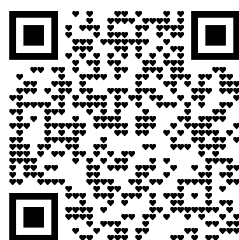


WHAT'S THE HARM?

A Parents Guide



Find out
more,
access
resources
and get
involved



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In partnership with:



BARNSELY
RECOVERY
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'What's the Harm?' A Parent's Guide

Supporting positive family relationships, wellbeing and healthy development.

A Workbook for Families

This workbook is for parents, carers, guardians, family members and other significant adults who look after children. It will help you understand how alcohol and drugs can affect children and family life.

Throughout This Workbook, You Will:

- Learn what Hidden Harm is and how it can affect children and families.
- Find out how children of different ages may be affected.
- Think about your own alcohol or drug use in a safe and supportive way.
- Learn simple steps to help keep children safe and supported.
- Find information about local services and support available in Barnsley.

A Message for Parents

Some parents worry about asking for help because they think people might judge them. This isn't fair because everyone needs help sometimes. This workbook has been created to offer information, support and ideas. It can help you think about any concerns you may have, learn about the support available, and take positive steps for yourself and your family. Drinking alcohol, taking drugs or prescribed medications does not always mean there is a problem in a family.

However, alcohol and drugs can sometimes affect family life in ways that are hard to see. Understanding these effects can help keep children safe, build stronger family relationships and help families get support when they need it.

Whatever is happening in your family, things can get better and help is available.

Campaign Message

Supporting Your Child, Your Family and You.

Every child deserves to feel safe, loved and supported. Every family deserves support when they need it, without judgement.

Throughout this workbook, the term "parent" is used to refer to any adult who plays an important caring role in a child's life, including parents, carers, guardians, family members and other significant adults (such as a family friend).

The term "children" refers to any child aged between 0 and 17 years old, unless it states the specific age.



Introduction

Welcome

Thank you for taking the time to read this workbook.

This workbook will help you understand what hidden harm is and how it might affect your family. It looks at how drinking alcohol and taking drugs can affect children, family relationships and everyday life. It will also provide activities, ideas and information about where to get help.

This workbook is about support and understanding.

Many parents who drink alcohol or take drugs care deeply about their children and want the best for them. Sometimes alcohol or drugs can affect family life in ways people do not realise. Learning about these effects is the first step towards making positive changes and getting support if needed.

You May be Reading this Because...

- ☐ You are a parent or carer
- ☐ Your child has been affected by a parent, step-parent, or family member's drinking alcohol or drug use (including medications)
- ☐ You care for a child whose family has been affected by alcohol or drugs currently or in the past
- ☐ You want to understand more about how children can be affected
- ☐ You are looking for advice, support or information
- ☐ You want to make positive changes for yourself and your family

A Message for Parents and Carers

You may feel worried, upset, guilty, frustrated, scared or unsure. These feelings are normal.

This workbook is not about blame. It is about understanding your experiences, recognising your strengths and helping children have healthy futures

"Small changes in our everyday lives can make a big difference to how children feel, learn and grow."



What Do We Mean by Hidden Harm

Hidden Harm: The Impact We Don't Always See

Hidden Harm: is the name used to describe the difficulties some children and young people experience when a parent, carer or another important adult drinks alcohol or takes drugs (including prescribed medications).

What's the Harm?

"A child missing breakfast because there was nobody awake to make it."

Many parents who use alcohol or drugs care deeply about their children and want the best for them. However, alcohol and drugs can sometimes affect family routines, relationships, safety and emotional wellbeing. These effects are not always easy to see.

Every family is different. Some children show how they feel, while others keep their worries hidden. Understanding Hidden Harm can help you recognise when you or your children may need support.

Before Birth

A baby may be affected before they are born if alcohol, drugs or some medications are used during pregnancy.

Potential impacts include:

- Increased risk of miscarriage, increased risk of still birth.
- Premature birth, low birth weight.

