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?

---

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?

---

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?

---

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?

---

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?

---

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)?

---

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?

---

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?

---

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

History of Substance Use

What it can tell you:

- Long-term use or repeated relapses may indicate entrenched patterns that impact parenting consistency and reliability.
- Previous efforts to stop show potential for change and awareness, especially where parents can reflect on what worked or didn't.
- Denial of a problem or lack of history-sharing may suggest minimisation or lack of insight.
- Acknowledging harm or past consequences (e.g. hospitalisation or prison) may indicate readiness for support.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Does the parent recognise the impact of their use?
- Are they willing to explore support or change?
- Could previous failed attempts affect confidence or trust in services?

Current Use and Patterns

What it can tell you:

- Frequency and quantity of use give an indication of how functioning may be affected.
- The timing and pattern of use may highlight if the parent is intoxicated during key parenting hours.
- Use in social or solitary settings may affect mood and risk — e.g. group use may increase unsafe visitors, whereas isolated use may suggest secrecy or shame.
- High levels of use, binge patterns or withdrawal symptoms can seriously impact the parent's emotional availability and safety.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the parent's use compromising their ability to supervise, respond, and emotionally connect?
- Are there predictable times when parenting capacity is reduced?
- Does the pattern suggest dependency or recreational use, and what does that mean for the child?

Use in the Home Environment

What it can tell you:

- Using substances at home increases risk of the child witnessing drug use or accessing harmful substances or equipment.
- Disposing of items unsafely (e.g. needles) raises direct physical health risks.
- If other substance users are present, risk of exposure to unsafe adults increases.
- Parents using around children often signals normalisation of harmful behaviours.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the home environment safe and free from risk?
- Does the parent understand the impact of exposure on the child's physical and emotional wellbeing?
- Are they taking active steps to reduce the child's exposure?

Impact on Parenting

What it can tell you:

- Substance use may affect memory, mood, energy, patience, or emotional responsiveness.
- A parent's awareness of these impacts often signals insight and openness to support.
- Where use leads to missed routines, neglect, or emotional absence, parenting capacity is compromised.
- If a child assumes a caring or supervisory role, this may indicate role reversal or emotional neglect.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the child's safety, supervision or emotional care reduced at any point?
- Does the parent make realistic plans for care if they are unwell or unavailable?

- Are parenting difficulties due to substance effects or underlying issues (e.g. mental health, trauma)?

Impact on Other Parent/Carer

What it can tell you:

- The other parent may become overburdened, emotionally unavailable, or distressed, which can also affect parenting.
- If one carer is trying to compensate for the other, it may create tension, role imbalance, or emotional confusion for the child.
- If both parents are misusing, risks are significantly heightened.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the non-using parent protective and emotionally available to the child?
- Are there power imbalances or conflict affecting parenting consistency?
- Are both parents open to working with support?

Risks and Safety

What it can tell you:

- Unsafe storage or use within the home puts the child at physical and emotional risk.
- Visitors who misuse may increase danger or lead to unpredictable, unsafe environments.
- Patterns of irritability, sleep issues, or disorientation may suggest parenting is frequently compromised.
- Parents who hide their use may either be protecting the child or avoiding acknowledgement of harm.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the home consistently safe?
- Are others in the home a source of support or risk?
- What safety planning is in place during periods of use?

Financial and Social Impact

What it can tell you:

- Use affecting employment or budgeting may lead to housing risk, food insecurity, or emotional stress.
- Social withdrawal, borrowing, or conflict with family and friends can increase isolation — which in turn increases risk.
- Engagement in criminal behaviour to fund use poses significant safeguarding concerns.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the family financially secure and emotionally supported?
- Is the child's stability affected by financial or housing instability?
- Are relationships around the child positive or strained due to use?

Child's Awareness and Involvement

What it can tell you:

- Children who are aware of their parent's use may feel confused, scared, or burdened.
- Involvement in procurement or care roles may signal serious safeguarding concerns.
- Parental honesty and concern show reflection and potential for change.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the child emotionally or practically impacted by the parent's use?
- Has the child become prematurely responsible or emotionally affected?
- Are there appropriate boundaries and adult-child roles in place?

Awareness and Protective Action

What it can tell you:

- Parental insight into risk is a key protective factor.
- Making care plans or engaging support shows responsibility and planning.
- Parents who minimise impact or resist help may need more intensive intervention.

Things to consider in parenting:

- Is the parent aware of the full effect of their use on the child?

- Are they putting the child's needs above their own during times of use?
- Do they show motivation and willingness to change?