




  Project supported by the PHA



Supporting Family Members Affected by Substance Use



  **Housekeeping**


- Breaks
- Microphones
- Internet connections
- Confidentiality
- Questions/comments





  **Course Objectives: Day One**

By the end of today, you will be able to:

- Understand the reasons why people might use substances, and what addiction is
- Identify ways that families are impacted by substance use
- Identify the various ways that family members cope with substance use



  **Introduction: Substance Use and Addiction**

Why do people use substances, what is addiction, and how does it develop?

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Why do people use substances?
Think of some reasons why people might use alcohol or other drugs.

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Relieving tension/anxiety/form of escapism

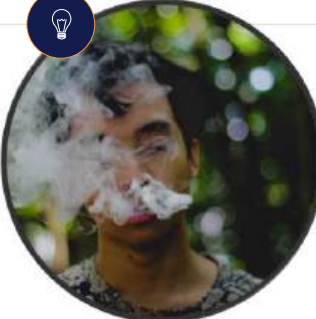



Boredom
Dependency
Availability

Rituals
Rebellion
Self-medication

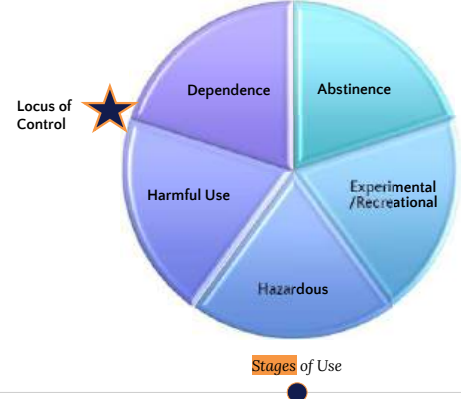
Social norms and/or peer pressure

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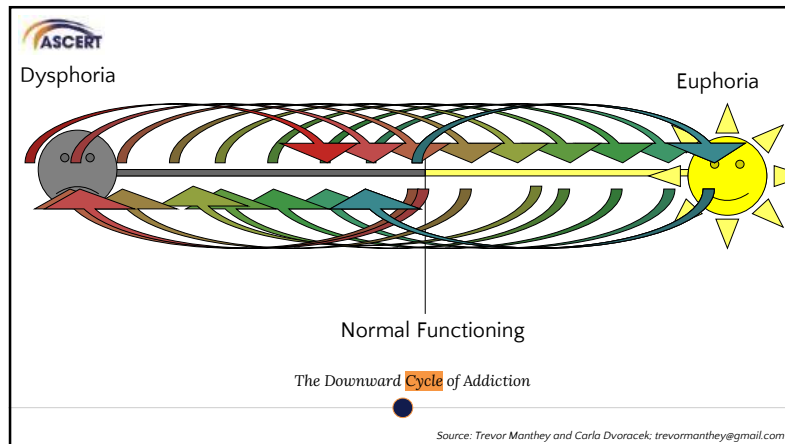
How much is too much?
In small groups, come up with definitions for "problematic use" and "dependent use", and identify signs of both.

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Locus of Control

Stages of Use



Five Common Factors of Addiction



- **Loss of control** over the use of the substance
- **Preoccupation** with the substance
- A **compulsion** to look for something outside of the self for safety, security, and self-esteem
- **Withdrawal**
- A tendency to continue the behaviour despite **adverse consequences**



Addiction and the Brain

Addiction: Final Notes

- Most people experiencing addiction who come for help have other psychiatric difficulties as well
- Chronic relapse is the reality for many people
- Different therapies appear to produce similar treatment outcomes and the more individualised/broad-based the treatment, the better the outcome
- Epiphanies are hard to manufacture
- Change takes time


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Impact of Substance Use on Family Members: Introduction

2

What is the language of this issue, and what is the scope of the problem?

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Exploring Attitudes

In groups, take a look at the five brief scenarios presented to you. Who would you be the most concerned about and why?