Key message: There is no safe amount, no safe time and no safe type of alcohol or drug use in pregnancy. Any alcohol at any stage can harm a baby's developing brain and body. Please speak with a Pharmacist, Midwife, or GP for medical advice if taking any medications during pregnancy. [Medicines in pregnancy - NHS](#)



Babies and Toddlers (0–2 Years)

At this age, babies rely entirely on adults to meet their needs.



Possible impacts include:

- Difficulties forming close and secure bonds with adults.
- Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (withdrawal symptoms after birth).
- Difficulties linked with Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD).
- Less comfort, attention and emotional support.
- Missed health appointments.
- Challenges with feeding, sleep and daily routines.
- Fewer opportunities for play, learning and interaction.
- Increased risks when safer sleep guidance is not followed which can lead to Sudden Unexpected Death in Infancy (SUDI).

Things you may notice:

- Delays in development.
- You start missing your appointments.
- Concerns about routines, nutrition or safety at home.

A note about safer sleep and coping with crying.

Looking after a baby can be tiring, especially when there are other challenges in family life. Following safer sleep guidance can reduce the risk of sudden infant death. It is important to avoid sleeping with your baby on a sofa / armchair. You should also avoid bed-sharing after drinking alcohol, taking drugs or medication that affects alertness.

Remember the **ICON** message:

I = Infant crying is normal

C = Comforting methods can help

O = It's OK to walk away for a few minutes if your baby is safe

N = Never, ever shake a baby.

If you need support, speak to your Midwife, Health Visitor, GP, Family Hub, or another trusted professional. Visit: www.iconcope.org or www.lullabytrust.org.uk for further advice and guidance.



Early Childhood (2–5 Years)

Children at this age are learning, exploring and developing new skills.

Possible effects include:

- Missing nursery or preschool.
- Delays in speech, language or social skills.
- Difficulty managing feelings.
- Fewer opportunities to play and learn.
- Seeing or hearing things that are not suitable for children.
- Accidentally swallowing alcohol, medication or other substances that have not been stored safely.

What you may notice in your child....

- Tiredness.
- Changes in behaviour.
- Developmental concerns.
- Poor attendance.



School Age (5–12 Years)

As children grow, they become more aware of what is happening around them.

Possible impacts include:

- Worrying about a parent or family member.
- Struggling to concentrate at school.
- Missing school or arriving late.
- Feeling anxious, sad or upset.
- Difficulties with friendships.
- Taking on caring responsibilities at home.

Things children may say about their day:

"I was worried about mum last night."

"I look after my little brother before school."





Adolescence (13+ Years)

Young people may take on more responsibility while also dealing with the challenges of growing up.

Possible effects include:

- More caring responsibilities at home.
- Feeling worried, sad, or not feeling very happy inside.
- Difficulties managing feelings and behaviour.
- Less interest in school or college.
- Drinking alcohol or drugs at a younger age.
- Increased risk-taking behaviour.
- Difficulties in relationships and friendships.

Things you may notice in your child....

- Staying away from others.
- Anger or frustration.
- Missing school.
- Risk-taking behaviour.
- Young caring responsibilities.
- Being bullied.
- Difficulties with friendships.
- Missing appointments.
- Emotional changes.



Hidden Does Not Mean Harmless

Many children show strength and cope well, even during difficult times, but some carry worries that are too big for them. Some children take on responsibilities that are not right for their age. Finding support early can help children stay healthy, safe and happy.

Ask Yourself:

Have I ever talked to my child about alcohol or drugs?

What would they say?

"Hidden Harm is not about blame. It is about understanding challenges and making sure children, young people and parents get the support they need"

Why Early Support Matters

Small steps today can make a big difference tomorrow.

Children and families often do better when they get help early. Getting support at the right time can reduce stress, improve relationships and help families feel happier and healthier. Support is not about blame. It is about helping families get the support they need.

How Early Support Can Help

Pregnancy and Early Childhood.

A child's development starts before they are born. Using alcohol or drugs during pregnancy can increase the chance of problems such as: premature birth, low birth weight, health problems for the baby, withdrawal symptoms after birth.

Support before or during pregnancy can help both parent and baby. Many pregnancies are unplanned, so looking after your health at all times can help.

