

Handout:
Alcohol and Drug Use Continuum and Implications for Child Welfare

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Alcohol and Drug Use Continuum	Implications for Child Welfare and Examples of Risks to Children
<p>Substance use—the use of alcohol or other drugs to socialize and feel their effects. Use may not appear abusive and may not lead to dependence; however, the circumstances under which a parent uses can put children at risk of harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Driving with children in the car while under the influence • Use during pregnancy can harm the fetus
<p>Substance abuse—includes at least one of these factors in the last 12 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Effects have seriously interfered with health, work, or social functioning • Person has engaged in hazardous activity on a recurring basis, such as driving or operating machinery under the influence • Person has experienced use-related legal problems • Person has continued use despite ongoing or recurring problems caused or exacerbated by use—this includes a maladaptive pattern of use, such as binge drinking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children may be left in unsafe care—with an inappropriate caretaker or unattended—while parent is using alcohol or other drugs • A parent may neglect or sporadically address the children’s needs for regular meals, clothing, and cleanliness • Even when the parent is in the home, the parent’s use may leave children unsupervised • Behavior toward children may be inconsistent, such as a pattern of screaming insults then expressing remorse
<p>Addiction (or substance dependence)—a pattern of use that results in three or more of the following symptoms in a 12-month period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerance—needing more of the drug or alcohol to get “high” • Withdrawal—physical symptoms when alcohol or drugs are not used, such as tremors, nausea, sweating, and shakiness • Unable to control use—a strong craving or compulsion to use and an inability to limit use • The alcohol or drug increasingly becomes the focus of the person’s life at the expense of all other areas, including family, work, social, and recreational • Continued use despite ongoing or recurring physical or psychological problems caused or exacerbated by the alcohol and drug use 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite a clear danger to children, the parent may engage in addiction-related behaviors, such as leaving children unattended while seeking drugs • Funds are used to buy alcohol or drugs, while necessities, such as buying food, are neglected • A parent may not be able to think logically or make rational decisions regarding children’s needs or care
<p>Sources: American Psychiatric Association, 2000; SAMHSA, 2005.</p>	