



## Parental Drug and Alcohol Problems

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**Q. What can happen when a parent has problems with drugs and alcohol?**

**A.**



Being a parent is a really responsible job. A parent needs to be reliable and someone that others in the family can depend on. Parents, as the adults in the home, have the responsibility of making good decisions for all the family.

However, when a parent has problems with drugs or alcohol it can take over their lives and affect their ability to think and make good choices and decisions. This means that family life will be less of a priority and things can become chaotic and stressful.

This will affect the whole family. The family may try to cope with the situation, but everyone can get caught up in the behaviour caused by the harmful drug or alcohol use and take on the role of keeping the 'show on the road'.

Families will often do this to protect the person with the problem and to 'hide' the situation from others.

Often the family will not even discuss the drug or alcohol problem among themselves. When people ignore problems, or don't discuss things, it can result in people feeling lonely or frightened.

Talking about a problem with your family is an important way of coping and getting support. If you cannot talk about it with anyone at home, try to find another family member or adult who will be able to listen to you and give you the support that you need.

**It is important to talk about what is happening in your family.**

## Q. It is always a serious issue?

A.

Not all families living with drug or alcohol problems experience serious difficulties.

For example, a parent may be dependent on methadone (a synthetic opiate, or type of medication, which can be prescribed to treat heroin addiction) or other medication, but because they are getting the right help and advice around their medication and health and because they have professional support they can manage well.

In other cases, the person who is misusing will choose to use at a time when there are less risks, e.g. when children are in bed and there is another responsible adult in the home to ensure safety. While the person may be taking risks with their own health, they know that there is someone else at home who can keep a check on things.

***'I want her to do it, stop using drugs... well how much can I say? I can't say how much 'cos it's the most in the world. You can't really say a number can you?' Jane, 14***

Despite this appearing to be a safer option, it is still a gamble which has the potential to lead to danger. There is always the risk that while under the influence someone may become urgently ill, their behaviour may become aggressive or accidents could happen.

Also, the other parent who takes on the extra responsibilities may feel extra pressure during times when their partner is using or less able to carry out daily tasks (due to withdrawal symptoms). This can cause a lot of tension in the home.

In some families, there may be only one parent or it may be that both parents are using drugs or alcohol. This can be difficult as you may end up taking on extra responsibilities like looking after your brothers or sisters or making dinner every night. You may also be worried about your parents when they are under the influence.

These are big worries to carry by yourself and may be affecting your school life, your friendships and your personal life. This is unfair and it is important that you get help and support as soon as possible.

**While some families are better able to cope with the challenge of harmful drug or alcohol use, it is always a serious issue and it can be a great strain on family life.**

## Q. Do lots of families have this problem?

A.

Yes. Problems with drugs and particularly alcohol are very common. Families everywhere are affected by it. You are not alone.

There are many children and young people living with the same problem, both in your neighbourhood, school and even among your immediate friends.

Because families often feel ashamed and try to cover up what is happening in their home, it is not something that is easy to tell from the outside.

For some families, it may not be easy to talk about what is happening. This can make children and young people feel very alone with the problem. It is important to know that you are not alone and that problems with drugs and alcohol can happen in many families.

## **Did You Know?**

- According to Alcohol Action Ireland, between 61,000 and 104,000 children aged under 15 years in Ireland live with parents who misuses alcohol.
- In 2009, an ISPCC study found that one in 11 children in Ireland was impacted negatively by parental alcohol problems. At the moment, there are no figures available for the impact of drug use on children in Ireland.

**See Finding Help for more information or [www.al-anon-ireland.org](http://www.al-anon-ireland.org) for details of Alateen, an organisation for young people who are affected by a problem drinker.**