *At the Intersection of Domestic Violence and Substance Use: A Toolkit for Hope, Healing and Advocacy for Family Justice Centers*, is one of a series of resources developed to support the provision of more holistic, hope-centered, and trauma-informed substance use advocacy and services in Family Justice Centers.

PURPOSE

- 1 This toolkit serves as an accompaniment to *At the Intersection of Domestic Violence and Substance Use: Hope, Healing and Advocacy for Family Justice Centers*, [an 8-part Virtual Learning Series located on the Alliance's HOPEHub training platform](#).
- 2 The Virtual Learning Series explores the role of substance use in the lives of survivors, and offers a framework and resources for advocates and others working with and nurturing hope in FJC clients who experience substance use as part of the trauma or victimization they face from an abusive partner.
- 3 This toolkit offers a comprehensive array of resources, guidance, examples, and tips to enhance the implementation of the lessons offered through the Learning Series.

RESPONDING TO THE NEED

Many survivors of domestic and sexual violence are exposed to substance use, either through their own use, the use of a partner or ex-partner, or both. So often substance use by a survivor is directly related to trauma they have experienced as a result of victimization. Historically, Family Justice Centers have generally not included substance use services onsite, much less included substance use services with an understanding of victimization.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Justice Office on Violence Against Women (OVW) recognized the challenges many advocates within Family Justice Centers and similar co-located service centers faced in providing services and advocacy to survivors experiencing substance use and substance use coercion. In response, OVW created the Substance Use and Family Justice Center Pilot Project with the goals of:

1. Increasing the capacity of Family Justice Centers to serve clients who experience substance use, substance use disorders, and substance use coercion.
2. Building relationships between substance use disorder treatment providers and FJC staff.
3. Increasing awareness, knowledge, and collaboration in an effort to create a more trauma-informed, hope-centered, and robust response to address the complex needs of survivors dealing with substance use-related needs.

PROJECT PARTNERS

The Substance Use and Family Justice Center Pilot Project is a collaboration between [Alliance for HOPE International](#) (Alliance) and the [National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health](#) (NCDVTMH), working in partnership with:

[Strength United Family Justice Center in Van Nuys, CA](#)

[Crystal Judson Family Justice Center in Tacoma, WA](#)

[Essex County Family Justice Center in Newark, NJ](#)

Our partners at the Crystal Judson Family Justice Center, the Essex County Family Justice Center, and the Strength United Family Justice Center have provided vital insight and ongoing guidance in all aspects of this project, including the development of this toolkit.

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SUPPORTING SURVIVORS AS PARENTS

CLICK TO ACCESS THE VIRTUAL LEARNING SERIES [LESSON 7](#)

PARENTAL SUBSTANCE USE: PREVALENCE AND POTENTIAL CONCERNS

- Prevalence: 1 in 8 children (or roughly 8.7 million) live with at least one parent who has a diagnosable substance use disorder (Lipari & Van Horn, 2017)
- Parental substance use or substance use disorder does not automatically mean that a child's safety and wellbeing are at risk (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021)
- It can be difficult to separate the impacts of parental substance use on children from other common concerns, including domestic violence, poverty, trauma, social isolation, and housing instability
- Parental substance use does increase the likelihood of child welfare involvement, out-of-home placements for children, and increase barriers to reunification (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2021), all of which can be deliberately used by an abusive partner to threaten, control, and entrap a survivor as well as jeopardize their connection with their children (Phillips et al., 2020)

SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CHILDREN IMPACTED BY SUBSTANCE USE

- People who are pregnant and/or parenting and use substances face increased stigma, shame, and barriers to desired resources
- Eradicating stigma, judgement, and shame are essential to supporting pregnant or parenting survivors and their children
- Offer services and resources that support safety planning around substance use, social connectedness, parent-child bonding, and access to desired resources
- Promote protective factors and focus on family strengths

EVIDENCE-SUPPORTED CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS

Parents often experience increased barriers to accessing desired services and resources. It is always important to help people address any barriers they may experience. Common barriers include transportation, childcare, food insecurity, and stigma, which is especially intense for people who are pregnant or parenting.

Here's a selection of evidence-supported and promising clinical interventions specifically for supporting parents who use substances and their children.