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Let's Be Clear With the Words We Use

- Family
 - Group of people with a strong emotional connection, whether they live together or not
- Drug
 - Chemical that causes a change/changes in the way the human body works (mentally, physically, or emotionally)
- Addiction
 - When someone continues doing something (e.g. drinking/using drugs) despite harm (e.g. physical health, mental health, relationships)

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Let's Be Clear With the Words We Use: "Co-Dependency"

- Idea that says that individuals (usually partners) become "addicted" to the relationship/negative consequences associated with addiction; "loving too much" (Peterson & McBride, 2002; Anderson, 1994)
- Counterpoint: No such thing as "co-dependency"; family members are merely responding to the stressful situation they find themselves in (Orford et al., 2010a)




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Let's Be Clear With the Words We Use: "Enabling"

- When someone knowingly or unknowingly supports another's problem substance use
 - Soften the impact
 - Reduce the pain
 - Allow the person to avoid consequences of his/her own behaviour
- Does this pathologise care?
- "An abnormal reaction to an abnormal situation is normal"

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The Scope of the Problem: Problem Drug Use in the UK



- At least 1.5 million adults significantly affected by a relative's drug use
 - 575k spouses, 610k parents, 250k other (e.g. grandparents, siblings)
- Estimated impact of problem drug use on the family in the UK: £1.8 billion/year
 - £9,741 per affected family member/carer*

Source: "Supporting the Supporters: Families of Drug Misusers", UK Drug Policy Commission

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The Scope of the Problem: Problem Parental Substance Use

- Estimated 40,000 young people in NI are living with problem parental alcohol use (PPAU)
- 40% of children on the Child Protection Register and 70% of Looked After Children are there as a direct result of PPAU
- In 2023/24, 12% of drug misuse clients* on the NI Substance Misuse Database said they lived with dependent children




Sources: Hidden Harm Action Plan, Public Health Agency (2010); Department of Health (2025)


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Impact of Substance Use on Family Members: The Experience


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What is it like living with substance use in the family?

 **The Impact of Substance Use on Families**





- All domains of life can be severely affected
- Family members can suffer extreme stress socially, financially, and in regards to health/safety
- Strong correlations with mental health problems, violence/abuse, neglect, and social exclusion
 - All of these increase a family's risk of harm
- Attempting to cope often creates difficult dilemmas, and there is often little guidance on what to do

 **The Impact of Substance Use on Families**




- Family members are usually very isolated due to stigma/fear and/or lack of resources available
 - Professionals who might help are often badly informed at best, or critical at worst
 - Social support is needed but tends to fail
- Many family members believe things will get better only if the substance misuse stops
- Family involvement in treatment can improve outcomes but they have needs in their own right


 **The Impact of Substance Use on Families**



- Family members living with someone's addiction can show:
 - A higher risk of physical and psychological problems
 - Poorly-defined problems (e.g. frequent trips to the doctor)
 - More use of mental health services
 - Isolation
 - Chronic low self-esteem

 **The Impact of Substance Use on Families: Children**


- Children can be particularly affected
 - Familial (usually parental) problem substance use is one of the most common characteristics of social workers' case loads
- Hidden harm
 - Serious negative consequences on children due to living with parents/carers who use drugs/alcohol problematically (including OTC and prescribed medication)
 - 1 in 11 children in NI is affected by problem parental alcohol use



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The Impact of Substance Misuse on Families: Parenting Capacity

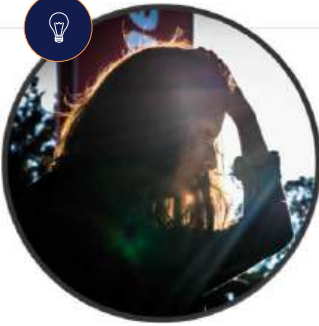
- Impact of problem parental substance use on children/young people may not be directly correlated to amount or frequency of the substance use
- Knowing about the amount of substances used can help us understand the impact on the parent as an individual
 - Shouldn't be taken as an indicator of harm without assessing parenting skills



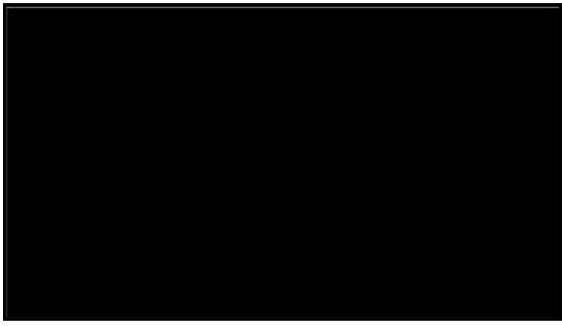
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What is the experience of hidden harm?

