



Child Perspectives on Substance Abuse

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Child Development 101



Children's Vulnerability

- Age
- Lack of experience
- Inability to express thoughts, needs
- Brain neurochemistry
- Open to behavioral models



Good Parenting

- Consistency
- Open communication
- Expression of feelings
- Boundaries
- Structure
- Rubber band independence



Parenting Under the Influence



Prenatal Exposure

<p>Alcohol</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifelong problems • Mental retardation • Difficulty knowing right from wrong • Problem solving issues • Poor coordination 	<p>Other Drugs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unclear re: duration • Limited abstract thinking • Impulse control • Sensory Integration • Learning problems • Tough to soothe as infants • Impulse control
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How Drugs Affect Parenting



- Extreme discipline
- Unrealistic expectations of child
- Blame child
- Role reversal
- Isolation
- Illegal activity
- Low frustration tolerance
- Extreme mood changes
- Inconsistency
- Under-responsive/neglect
- Focus on parent's needs
- Closed communication

Related Situations

- Poverty
- Low parental education
- Parental mental illness
- Homelessness
- Custody changes
- Inadequate nutrition
- Poor prenatal care



Moms and Drugs



- Guilt and shame
- Worried about CPS involvement
- Feel ineffective and incompetent
- Low bonding with baby
- Intolerance of child behaviors
- Insensitivity to child development
- Prenatal AOD use
- Punitive and severe discipline

Dads and Drugs

- Heightened sensitivity, lower tolerance to infant's needs
- Drinking by dad → drinking by teen



Effects on Children: Active Addiction



Assumptions

- Children affected by all stages of use
- Effects become lifelong baggage
- COAs are not COSAs
- Not just about parent and child
- Parental substance abuse yields:
 - Negatives and risks
 - Positives
 - Resiliencies – despite experiences
 - Coping/Strengths – because of experiences



Complicating Factors



- Parent's own experience with parental substance abuse
- Child's personality, temperament, and needs

Impact of Parental Addiction: Critical Factors



Parent's Use

- Pattern of use
- Drug of choice
- Rate of addiction
- Duration of addiction
- Timing of treatment and recovery
- Relapse?
- Parent's gender and role

Child Factors

- Age of child at onset/height
- Child's personality
- Protective factors

Other Factors

- Family living situation
- Access to family support
- Family dynamics
- Systems involvement

Home Life

- Shame, blame, guilt, anger
- Denial and secrecy
- Neglect
- Role reversal
- Mistrust
- Social isolation
- Inconsistency
- Violence and conflict



Consequences for Children

- Ignored
- Schoolwork suffers
- Parentified
- Afraid to bring friends home
- Pulled into conflicts
- Hard to concentrate
- No access to emergency services
- Chaotic family structure
- Lack good role models
- Family violence
- Neglect



Sibling Relationships

- Parental addiction may alter relationship
 - Strengthen (caregiving)
 - Weakening (role reversal)
- Later may be only source of family connectedness



How Children Feel



- Sad
- Afraid
- Lonely, invisible
- Traumatized
- Angry
- Worried
- Love parent
- Ashamed
- Guilty, responsible
- Embarrassed
- Parental
- Confused
- Depressed
- Anxious
- Loyal to parent
- Hopeful

Children's Confusion

- Parents' behavior
- Psychopharmacology
- Their own role in cause and control
- Commonality of situation



General Behavioral Issues

- **Academic** – difficulty concentrating, behavioral disruption, truancy, learning challenges
- **Emotional** – psychosomatic, low self-esteem, withdrawal, depression, mood lability, irritability
- **Social** – withdrawn, bullying, delinquency, amorality
- **Conduct** – aggression, poor frustration tolerance, hyperactivity, delinquency



Behavior Problems: Younger Children

- Eating
 - Overeating, hoarding food, failure to thrive
- Sleeping
 - Nightwaking, night terrors, refuse to go to sleep alone, refuse going to bed
- Toileting
 - Encopresis, Enuresis, refusing to use toilet
- Difficult to manage
 - Tantrums, overactive, self-endangering behavior, indiscriminate social behavior
- Aggression
 - towards caregiver, towards peers
- Sexualized behavior
 - Masturbation, simulating sex with peers or toys



Behavior Problems: Older Children and Teens

- Experiment with AOD
- School problems
- Social problems
- Run away
- Withdraw/ignore
- Perfectionism
- Alternative relationships
 - Gangs
 - Romantic partners
 - Destructive friendships
- Doesn't trust
- Hypervigilant
- Hoards
- Aggression/anger
- Psychosomatic problems
- Anxious/depressed
- Comedy



Special Issues for Teens



- Friendships
- Romantic relationships
- After-school jobs
- Homework
- Keeping up with household chores

