

Parenting Assessment in Social Work



ALCOHOL & DRUG USE OF A PARENT



Checklist | Questions & Analysis

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PARENTING ASSESSMENT IN SOCIAL WORK

Checklist/questions - Drug and alcohol use of a parent

1. History of Drug and Alcohol Use

- Have you ever used alcohol or drugs regularly?
 - What substances have you used over the years?
 - When did you first start using?
 - Have you ever tried to stop or reduce your use?
 - What kinds of support or treatment have you tried in the past?
 - Have you ever been in hospital or prison because of your substance use?
 - Do you think alcohol or drugs have ever caused problems in your life?
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2. Current Use and Daily Patterns

- Are you using alcohol or any drugs at the moment?
 - What do you use, and how often?
 - How do you usually get what you use?
 - When do you usually drink or use drugs? (e.g. time of day, days of the week)
 - Who are you usually with when you use?
 - How much do you use each time?
 - How do you feel after using? Do you notice any after-effects?
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3. Use in the Home Environment

- Where do you usually use drugs or alcohol — in your home or elsewhere?
- If you use at home, where in the house do you usually go?
- Is anything used during or after (e.g. equipment, wrappers, containers)?
- How do you store or dispose of any leftover substances or drug-related items?
- Are there ever other people in the home who also use substances?

- Do any of these people spend time with your child?
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4. Impact on Parenting

- Can you describe your usual daily routine with your child?
 - Are there times when your use affects your energy, patience, or ability to focus?
 - How do you manage parenting responsibilities on days when you've used substances?
 - If you're unwell or unavailable, who looks after your child?
 - Have you noticed any changes in your relationship with your child due to your use?
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5. Impact on Other Parent/Carer (if applicable)

- Is there another parent or adult involved in your child's care?
 - Do they know about your alcohol or drug use?
 - How does your use affect their ability to parent or support you?
 - Have they taken on extra parenting tasks because of your use?
 - Do you feel your substance use affects their relationship with the child?
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6. Risks and Safety

- Has anyone ever expressed concern about your use and your child's safety?
 - Have there been any accidents, near misses, or times you couldn't respond quickly to your child?
 - Do you ever feel your mood or behaviour changes in a way that could affect your child?
 - Has your child ever seen you unwell, asleep, or confused due to alcohol or drugs?
 - Has your home environment ever been affected by drug use (e.g. stress, arguments, damage, or visits from people involved in drugs)?
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7. Financial and Social Effects

- Has your use affected your ability to work or manage money?
- Do you ever have difficulty paying for food, bills, or rent due to substance use?
- Have you borrowed money or asked others for help financially?

- Has your use led to any changes in friendships, family relationships, or contact with services?
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8. Your Child's Awareness and Involvement

- Do you think your child is aware of your alcohol or drug use?
 - Have they ever asked questions or talked to you about it?
 - Has your child ever been involved in helping you get alcohol, drugs, or money?
 - Do you know if your child has ever tried or used any substances?
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9. Understanding and Support

- How do you think your substance use affects your child?
- What are your thoughts or concerns about how things are at the moment?
- What helps you stay in control or reduce your use?
- Is there anything you think could help you move forward or feel more supported?

GUIDANCE FOR SOCIAL WORKERS

Analysing responses – **Drug and alcohol use of a parent**

1. History of Drug and Alcohol Use

What this might show about the parent:

A long-standing substance use history with repeated relapses suggests chronic dependency, which can disrupt consistency in caregiving and emotional availability. If a parent is able to articulate what triggered past relapses—stress, relationships, emotional distress—it shows developing insight. In contrast, omission or minimisation of past substance problems points to limited self-awareness and may indicate resistance to change.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children may have lived through repeated upheavals, including unexplained absences, unstable caregiving arrangements, or exposure to intoxicated behaviour. These periods can erode trust, trigger anxiety, lead to attachment insecurity, and affect the child's sense of predictability and belonging. Where parents show no insight into these past impacts, the risk of repeated disruption remains high.

2. Current Use and Daily Patterns

What this might show about the parent:

Frequent use—especially during mornings, evenings, or weekends—indicates dependency that impedes routine child care. An adult using with peers at home may normalise substance misuse for the child. Using only in private might be less risky but can still hide problems tied to shame or emotional avoidance.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children may suffer from inconsistent routines, emotional disconnection, or lack of supervision. Their daily lives may be disrupted by missed meals, bedtime delays, or unexplained absences. Emotionally, children may become anxious or withdrawn, especially if they do not understand what is happening. If this becomes normalised, it can lead to long-term issues with trust, security, and behaviour.