There is no safe amount, no safe time and no safe type of alcohol or drug use during pregnancy. Any alcohol at any stage can harm a baby's developing brain and body. Please speak with a Pharmacist, Midwife, or GP for medical advice if taking any medications during pregnancy. [Medicines in pregnancy - NHS](#)

Supporting Your Emotional Wellbeing Can...

- Reduce worry and stress.
- Build confidence.
- Help children feel safe and supported.
- Help families cope better with challenges.

Supporting Your Relationships and Family Life Can...

- Strengthen family relationships.
- Create more stable routines
- Improve communication.
- Create a calmer home environment.

Supporting Your Health and Development Can...

- Help children and young people grow and develop well.
- Encourage families to attend health appointments.
- Give children the best start in life.

Supporting Your Learning and Education Can...

- Improve attendance at school and help children concentrate.
- Help children reach their potential.
- Improve confidence and friendships.

"Support is not just about solving problems. It is about helping children and families build healthy and happy futures together."



Understanding the Impact on Children

Children May Show their Feelings in Different Ways

Children do not always tell adults when they are worried. Sometimes their feelings can be seen through changes in their behaviour, emotions, friendships, or daily routines.

These signs do **not always mean** that a parent's alcohol or drug use is the cause, however they can be a reason to stop, think and ask whether a child or young person might need some help.

What's the Harm?

"The children don't notice."

Children often notice much more than adults realise, even when they don't talk about it.

Let's Take a Look...

Meet Aisha's Family

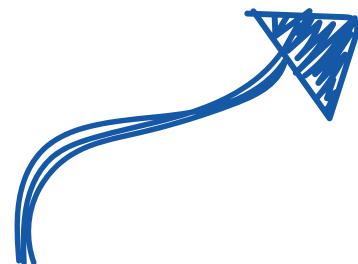
Aisha is 13 years and lives with her dad and younger brother. Most mornings she gets herself ready for school and helps her brother get ready too. Aisha often worries about her Dad's drinking and what things will be like when he gets home. Sometimes family plans change unexpectedly. This makes Aisha feel disappointed and frustrated. She has stopped going to some of her activities because she spends a lot of time worrying about things at home.

Although Aisha looks like she is coping, she keeps many of her feelings to herself.

After talking to a trusted adult at school, Aisha and her family were connected with support services. Her Dad received support for his drinking. Aisha had someone she could talk to about her worries. Over time, family life became more predictable, communication improved and Aisha felt able to enjoy time with friends again.

The important message:

- Small signs can be easy to miss.
- Support can help before problems get bigger.
- Families do not have to face challenges alone.



Young Carers

Some children help look after someone in their family. They may help with jobs around the house, care for younger brothers and sisters, or spend a lot of time worrying about a family member. These children are called young carers. Sometimes young carers take on more responsibilities than children of their age should have.

Ask Yourself:

"Is my child doing jobs or carrying worries because of my, or someone else's alcohol or drug use?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not Sure

If you answered "Yes" or "Not Sure", support may help reduce pressure on your child.

For more information on this topic contact: **01226 770619** (via Targeted Early Help)

"I spent a lot of time worrying about other people. It helped when someone reminded me that it was okay to be a child."

Signs to Look Out For

Noticing Changes Early

Children react to challenges in different ways. Changes in behaviour or emotions do not always mean alcohol or drugs are causing a problem. However, these changes can be a sign that a child needs support, understanding or someone to talk to. Finding these signs early can help prevent bigger problems later on.

What you might notice	Childs voice example	What this might mean
Changes in behaviour	"When you've been drinking, I never know which version of you is coming home."	They may be feeling worried, upset, or unsure how to express their feelings to you.
Difficulties concentrating at school	"My parent woke me up when they got in from the pub, I was worried about them."	Stress or worry may be affecting their ability to focus
Poor school attendance	"I stayed home because I didn't want to leave my parent on their own when they were not feeling well."	They may be struggling emotionally or finding routines difficult
Sleep problems or nightmares	"I keep replaying the argument from last night in my head when I'm trying to sleep."	They may be feeling anxious or unsettled.
Becoming withdrawn	"Every day is so different and unpredictable, it's hard to know where I stand." "I don't invite my friends round anymore because I don't know what things will be like at home."	They may be finding it hard to talk about how they feel.

