

# Substance Abuse Overview

***“All children wake up in a world that is not of their own making, but children of alcoholics and other drug-addicted parents wake up in a world that doesn’t take care of them.”***

***-Jeannette L. Johnson & Sis Wenger***

Many cases bringing children into the dependency system have substance abuse as a primary or secondary issue. Parents who are substance abusing or addicted may be neglectful of meeting their children’s need for safety or well being. Attachment may be impaired, the stability and consistency children need to follow a typical developmental trajectory may be missing, and the lack of good decision making while under the influence or as a symptom of addiction may endanger the welfare of the children. Parents who are unable to function while intoxicated may leave children unattended, leading to the possibility of serious consequences. The treatment of these issues becomes paramount in many dependency cases, often directly impacting the timeliness of reunification. This section, in three primary resources, provides an overview of these issues as they relate to adults and to adolescents.

The first article, written by a retired superior court judge, discusses the complex nature of parental substance abuse and dependency. It provides information on the issues that need to be addressed in those situations. It also provides management tools that may be helpful in ensuring timely permanence for children. The second article focuses on the substance abusing adolescent. The article highlights a number of correlations including the link between parental substance abuse/addiction and that of adolescents, as well as an increased rate of juvenile delinquency, school drop-out, and teen pregnancy occurring with substance abusing adolescents. The article’s concise fact sheet provides access to statistics, associated risk factors, and strategies for addressing the special needs of adolescent substance abusers. The third resource is a laminated reference chart of commonly abused drugs, their classifications, and the effects of using them. It provides an at-a-glance reference and a listing of suggested treatment strategies.

These resources provide a foundational knowledge base. Understanding the risks, issues, and treatment options for parents and adolescents with substance abuse or addictions is essential to ensuring adequate treatments are identified, ordered, accessed and reviewed. Information contained in this section may be helpful during multiple hearing types (Benchbook Chapters 5, 6, 8 & 10), because the issue of substance abuse can be pervasive in the court’s dependency caseload. This information may also be useful in assessing the appropriateness and adequacy of Family Service/Family Group Decision Making plans (Benchbook Chapter 15).

This section concludes with a listing of additional resources for those interested in further information. Of note are articles on the brain science of addiction, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and the importance of multi-system treatment approaches.