

SCODA Assessment Framework

Framework for assessing problem drug use and impact on parenting

This assessment framework has been adapted and expanded from guidelines produced by the Standing Conference on Drug Abuse (SCODA 1997)

Children in the family - provision of good basic care

- How many children are in this family?
- What are their names and ages (wherever possible include dates of birth)?

For each child:

- Is there adequate food, clothing and warmth for the child? Is height and weight normal for the child's age and stage of development?
- Is the child's health and development consistent with their age and stage of development? Has the child received necessary immunisations? Is the child registered with a GP and a dentist? Do the parents seek health care for the children appropriately?
- Does he or she attend nursery or school regularly? If not, why not? Is he or she achieving appropriate academic attainment?
- Does the child present any behavioural problems, or emotional problems? Does the parent manage the child's distress or challenging behaviour appropriately?
- Who normally looks after the child?
- Are children engaged in age-appropriate activities?
- Are there any indications that any of the children are taking on a parenting role within the family (e.g. caring for other children, excessive household responsibilities etc.)?
- Is the care for the child consistent and reliable? Are the child's emotional needs being adequately met?
- Is there a risk of repeated separation for example because of periods of imprisonment (eg. short custodial sentences or fine default)
- How does the child relate to unfamiliar adults?
- Are there non-drug using adults in the family readily accessible to the child who can provide appropriate care and support when necessary?

Describing parental drug use

(identify sources of information, including conflicting reports)

- Is the drug use by the parent
 - experimental?
 - recreational?

- chaotic?
- dependent?
- Does the user move between these types of drug use at different times?
- Does the parent misuse alcohol?
- Does the parent use alcohol concurrently with other drugs?
- How reliable is current information about the parent's drug use?
- Is there a drug free parent, supportive partner or relative?
- Is the quality of parenting or childcare different when a parent is using drugs and when not using?
- Does the parent have any mental health problems alongside drug use? If so, how are mental health problems affected by the parent's drug use? Are mental health problems directly related to drug use?

Accommodation and the home environment

- Is the family's living accommodation suitable for children? Is it adequately equipped and furnished? Are there appropriate sleeping arrangements for each child, for example does each child have a bed or cot, with sufficient bedding?
- Are rent and bills paid? Does the family have any arrears or significant debts?
- How long have the family lived in their current home / current area? Does the family move frequently? If so, why? Are there problems with neighbours, landlords or dealers?
- Do other drug users share or use the accommodation? If so, are relationships with them harmonious, or is there conflict?
- Is the family living in a drug using community?
- If parents are using drugs, do children witness the taking of the drugs, or other substances?
- Could other aspects of drug use constitute a risk to children (e.g. conflict with or between dealers, exposure to criminal activities related to drug use)?

Procurement of drugs

- Where are the children when their parents are procuring drugs or getting supervised methadone? Are they left alone? Are they taken to unsuitable places where they might be at risk, such as street meeting places, flats, needle exchanges, adult clinics?
- How much do the parents spend on drugs (per day? per week?) How is the money obtained?
- Is this causing financial problems?
- Do the parents sell drugs in the family home?

- Are the parents allowing their premises to be used by other drug users?

Health risks

- Where in the household do parents store drugs?
- Do the children know where the drugs are kept?
- What precautions do parents take to prevent their children getting hold of their drugs? Are these adequate?
- What do parents know about the risks of children ingesting methadone and other harmful drugs?
- Are they in touch with local agencies that can advise on such issues such as needle exchanges, substitute prescribing programmes, detoxification and rehabilitation facilities? If they are in touch with agencies, how regular is the contact?

If parent(s) inject:

- Where do they keep injecting equipment? In the family home? Are works kept securely?
- Do they share injecting equipment?
- Do they use a needle exchange scheme?
- How do they dispose of syringes?
- What do they know about the health risks of injecting or using drugs?

Family and social supports

- Do the parents primarily associate with other problem drug users, non-drug users or both?
- Are relatives aware of parent(s) drug use? Are they supportive of the parent(s)/ the child?
- Will parents accept help from relatives, friends or professional agencies?
- Is social isolation a problem for the family?
- How does the community perceive the family? Do neighbours know about the parents drug use? Are neighbours supportive or hostile?

Parents perception of the situation

- Do the parents see their drug use as harmful to themselves or to their children?
- Is there evidence that the parents place their own needs and procurement of drugs before the care and welfare of their children?

Do the parents know what responsibilities and powers agencies have to support and protect children at risk?