Listen to Laura's Story and pay attention to how she describes her experience of living in a household with problem parental alcohol use.



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Laura's Story


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What did you hear Laura say?



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Hidden Harm: Laura's Story



- Ruined 5th/6th birthday party
- Does housework most of the time
- Relationship breakdown
- Difficulty with food/eating
- Happy in school but doesn't want teachers to know about the situation – "it's embarrassing"
- Missing school
- Money issues
- Self-harm

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Rules of Shame

<p>Don't Feel</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't get angry ○ Don't get depressed ○ Don't be afraid 	<p>Don't Talk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't tell other people about family problems ○ Don't talk about problems with other family members 	<p>Don't Trust</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Don't trust anybody outside the family ○ Don't trust the police ○ Don't trust the person with the addiction or your own perceptions
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Risk Factors Associated With Worsened Outcomes: General


- High levels of family disharmony
- Domestic violence
- Abuse (physical, sexual, emotional)
- Inconsistent, ambivalent, or neglectful parenting



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Risk Factors Associated With Worsened Outcomes: General


- Absence of a stable adult figure
- Parental loss
- Material deprivation/neglect
- Family not seeking help



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Risk Factors Associated With Worsened Outcomes: Substance-Specific


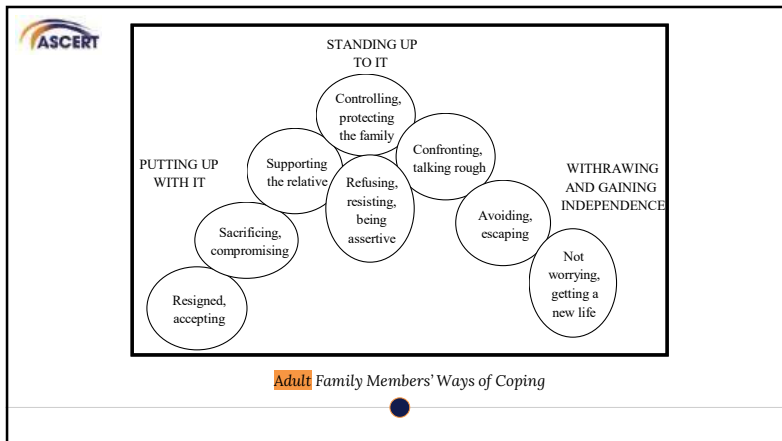
- Both parents using substances problematically
- Substance use taking place in the home
 - Child being present during use
 - Child witnessing use/paraphernalia
- Severity of problem substance use
- Exposure to/awareness of criminal activity (e.g. drug dealing)



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How Do Family Members Tend to Cope/Respond?

- Adults tend to cope in 3 ways – is it different for young people?
 - Tolerant
 - Engaged
 - Withdrawn
- “Coping may not mean the same as being resilient. It may just mean doing what you need to do to get by.”
 - Silent Voices Report, 2012

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Fearfulness/Self Protection	Confrontation/Self Destruction
Fearful Inaction Terrified	Discord Rows arguments
Protective Action Hide money, took special care of own possessions	Emotional Attack Tried to show him up make jealous
Fear of the Future Afraid for the family	Action against self Gets drunk, makes self sick, hurts self
Unemotional or Indifferent to Pain Stoicism, put on a brave face, pretend all is well	Detachment/Internalising/ Help Seeking
Involvement	Avoidance Refused to talk, stayed in the bedroom
Anti Drink Pours down sink	Switched off Built shell around self, day dreamed
Indulgence Gave him drink, make comfortable	Help seeking Sought help from neighbour relative
Self Blame Felt guilty, blames self	

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How Family Members Cope


In groups, look at some of the aforementioned ways that adult and child family members cope with problem substance use in the family. Try to think of some perceived advantages and disadvantages for each style of coping.

