General Facts
1. Not all parents who use drugs/alcohol will require support or an intervention from statutory services for children (ACMD 2002).
2. Between 780,000 and 1.3 million children in the UK are affected by parental alcohol problems (at most 1 in 11 children) (PMSU 2004).
3. There are between 200,000 and 300,000 children of problem drug users in the United Kingdom (at most 1 in 28 children) (ACMD 2003).
4. 47% of problem drug users entering treatment were responsible for children aged 18 or under (Gossop et al. 1998).
   In 2005/6 2,211 adults accessed treatment in Surrey (www.ndtms.net)
5. Nationally problematic alcohol use by parents was identified as a factor in over 50% of child protection cases (Alcohol Concern 2003)
6. In Surrey problematic substance (drug/alcohol) use was identified as a contributing factor in 32% of Child Protection Conferences from 1st October – 31st December 2004 (53 out of 165 cases). (Surrey SSCB data)

Pre-Birth
1. Different drugs (including alcohol) will have different impacts on the unborn child; the impact that a single drug will have will vary and is not necessarily dependent on the dosage but on a range of interplaying factors.

2. Problematic drug/alcohol use may impact on the foetus in the following ways:
   ▪ Intra-uterine growth retardation
   ▪ Pre-term delivery
   ▪ Increased rates of low birth weight and perinatal mortality
   ▪ Death in utero

Neonatal Period
A new born baby may experience the following:
   ▪ Abstinence syndrome  (24-72 hours after delivery but can be delayed if the mother has been using Methadone and Benzodiazepines)
   ▪ Foetal distress
   ▪ Foetal alcohol syndrome

Risks for Children
Children of parents with problematic drug/alcohol use are at greater risk of the following hazards:
   ▪ Physical; emotional; sexual abuse and neglect
   ▪ Inadequate supervision and inappropriate parenting practices
   ▪ Suffering as a result of domestic abuse
   ▪ Frequent changes in carers and accommodation
   ▪ Sustained or intermittent poverty; inadequate accommodation.
   ▪ Exposure to criminal or other inappropriate adult behaviour
- Exposure to toxic substances, drug-using paraphernalia (needles/syringes etc) in the home and therefore possible exposure to blood borne virus infection
- Social isolation
- The above may be in addition to, and interact with parental mental health problems and under-attainment.

**Impact on Children**

Children may experience the following long-term impacts:
- Emotional, cognitive and / or behavioural problems
- School refusal / truanting
- Increased prevalence of learning problems and poor educational achievement
- Inadequate healthcare, including incomplete immunisation
- Poor socialisation
- Early drug/alcohol use. Children and young people may view their parent’s drug/alcohol use as normal (Ward et al 2003; Newburn and Pearson 2002)
- Early offending behaviour

**Protective Factors**

The risk of a child developing behavioural or other problems will not be determined by one single risk factor but by the interaction between risk and protective factors over time (Dawe et al 2000). Protective factors include strong family support; and / or support from a non-using adult such as teacher or other professional; and / or controlled parental drug dosage and maintenance of family routines (Barnard and McKegany 2004).

**Assessing Parental Drug/Alcohol Use**

One of the main difficulties in assessing the harm to children of living with parental drug/alcohol use is that, in the majority of cases, drug/alcohol use is associated with a range of other factors: such as, poverty and deprivation, poor physical and mental health, poor housing, debt, offending and unemployment. Any or all of these factors are likely to have an impact on the parent and on the child. The relationship between these factors and drug/alcohol use is generally complex and the use should not be addressed in isolation.

For support in assessing the impact of parental drug/alcohol use on children and young people see Appendix 2 of the DAAT SSCB Best Practice Guidance When Parents are Using Drugs/Alcohol: Working Together With Parents and Children (www.surreycafis.org.uk).

**References**

Alcohol Concern (2003), Children of Problem Drinking Parents