What you might notice	Childs voice example	What this might mean
Anger, frustration or upset	"People say I'm moody, but they don't know how stressful it is when plans keep changing."	They may be reacting to stress or uncertainty.
Taking on caring responsibilities	"My PE clothes smell of cannabis." "Why do I have to be the one to wash them when the machine is broken"	They may be trying to help more at home than is appropriate for their age.
Feeling tired or lacking energy	"I have so much to remember, I sometimes forget things." "I stay awake listening to make sure everything is okay, I'm exhausted the next day."	Emotional stress can affect physical wellbeing.

A Parents View

Barnsley Parent, receiving support from Barnsley Recovery Steps.

'When I was using drugs I was often angry and easily upset. I argued with people around me including my children. I realise now this shouldn't have happened in front of them. I see why the professionals were worried. I want to be the best Dad, I don't want to go back to using.'

A Quick Reflection

Have any of these examples made you think about your family life?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, what have you noticed?

"The earlier worries are noticed; the sooner support can be found. Small conversations with your children can make a big difference."

Taking Time to Reflect

Taking time to think can help you understand how alcohol or drugs may affect you, your children, and family. This is not about blame. It is about thinking what is working well and what change might help to make it better.

What's the Harm?

"A young person checking on their parent instead of doing homework."

What responsibilities might my child be taking on that I am not always aware of?

Reflection Worksheet

What changes when I drink alcohol or take drugs?

Tick any that apply to you:

- ☐ My mood changes
- ☐ I feel more stressed
- ☐ I become less patient
- ☐ I sleep differently
- ☐ I spend less time with my children
- ☐ Family routines become harder
- ☐ Arguments happen more often
- ☐ I spend more money
- ☐ Other:



What my Child May Notice About Me When I Drink Alcohol or Take Drugs

- "You're louder than usual."
- "You talk a lot more than normal."
- "You seem different somehow."
- "You say things you wouldn't normally say."
- "You swear more when you've been drinking."
- "You stay up much later than me."
- "Sometimes you forget conversations we've had."
- "You don't always listen properly when I'm talking."
- "Our plans sometimes change at the last minute."
- "You seem more emotional than usual."
- "I can tell when you've had a drink, even if you don't think I can."
- "Sometimes I don't know what mood you'll be in."
- "You seem tired the next day."
- "I like it when we spend time together without distractions."
- "At family parties, it is fun. You seem happier but it doesn't stay that way."

Children often see things adults do not realise they notice. Taking a moment to step in their shoes, can help you understand how alcohol or drugs may affect them, in ways that are easy to overlook.

"Every positive step you take, no matter how small, can make a difference".

Talking to Your Child

Talking to Your Child

Honest Conversations Build Trust

Children often know when something is not right, even when nobody talks about it. They may feel worried, confused or frightened. Some children blame themselves for things that are happening. Children need to know that what is happening is not their fault.

You do not have to have all the answers. What matters most is listening and being honest.

Helpful things to say Try using simple, reassuring statements such as:	Try to avoid
"I love you and I care about you."	Making promises you cannot keep: "Everything will be fine tomorrow."
"What is happening is not your fault or your responsibility."	Dismissing their feelings: "Don't worry about it."
"Thank you for telling me how you feel."	Expecting them to take responsibility: "You need to look after your brother/sister."
"It's okay to feel worried, upset, or confused."	Blaming yourself or others in front of them: "It's their fault I react like this"
"You can always talk to me or another trusted adult."	Asking children to keep family problems secret: "This stays between us"
"We are getting support to help things get better."	Threatening them that they will be taken away or separated from their family: "If you don't behave, you'll be taken into care if this carries on"
"You do not have to deal with this on your own."	Comparing siblngs and putting them in the middle of family difficulties: "Why can't you be more like your sister?"

Remember

- Listen more than you speak, make it a discussion not a lecture.
- Keep explanations simple and appropriate for your child's age.
- Reassure them that they are loved.
- Remind them it is not their responsibility or fault.
- Make sure they know who they can talk to.