3. Use in the Home Environment

What this might show about the parent:

Permitting substance use in the home or by visitors reflects weakened boundaries and insufficient risk management. Failing to secure paraphernalia or knowingly allowing substance users in the house demonstrates poor judgment regarding the child's safety.

Parents who create separate spaces and prevent child exposure demonstrate some protective awareness.

Implications for the child and parenting:

A home that contains used needles, alcohol containers, or other drug paraphernalia poses clear physical risks—such as poisoning, injury, or infection. If other substance users are regularly present, children may witness chaotic behaviour, aggression, or inappropriate adult conversations. This affects their sense of safety, contributes to emotional distress, and may result in children avoiding their home or feeling ashamed to bring friends over.

4. Impact on Parenting

What this might show about the parent:

Impaired concentration, mood swings, irritability, or excessive tiredness can make parenting unpredictable. A parent who recognises these effects and plans ahead—through childcare or safe routines—demonstrates responsibility. Without such awareness, children may regularly experience chaotic or emotionally distant care.

Implications for the child and parenting:

When parenting is shaped by unpredictable moods or tiredness, children may feel confused or rejected. They might begin to anticipate the parent's needs or modify their behaviour to avoid conflict, rather than seeking comfort or guidance. Over time, this can distort the parent-child relationship and contribute to anxiety, self-blame, or emotional withdrawal.

5. Impact on Other Parent/Carer (if applicable)

What this might show about the parent:

If one parent misuses substances, it places a disproportionate burden on the other, risking caregiver burnout or emotional withdrawal. The secondary adult may hide problems or struggle alone to keep the family afloat. When both parents misuse, the child lacks reliable emotional and practical support.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Even where the non-using parent does their best to protect the child, they may be overwhelmed and emotionally distant due to the pressures of compensating for the other. This can result in the child receiving only basic care, with less emotional availability or structure. If both parents are using, the child is likely to experience neglect, fear, or instability in all areas of life.

6. Risks and Safety

What this might show about the parent:

A parent who overlooks unsafe conditions—like leaving sharp items accessible or failing to plan for intoxicated episodes—shows a lack of safety awareness and risk management.

Those who intentionally mitigate these hazards demonstrate protective capacity and responsibility, even if recovery is not fully underway.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children may be injured by unsafe items, left unattended, or placed in risky situations. Emotional trauma can also occur when children witness erratic behaviour, violence, or are unsure whether their home is safe. Without a protective response from the parent, the child's confidence in adults is undermined, and their emotional development can be severely affected.

7. Financial and Social Effects

What this might show about the parent:

Substance misuse that prioritises spend on substances over essentials indicates neglect. Financial instability may push families toward unsafe coping strategies—borrowing, pawning, or illegal activity. An insight-driven parent seeking budgeting or support shows motivation to shift focus back to the family's welfare.

Implications for the child and parenting:

When household money is spent on drugs or alcohol, children may go without food, clean clothes, or heating. School trips, uniforms, or transport may be unaffordable, and the family may face eviction or utilities being cut off. Socially, the child may feel ashamed, be isolated from peers, or experience bullying. This can erode self-esteem and limit opportunities for positive experiences and development.

8. Your Child's Awareness and Involvement

What this might show about the parent:

Parents who inform their child in an age-appropriate way demonstrate emotional literacy and care. But if the child is buying, hiding substances or money, or taking care of the parent, role boundaries are compromised, and responsibility is transferred inappropriately.

Implications for the child and parenting:

Children who feel responsible for their parent's wellbeing often become anxious and hyper-vigilant. They may stop expressing their own needs, act older than their age, or struggle in school or friendships. This emotional burden can lead to longer-term mental health difficulties, trust issues, and confusion about family roles and boundaries.

9. Understanding and Support

What this might show about the parent:

Parents who recognise risks and follow through—by cleaning up the home, engaging with services, or setting boundaries around use—demonstrate protective awareness. Those who deny impact or reject help, despite evidence, impair their child's safety and wellbeing.

Implications for the child and parenting:

When a parent takes clear protective steps, even if they are still using substances, the child is more likely to feel safe and have their emotional and physical needs met. This can reduce long-term harm and build resilience. In contrast, where no steps are taken and denial continues, the child's daily environment remains unpredictable, which increases the risk of neglect, trauma, and emotional insecurity.

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1 WWW.SOCIALWORKERSTOOLBOX.COM



2 WWW.ANXIETYHELPBOX.COM



3 WWW.FEELINGSHELPBOX.COM



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