Resiliency, Protective Factors, and Coping Skills

- Resiliency
 - Successful adaptation despite challenges
 - Personality traits + environment
 - Dynamic process
- Enhanced by protective factors
- Coping mechanisms
 - Survival skills
 - Contextual
 - Developed because of negative experiences



Effects on Children Treatment and Separation



Treatment without Separation

- Focus on treatment, not child
- Homeostasis evolves with parent and child together
- Requires supportive home environment



Separation & Treatment: What Happens At Home

- Additional responsibilities
 - Child / elder care
 - Financial
 - Visiting
 - Treatment mandates
- Expectations and requests for change
- Awkwardness of visits
- Trying new skills – awkward
- Communication altered
- Absent family member



Separation: Child's Experience

- Immediate reaction ≠ long-term adaptations
- Age of child affects presentation
- More placements, more severe reactions
- AD/HD overdiagnosed, PTSD underdiagnosed
- Behavior may seem willful but may be survival oriented
- Regardless of permanency plan, separation issues need to be dealt with therapeutically for child to do well

Separation: Short-Term Effects

- Eating and sleeping disorders
- Depression
- Emotional withdrawal
- Acting out
- School problems
- Symptoms often misdiagnosed



Separation: Long-Term Issues

- Loss and abandonment
- Fearful re: parent
- Alternate caregiving
- Parental apologies
- Knowledge of parent's location?
- Limited contact (tx imposed)
- Fantasies and expectations
- Come to terms with parent's limits



Separation: By Age

- **Younger children** – disorganization, better adjustment long-term than children first separated when older
- **Late childhood** – maladaptive behavior
- **Teens** – sexual misconduct, truancy/delinquency, substance abuse, gang involvement



Separation: Implications for Practice

- Sibling contact extremely important to sense of continuity
- Contact and continuity with parent is important
- Children's support needs are great
- Caregivers need help understanding children's behaviors



Child Issues with Treatment



- Mother/child program – limits to number and age of children
- Treatment mandates reduce attention to child
- Restricted contact
- Limited staff skill and capacity

Visit Issues for Children

- Unfamiliar parent
- Awkward environment
- Conflicted feelings
- Loyalty splits
- Context of visit – affect parent/child mood
- No entertainment, activities
- Supervision makes awkward
- Non-natural context



Effects on Children Recovery, Reunification and Relapse



Recovery

- New homeostasis
- Recovery the parent's #1 priority
- Fantasies – unrealized
- Denial of family issues
- No chemicals as a buffer
- Relapse possibility
- Reunification issues



A Child's View of Recovery

- Change is scary, even if desired
- What is my role now?
- Confusion about "meetings"
- Resentful about slogans and terminology
- Expect "all better" but parental relationship may be worse
- New limits and rules



Child Ambivalence about Reunification

- Anger about past
- Scared about relapse
- Avoid promises – lack of trust
- Don't want rules and structure
- Feelings about sibling's living arrangements
- Scared that have lost place in family
- Strong bond with caregiver
- Reluctance to leave alternate home or neighborhood
- Don't want to leave friends or school



Family Dynamics: Reunification



- Parent tries to resume authority and discipline
 - Kids don't like this
- Parent extensively focused on recovery
 - Family is impatient and feels ignored
- Kids begin to act out – to test tolerance and limits
 - Parents are confused, surprised and hurt
- Parents have high expectations
 - Unwilling to ask for help

When Families Reunify: Testing Behavior

- Tantrums
- Defiance
- Jealousy
- Nightmares
- Clinging behavior
- Hypervigilance

- Parental surprise



Reunification: Other Issues

- Unification, not reunification
- Child may be stranger to parent
- Reality v. fantasy
- Child's problems
- Emotional baggage
- Grief and loss for past home/caregiver
- Renegotiate authority lines
- New families



Relapse

- Dashed hopes
- Confirmation of untrustworthiness
- Child may re-enter care
- Renewed separation – erodes attachment
- Pre-recovery state for child



Interventions and Support



What Children Need

- Developmental screenings
- Early intervention
- Reassurance
- Prevention
- Support
- Education
- Honest explanations
- Counseling (i.e., transition points)
- Identification of resiliency and strengths
- Reunification support



Mental Health Evaluation

- Presence of trusted adult (wait at least one month after placement)
- Interdisciplinary – to understand multiple issues
- Re-evaluated 2x/year until age three
 - Uneven emergence of skills
 - Children's vulnerability to stress
 - Frequent maturational changes



Recommended Mental Health Assessment Schedule

- First visit – mental and physical health screening within 48 hours of placement
- Comprehensive pediatric eval – 30 days
- Interdisciplinary developmental eval and mental health eval btw 30 – 60 days
- Reevaluation every 6 months



Key Responsibilities

- Screenings
 - Mental health
 - Developmental
- Recommend early intervention
- Ask about strengths and resiliency
- Reunification support and counseling