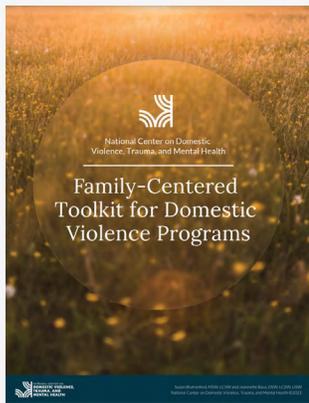
- [Mindfulness Based Parenting Intervention](#)
- [Celebrating Families!](#) (English version)
- [¡Celebrando Familias!](#) (Latin American and Spanish language version)
- [Wellbriety and Celebrating Families!](#) Partnership (Native American version)
- [Mothering from the Inside Out](#)

TIP SHEETS

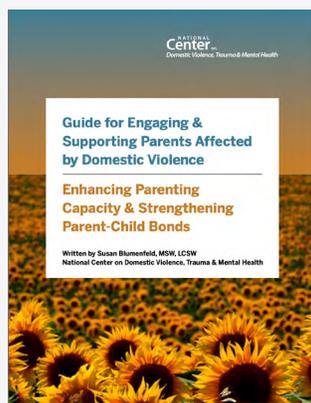
- [Advocating at the Intersections of Substance Use Coercion and Child Protective Services](#)
- [Supporting Parents and Caregivers Who Use Substances](#)
- [Promoting Protective Factors](#)

CLICK BELOW TO ACCESS THE RESOURCES

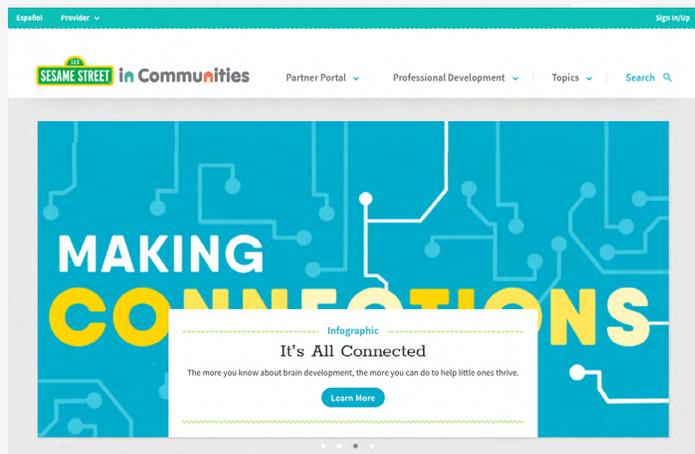
NCDVTMH'S FAMILY-CENTERED TOOLKIT FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE PROGRAMS



NCDVTMH'S GUIDE FOR ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING PARENTS AFFECTED BY DOMESTIC VIOLENCE



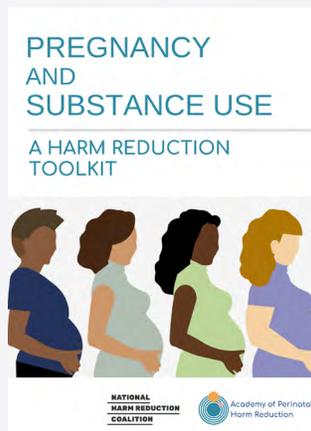
SESAME STREET IN COMMUNITIES HAS VARIOUS HELPFUL TOPICS



ACADEMY OF PERINATAL HARM REDUCTION (APHR)



APHR'S PREGNANCY AND SUBSTANCE USE TOOLKIT



Parental Addiction

When a family member struggles with addiction, the whole family struggles. Children often think it's their fault; they feel shame, embarrassment, guilt, and loneliness, they may feel invisible. It takes special effort to start important conversations and answer children's questions. But parents, teachers, caregivers, and other caring adults can comfort children and guide them through difficult moments. With love and support, the family can cope with the challenges of addiction together.



Exploring Emotions

Feelings come in all shapes and sizes. When you help children express and understand their emotions, you're helping them to overcome challenges, understand others, and communicate. In simple everyday ways, you can give them important tools that will help them handle big feelings, little ones, and every feeling in between.