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Course Objectives: Day Two

By the end of today, you will be able to:

- Understand what needs to be considered when working with families impacted by substance use
- Identify strategies to help affected families
- Understand the importance of individual and family resilience
- Identify local services available



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Supporting Family Members Affected by Substance Use: Introduction

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What might we need to consider when supporting families affected by substance use, and how can we actually do this?

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Barriers to Engagement



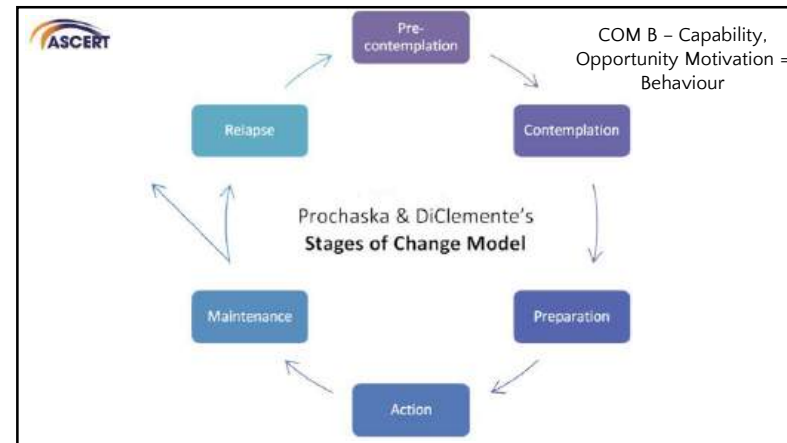
- Families becoming insular
- Viewing substance use as a coping mechanism
- Development of problematic types of attachment
- Dependence on substances
- Defensive barriers to protect the family from stigma/social exclusion
 - Can keep professionals away

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What is the Best Way to Help the Family?



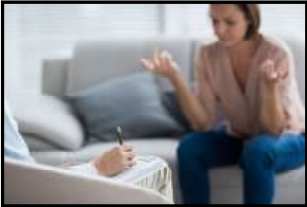
- Evidence-based treatment: what does this mean to you?
- Effective treatment for the individual
- NICE guidelines for supporting family members
- Resilience building



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Helping the Family – Treatment for the Individual

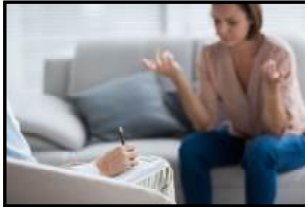
- Research suggests no one treatment approach is the answer
 - Screening and brief interventions for hazardous/harmful drinkers
 - Motivational Interviewing
 - 12 Step
 - Social, Behaviour Network Therapy
- What they all have in common: therapeutic alliance

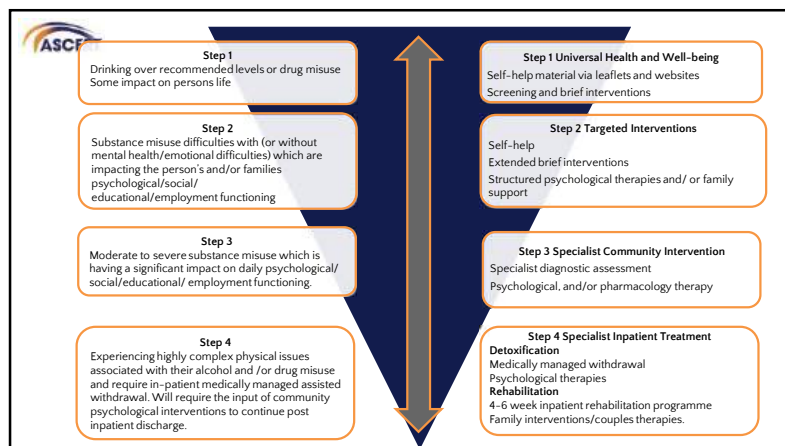


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Helping the Family – Treatment for the Individual

