

Practice briefing for professionals working with young people

Working with young people who misuse/abuse alcohol or substances

Recent SafeLives findings have identified that young people experiencing intimate partner violence are extremely vulnerable and are at high risk of serious harm¹. Not only are they suffering abuse in their intimate relationships, they often have additional vulnerabilities, including substance and drug misuse. Of 341 young people supported, 22% disclosed substance misuse and 12% disclosed alcohol use.

This is not surprising, given the complex needs the young people within this dataset. Of all young people supported in this research:

- 65% disclosed experiencing depression or anxiety and 45% indicated they had self-harmed
- 1 in 5 (18%) disclosed sexual abuse
- 48% of young people had witnessed domestic abuse in their family home
- parental mental health was an identified risk in 1 in 4 cases
- 23% disclosed parental substance misuse

Engaging young people experiencing intimate partner violence with substance misuse

It is essential that professionals who undertake assessments on young people experiencing intimate partner abuse consider all additional risk factors in order to inform their safety planning.

Practice pointers

- Routinely ask about young people's use of alcohol and drugs
- Consider the young person's perception of risks associated to their substance misuse so that this can be incorporated in their safety plan
- Be aware that the young person's minimisation of risk may conceal a safeguarding concern that would warrant an immediate referral
- Consider how a disclosure of misuse of alcohol or drugs could be linked to their experience of intimate partner abuse
 - Does their partner supply them with alcohol or drugs as part of the abuse?
 - Do they use substances as a way of coping with the abuse that they are experiencing?
- Be aware of support services available in their area for young people who may be using alcohol or drugs and/or may be living with parents who misuse alcohol or drugs
- Provide options to refer them to a specialist agency for further information, advice and guidance
- If the young person requires referral to adult services (if they are 18), transition to these services should be as seamless as possible
- Be mindful that some young people may not want to engage with a specialist agency. In these situations, make contact with the specialist service and identify how they can work together to increase the young person's knowledge of the risks associated with drugs and alcohol.

¹ SafeLives (2014) Young people's national dataset January to December 2014. Bristol: SafeLives.

Working with young people who witness parental substance misuse

- When safety planning with young people, consider whether a young person's parents are a protective factor or an additional risk factor due to their substance and alcohol use
- "Local authorities tend to focus on young people's own drinking without consideration that it might be learnt or normalised behaviour from their parents. Equally, not enough is being done to address and support parents who drink, in order to reduce the impact upon children and families." (Manning, 2014)
- If a disclosure of parental alcohol or drug use raises significant concerns about the young person's wellbeing, an appropriate referral should be made to children's social care or specialist services that support young people affected by parental substance misuse.

Domestic abuse resources

SafeLives has developed a young people's Dash risk checklist and young people's safety plan, in partnership with young people from IKWRO, Leap Confronting Conflict and Barnardo's. Practitioners can use these tools to assess risk and to support and advise young people on how to keep safe. The checklist and guidance is available to download on safelives.org.uk/practice-support.

The checklist is not an assessment of levels of alcohol/substance misuse; however it does prompt the professional to consider these issues for the victim as part of the assessment process and general discussion.

Safety planning

The SafeLives young people safety plan can be accessed on safelives.org.uk/practice-support.

Additional resources and signposting young people

Professionals should be aware of services available in their area for young people who are using/misusing substances and for young people who may be affected by parental substance abuse/use. Professionals should familiarise themselves with the referral and assessment criteria for these local agencies.

Further information is available on the treatment of young people who use/misuse substances can be found at:

Public Health England gov.uk/government/organisations/public-health-england

Addaction addaction.org.uk

A national drug and alcohol treatment specialist charity

Lifeline lifeline.org.uk/

A national charity which provides diverse services to young people and adults who use/misuse substances.

Action for Children actionforchildren.org.uk/our-services/young-people/alcohol-and-substance-misuse

Barnardo's barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_projects/substance_misuse.htm