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR CHILDREN OF ADDICTION



NACA'S START WITH THE HEART PAMPHLET



Family Bonding

Families come in all shapes and sizes, and each is unique in its own way. But one thing all families have in common is love. Everyone benefits from spending quality time with family. With little ones, that usually involves plenty of silly play! Here are resources and activities with simple, everyday ways to live, love, learn, laugh, and create lasting memories together.



Traumatic Experiences

When a child endures a traumatic experience, the whole family feels the impact. But adults hold the power to help lessen its effects. Several factors can change the course of kids' lives: feeling seen and heard by a caring adult, being patiently taught coping strategies and resilience-building techniques, and being with adults who know about the effects of such experiences. Here are ways to bring these factors to life.



ADVOCATING AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF SUBSTANCE USE COERCION AND CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

What are the intersections between substance use coercion and child protective services (CPS)?

It is a common tactic of substance use coercion to either threaten CPS involvement or engage CPS systems in attempts to harm, threaten, and control survivors and their children. At the same time, studies suggest that the simple presence of DV or substance use can increase CPS findings of child abuse or neglect even when all other case facts remain the same; this risk was largest when both DV and substance use were present (Victor et al., 2018; Freisthler et al., 2017).

How can advocates support survivors and their families at these intersections?

- **Raised awareness** and recognition of the many tactics of substance use coercion
- **Safety** for people to be able to talk about DV, substance use, and substance use coercion and access desired resources without fear of punishment, retribution, or having their families separated
- **Resources** that address self-defined needs, especially those that support safety and economic stability (including housing, transportation, childcare, and more)
- **Expanding** the focus from a survivor's substance use to also consider:
 - o The abuse and danger they may be facing from an unsafe partner or ex-partner, including tactics of substance use coercion
 - o How they are striving to protect and care for their children
 - o Child safety; drug test results do not indicate whether or not a child is safe
 - o The potential for any identified concerns to resolve with the appropriate support and resources that aid in safety and stability
 - o A survivor's self-defined needs and preferences, as well as their access to desired resources that help address those needs
- **A critical review** of how stigma associated with DV and substance use may impact staff perceptions, influence staff decisions, and potentially shape programmatic policies and procedures



SUPPORTING PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS WHO USE SUBSTANCES

- Cultivate safe and nonjudgmental relationships with parents/caregivers and their children
- Focus on family and parenting strengths
- Respect the person's role as a parent or caregiver
- Support parent/caregiver-child bonding
- Support parents/caregivers to safety plan around their substance use to minimize the risk of it interfering with safe parenting
 - o These are some areas that can be helpful to discuss with parents/caregivers to strategize around safety while remaining survivor-led:
 - What are the potential risks to child safety, from the viewpoint of the parent/caregiver?
 - How are they protecting and caring for their children? Would it be helpful to talk about additional strategies?
 - How can we build on existing family strengths and protective factors?
 - What kinds of resources and support would be helpful?
 - The drug, set, and setting framework is a relevant tool for safety planning in this situation ([see the Drug, Set, and Setting tip sheet](#))
- Approach parents/caregivers with empathy, understanding that discussing substance use may raise feelings of fear, guilt, or other challenging feelings, and responding with affirming emotional support
- Strengthen social support networks
- Actively connect with desired resources, including children's resources
- Advocate for timely access to desired resources that are culturally resonant, trauma-informed, DV/SA-informed, gender responsive, and family-based
- Cultivate access to peer-based support resources
- When parents are ready to talk about their substance use with their children, help them share information that is simple, fact-based, and age-appropriate
- Promote protective factors



PROMOTING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Protective factors help mitigate risks that families face and are associated with improved well-being. This list of protective factors comes from a literature review commissioned by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth, and Families (Development Services Group Inc. & Child Welfare

Information Gateway, 2015). Advocates, counselors, and leadership can consult this list (as well as the tip sheet on Recovery Capital) to identify which of these factors are actively supported through currently offered services and resources, as well as to address any potential gaps in desired services and resources.



Individual

- Sense of purpose
- Sense of hope
- Self-regulation skills
- Relational skills
- Problem-solving skills
- Involvement in positive activities

Relational

- Parenting competencies
- Positive peers
- Caring adults

Community

- Positive community environment
- Positive school environment
- Economic opportunities



HOPE

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