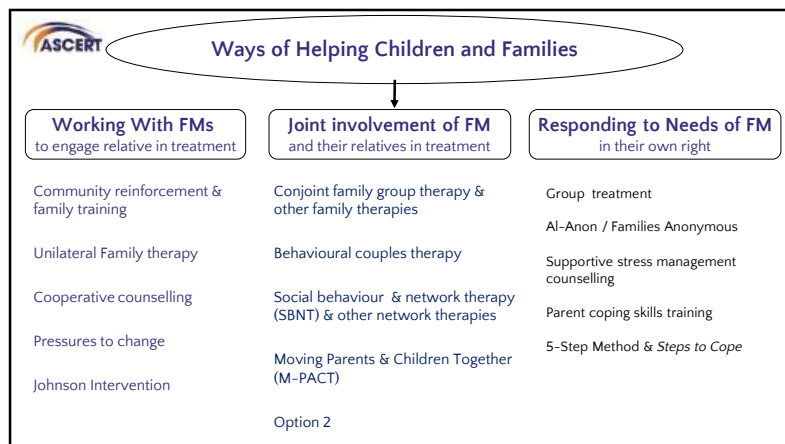
- Screening tools
 - AUDIT C
 - Full AUDIT
 - One question (maternity)
- Brief advice/interventions
 - Understanding units
 - Understanding risk levels and where they sit on the risk scale
 - Benefits of and tips for cutting down

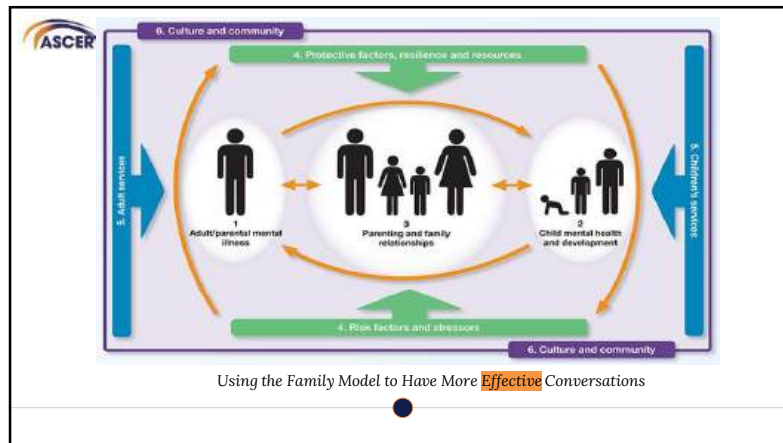




Supporting Families: NICE Guidelines

- At a limited level, staff should
 - Offer guided self-help material, typically consisting of a single session with the provision of written material
 - Provide information on self-help groups (e.g. Al-Anon)
- If the above isn't enough
 - Provide info/education on substance misuse
 - Help identify sources of stress related to substance misuse
 - Explore and promote effective coping (normally consisting of 5 weekly sessions)





What Family Members Say **Helps**

- Listening – the more families feel heard, the more you can keep them in a dialogue that will offer clarity about the situation and themselves
- Helping families reach the point of feeling that they have done everything possible to be of help
 - With this comes the recognition of limits and boundaries
- Teaching families to be responsible **to** the person with the substance use issues, and not **for** him
 - After years of living someone else's life, stepping in at unnecessary times can be a difficult habit to break. Affected family members tend to feel responsible for others' actions

What Family Members Say **Helps**

- Helping them evaluate their behaviours more effectively and honestly
 - Example: when you enable, you take something away, such as ridding one of responsibility, decision-making, problem-solving, or intense feelings that can encourage behaviour change
- What does not help
 - Confronting them when they say that the reason they engage in such behaviours is because they love the person with the addiction discounts their relationship and feelings

Messages Families Need to Hear



- You are not alone
- You are not to blame
- You are not betraying anyone by talking about it
- Your opinion matters
- You can still have a good life despite your parent's continued substance use
- There are people who can help you

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5 Supporting Family Members Affected by Substance Use: Building Resilience

How can we help these family members build resilience?