My Reassuring Message

Write one reassuring sentence you could say to your child:

Takeaway Message

Children do not need perfect answers. They need honesty, reassurance and support, knowing adults are there to help keep them safe.

Reducing Harm at Home

Small Changes Can Make a Big Difference

This page is an opportunity to recognise your family's strengths and think about small changes that could make home life even safer, calmer and more predictable.

No parent is perfect. What matters is recognising your strengths and making small positive changes. Even small changes can help children feel safer and more supported.

Small change, big difference

Small change: Can you spend time together each week, where you are well and fully present (if needs be, manage your withdrawal symptoms and keep safe).

Big difference: Your child gets quality time with you and builds happy memories.

Small change: Spend time talking to your child about their day without distractions.

Big difference: Your child feels listened to and valued and that you are interested in what is happening in their life.

Small change: Support your child to attend activities they enjoy.

Big difference: They can build confidence, friendships and routines outside the home.

Small change: Store medication/alcohol and drugs safely.

Big difference: Children are safer from harm.

What is Already Working Well?

Take a moment to recognise your strengths.

Three things you already do that help your child feel safe, loved or supported:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Remember: children benefit from lots of small positive moments, such as listening, spending time together, attending activities, sharing meals, or simply being there when they need you.

Family Wellbeing Check-In

Which of these are strengths in our family?

- ☐ We spend time together when we can.
- ☐ My child knows who they can talk to when they are worried.
- ☐ We have some routines that help family life run smoothly.
- ☐ I know where to get support if I need it.
- ☐ My child knows they are loved and cared for.
- ☐ We are taking positive steps, however small.

One area I would like to strengthen is:

What is one small change you could make this week to help your child feel even safer, more supported or more connected?

Closing Message

"Children do not need perfect parents. They need caring adults who keep trying, build on their strengths and ask for help when they need it."

Getting Support

What Support Can Offer

Emotional Support

Helping you feel listened to, understood and not alone.

- A safe space to talk without judgement.
- Support to manage stress, worry or feeling overwhelmed.
- Help to build confidence and self-esteem.
- Opportunities to connect with others who have had the same experiences.
- Support to strengthen family relationships.

"Sometimes the most important thing support offers is knowing that someone is there to help."

Practical Support

Helping families manage everyday challenges.

- Family routines.
- Planning for difficult situations
- Housing or money worries.
- Parenting advice and family support.
- Early Help support to prevent problems escalating.
- Guidance on talking to children about difficult issues.
- Youth Services and positive activities available.

"Small practical changes can make a big difference to family life."

Specialist Support - Extra help from Experts

Providing expert help when it is needed for yourself, your family or your children.

- Confidential drug and alcohol support.
- Recovery and treatment services.
- Support for children affected by Hidden Harm.
- Whole-family support or evidence based programs such as Moving Parents and Children Together Programme (MPACT).
- Young carers support.
- Maternity, health visiting, GP's and 0-19 services.
- Emotional wellbeing and Mental Health support.

"Extra help from experts, is there to work alongside families, not to judge them."

A Message to Take Away

Every family needs support at times. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness, failure or being a bad parent. It is a sign that you care enough to make positive changes. Whatever your circumstances, support is available, and taking the first step today could make a lasting difference for you and your child.

Local Support Services in Barnsley

No family should have to deal with challenges alone. If alcohol or drugs are affecting you, your child, or your family, help and support is available. Services can offer advice, treatment, emotional support, and practical help.

Seeking support is not a sign of failure. It is a positive step towards creating a healthier, safer, and more stable future for yourself and your loved ones. Many services understand that drinking alcohol or taking drugs can have an impact on the whole family and offer support for parents, children, young people, and carers. From specialist recovery services and family support programmes to early help, family hubs, maternity services, health visitors, GP, school nurses, help for emotions and mental health, young carers support, to name a few, are all here at every stage of your family's journey.

The directory provides information about local services, who they support, and how to access them. You may find that one service is right for you, or that several services can work together to provide the support your family needs.