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Building Resilience


- Resilience is defined as the capacity to transcend adversity (Gilligan, 1997)
- Resilience is the ability to recover and move on in the face of difficulties. A more simple definition is to be able to “bounce back” from life’s struggles
- Resilience is a process, not a trait, and is open to influence



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Building Resilience


- Building resilience is not just confined to young people
- “One of the most important thing things that came out of the years of research is that there is no age that has a monopoly on risks and no age beyond which it is too late to intervene” (Rutter 2000)



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Resilience Factors in Your Life

Take a look at Nan Henderson’s Resiliency Quiz to learn more about resilience factors and see if they’re present in your life.



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Internal locus of control
Active agency (making choices)

People actively choosing what information they want
How they cope
Support they use

Builds a sense of competence
A key resilience strengthening factor

Supporting **Resilience**: Rationale Behind the 5 Step Method/Steps to Cope

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Family resilience refers to the wellbeing of multiple individuals within a family unit, the relationships between them, and key family processes.

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Family Resilience

- Power et al. used a family resilience framework to understand the experience of families where a parent has a mental illness and found that a range of processes can support the maintenance of resilience
 - Communication about mental illness within the family can help them make sense of the negative impact
 - Rituals and routines (e.g. regular family dinners) can help maintain a sense of stability and promote bonding
- The study concluded that resilience comes from family members' capacity to balance negative experiences/feelings with a sense of optimism/hope for their family life

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Supporting Family Resilience

- A strengths-based programme focuses on ways relationships between family members can support wellbeing
- Supporting or healing relationships that may have been disrupted by substance misuse can be a key element of work to build resilience

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Supporting Family Resilience: Strategies

- Providing all family members with relevant, age-appropriate information and facilitating family discussions
- Working with families to identify/acknowledge the processes/practices that help them enjoy family life
 - Supporting and encouraging family members to maintain these processes (e.g. making school lunches)
- Creating the space for families to reflect on the impact of negative experiences while acknowledging strengths within the family unit and reasons to feel hopeful for the future


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Supporting Family Resilience: Strengthening Parenting Capacity

- Basic care
- Ensuring safety
- Emotional warmth
- Stimulation
- Guidance and boundaries
- Stability
- Rituals
- Roles and responsibilities
- Routines
- Communication
- Social life
- Finances
- Relationships and interpersonal interactions

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Engaging With Parents: Challenges




- Being honest and clear without creating hostility
- Being empathetic without colluding with unacceptable behaviour
- Reconciling the different imperatives of the role within practice with parents

Source: Forrester et al., 2008

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Engaging With Parents: What They Want in Workers


- Courtesy
- Being on time
- Speaking directly to them
- Avoiding jargon
- “Listening, really hearing, and accepting” what is being said



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Engaging With Parents: What They **Want in Workers**

- Explaining what is happening and why
- Doing what they say they'll do and avoiding over-promising
- Being honest when they can't help
- Being patient and making time to understand



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Important Messages for Family Recovery/Resilience: **Children**



- Talk about what you're going through
- You're not to blame for your parent's substance use
- Learn about addiction and recovery in ways that are ok for our age

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Important Messages for Family Recovery/Resilience: **Children**




- Have fun and do things other children and young people do
- Everyone needs help sometimes and there's people who can help you
- Develop a backup plan for any crisis – someone you can ring, somewhere you can go

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Important Messages for Family Recovery/Resilience: **Adults**


- Increase support for yourself
- You're not to blame for their substance use
- Learn all you can about substance use, addiction, and recovery



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Important Messages for Family Recovery/Resilience: Adults

- Take time for yourself emotionally
- You can't control their substance use – they must make that choice
- Ensure physical safety if necessary



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Putting It All Together

In your groups, look at the case scenario given to you. Think about how you might approach these families, given what we've talked about over the last couple of days.



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6 Signposting
Who's available to help?


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NIDACTS

Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Coordination Teams

drugsandalcoholni.info







 **Family Support NI**

familysupportni.gov.uk

A directory of various support services (e.g. mental health, finances) and registered childcare services in NI







Thanks!

Any questions?

ASCERT
0800 2545 123
info@ascert.biz
www.ascert.biz