Drug, Alcohol, Smoking and Vaping Support

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
Barnsley Recovery Steps	Treatment, recovery support and peer support for adults affected by alcohol or drug use	Phone: 01226 779066 Email: brs.referrals@waythrough.org.uk www.barnsleyrecoverysteps.org.uk
SPACE	Young people's drug and alcohol support service offering one-to-one support	Phone: 01226 779066 Text: 07483 367805 https://barnsleyrecoverysteps.org.uk/support/young-peoples-support/
Smokefree	Support to stop smoking	Telephone (free from landlines): 0800 612 0011 Telephone (free from most mobiles): 0330 660 1166 Text: Text YSF to 80800 for a callback service

Family and Hidden Harm Support

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
M-PACT	Whole-family support for families affected by parental substance misuse	Phone: 01226 779066 Email: brs.referrals@waythrough.org.uk www.barnsleyrecoverysteps.org.uk
Early Help	Parenting support, family support, targeted interventions and coordinated support plans	Phone: 0800 0345 340 Email: earlyhelp@barnsley.gov.uk

Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Support

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
Compass Be Mental Health Support Team	Emotional wellbeing support within schools	01904 666371 info.barnsleymhst@compass-uk.org
CAMHS	Specialist child and adolescent mental health support	01226 107377 barnsleycypmhrequestsupport@swyt.nhs.uk

Kooth	Free online counselling and wellbeing support for young people	https://www.kooth.com/
Childline	Confidential advice and support for children and young people	0800 1111
Night OWLS	Evening and overnight emotional wellbeing support	0800 148 8244 Text: 07984 376950 Chat online through the website: www.wynightowls.org.uk
Papyrus HOPELINE247	Suicide prevention and crisis support for young people	0300 102 2470 https://www.papyrus-uk.org/
Chilypep	Early support mental health and emotional wellbeing hub for young people aged 11–25 in Barnsley,	01226 213 123 HOME@chilypep.org.uk
SWYPT	24/7 Mental Health Crisis Support for Adults	01226 645000
NHS	Barnsley Talking Therapies 16+	01226 644900

Crisis Support (Any Age)

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
Samaritans	24/7 emotional support	116 123
SHOUT	Free confidential crisis text support	Text SHOUT to 85258

Health Services

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
0-19 Health Visiting Service	Child health, development and family support	01226 774411
Smoking in Pregnancy Service	Stop smoking support during pregnancy and early parenthood	01226 431621

GP Practices iheart Barnsley NHS 111	Non-emergency medical care Out of hours GP appointments Free non emergency medical helpline	Contact your own GP Surgery 01226 242419 111
Midwifery Services	Pregnancy and early parenthood support	Barnsley Hospital: 01226 730000
Spectrum	Free and confidential sexual health and contraception support and relationship advice	0800 055 6442 Barnsley.SH@spectrum-cic.nhs.uk

Young Carers Family Support and Universal Services

Service	What can they help with?	Contact details
Young Carers Service	Support for children and young people with caring responsibilities	01226 770619 (via Targeted Early Help)
IDAS	Domestic abuse advice and support	03000 110 110
Citizens Advice Barnsley	Debt, welfare and financial advice	0800 144 8848
Berneslai Homes	Housing and tenancy support	01226 787878
Self-Neglect and Hoarding Service	Support around self-neglect, hoarding and property concerns	01226 773555 safer@barnsley.gov.uk
BSARCS	Specialist support for people affected by rape, sexual abuse, sexual assault or sexual violence	01226 320140 info@bsarcs.org
Byouth	Early intervention and youth support for young people aged 11–19	byouthenquiries@barnsley.gov.uk or calling 01226 753406

A Final Thought

If you have reached the end of this workbook, take a moment to recognise something important. You have already taken a positive step.

Being a parent is not about being perfect. It is about being there for your child, learning, growing, and doing your best, even when life feels hard.

Alcohol and drugs can affect families in ways that are not always easy to see. But with support, things can get better. Relationships can improve. Families can recover. Children can thrive. Every conversation matters. Every small change matters. There is no shame in asking for help. Reaching out is one of the strongest things a parent can do.

Your child does not need a perfect parent. They need love, safety, support and hope. And every day is an opportunity to take one step closer towards that.

Change is possible. Support is available. You are not alone.

