

Parenting support toolkit for alcohol and other drug workers

What is the *Parenting support toolkit*?

The *Parenting support toolkit* is a resource to help you - alcohol and other drug (AOD) workers - address the vital role that parenting plays in your clients' lives.

The Victorian Parenting Centre and Odyssey House Victoria, with funding from the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health, have jointly developed this toolkit to support you.

Why is this toolkit important?

The toolkit aims to help you provide better outcomes for your clients and the best care for their children.

This brochure provides an overview of the toolkit and describes how it can be used in drug treatment agencies to assist parents.

Why talk about parenting?

Most of your clients will be affected by parenting - either as current parents, future parents, or parents who don't currently have contact with their children.

An understanding of the impact of parenting can be enormously valuable to AOD workers. It can improve your drug treatment outcomes and help prevent cycles of intergenerational problems.

Discussing a client's parental responsibilities and stresses can be crucial in assessing and responding to their drug problems. It's part of good drug treatment.

Who benefits? You and your clients' families.

Parents of all shapes and sizes

This toolkit can be used with all parents - whatever their social and cultural background or circumstances. Pregnant clients and those with children aged up to 18 years will benefit from your use of the toolkit. So too will their children.

Clients who are considering having children may also benefit. It's important to check with all clients to see how parenting might be affecting them.

AOD workers of all shapes and sizes

The toolkit has also been designed for AOD workers within different environments across Victoria. It has something for all types and levels of client contact - from minimal through to intensive client interactions, and for services offering harm-reduction to abstinence-based programs.

Workers who will find the kit useful include those offering needle syringe exchange, outreach and counselling, pharmacotherapy, withdrawal, family support, and residential drug treatment services.

How can talking about parenting help?

Parenting is enormously significant to clients attending drug treatment services. Having children can be a prime motivator for changing alcohol and other drug-taking behaviours. The challenges of parenting can also contribute to the maintenance of problematic drug use and can impact upon the likelihood and the severity of any relapse.

Parenting issues can also impact upon your client's engagement in treatment. You can minimise the risk of treatment goals not being met by identifying parenting issues and responsibilities early on in your work with clients, and then tailoring your interventions to suit. You may also need to provide clients with the appropriate information, support or referrals to other professional services to ensure that clients are in the best position to work on their drug problems with you.

A positive approach

Parenting can be a tricky subject to introduce because it is an emotional issue. Many parents feel concerned about being judged. Some may be worried about the worst case scenario of having a child removed by Child Protection. You will be able to use the resources, information and ideas in the toolkit to:

- alleviate your client's anxiety
- turn discussions about parenting into positive outcomes
- reduce the need for referrals to tertiary services such as Child Protection.

Maintaining a trusting and positive therapeutic relationship while doing this can sometimes be difficult. The approach outlined in the toolkit will make these conversations easier. Above all, you should be able to engage parents in an active conversation about their parenting role and maintain a positive and trusting relationship with them.

How does the toolkit work?

The toolkit enhances the existing abilities and resources of AOD workers by applying them to parenting issues. The toolkit is not a complete parenting program but you can use it to:

- introduce parenting issues in a way that is easy and non-threatening
- identify the parenting support that clients need, when they need it
- respond to clients' needs for support by providing information, guidance or referrals to specialist services and programs.

The toolkit provides a lot of information, tips and resources, plus a practice guide for reflecting on your work with parents. With a change in approach and support from drug treatment agencies, the toolkit will help you problem solve around the subject of parenting, in a similar way to health, housing, relationships and vocation.

The toolkit has four main components: three booklets and a quick reference card. Booklet 1 is designed to help you consider parenting in your work. It introduces parenting and its relationship to an individual's wellbeing and ability to achieve change. Booklets 2 and 3 provide complementary information, tools and resources to help you achieve this task. The Quick reference card will help you to find information in the toolkit at a glance.



For AOD workers

You don't need to be a parenting expert to help a client with their parenting issues.

Hopefully you will use this toolkit to build upon and strengthen your existing approach, knowledge and skills and apply these to parenting issues. This may require a shift in what you do around assessment, treatment goals, interventions and referrals. Of course, it is important not to work beyond your level of expertise and use the support of others to help you achieve this task.

The toolkit will help you build on your client's strengths and assist them to identify and achieve their parenting goals - whether that includes determining whether a parent needs information, support or referral to another service or professional.

The toolkit can also help you to address any parenting problems that could hinder your client's drug treatment. By incorporating the toolkit into your standard practices, you will be able to:

- identify your clients' parenting needs
- provide practical suggestions and referrals to help your clients address their parenting issues or concerns about a child's wellbeing
- build on your clients' strengths so they achieve their parenting goals
- add new skills and resources when your clients need them
- reduce any distress or relapse triggers that might be affecting your clients

- assist clients to manage their drug use and minimise any associated harms
- ensure the wellbeing of your clients' children.

It is important to remember that the toolkit is not intended to replace a comprehensive parenting program or replace the role of parenting specialists.

For agencies

The benefits of considering parenting issues flow through to agencies. Children often provide a client with the greatest motivation to seek help. Guilt, stress, lack of support and grief associated with parenting can all contribute to continued dependence on drugs.

Agencies that encourage the integration of parenting issues into standard practice are likely to generate more successful outcomes for their clients. This includes managing client drug use and minimising associated harm.

Best results will require some changes to current work practices. With some resources, training and support, you can help AOD workers and families to gain the most from this resource. You can give your workers:

- flexibility, resources and clinical support so they can explore the toolkit and incorporate it into their work practices and procedures
- support in making small changes that will result in significant benefits to clients and their children

- time to explore the toolkit and to identify parts that are relevant to their work
- time to include parenting issues in assessment and to respond to issues or make referrals as necessary
- access to supervision and consultation from senior staff or practitioners with experience in providing parenting support when trialling new approaches
- further support by seeking additional training and funding to more fully incorporate family- and parent-inclusive work into worker practice.



How do I use the toolkit?

The *Parenting support toolkit* includes three booklets and a quick reference card, all colour-coded for easy identification. Booklet 1 and the Quick reference card contain the primary information. Together, these enable you to quickly improve outcomes for clients and their children. Booklets 2 and 3 provide information and resources to extend your work with parents.

Booklet 1: Exploring parenting issues

Exploring parenting issues describes how to include parenting issues in a broader client assessment, and outlines the importance of the parenting role to an individual's wellbeing and ability to achieve change. By addressing parenting issues as set out in Booklet 1, workers will be better able to help clients minimise parenting stress and help to prevent drug relapses. The booklet contains a practice guide to help AOD workers reflect on how they can introduce or strengthen parenting as part of their standard practice.

Quick reference card

The *Quick reference card* contains a simple summary of the process for including parenting in your work with clients. It also contains a list of regional parenting services and helplines and a 'quick find' navigational guide to the toolkit.

Booklet 2: Tools

This booklet contains background information and a range of assessment tools to help you determine what parenting support or skills your clients may need to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children. These can enhance your ability to identify the physical, emotional and social needs of children and to assess parenting skills and resources.

Booklet 3: Service and resource guide

The *Service and resource guide* outlines: available statewide child and parenting related services; specialist alcohol and drug family programs; and Centrelink and Family Tax benefits and entitlements. This booklet also includes resources and links on parenting and children, and information on how to effectively use these resources.

Where to from here?

To start using the toolkit, read through Booklet 1 and the Quick reference guide. The suggestions and practice guide will help you to immediately start considering parenting issues in your assessment and treatment processes.

The entire toolkit is also available for download online. You can also download individual tools and resources to adapt these to your agency's practices.

For more information about the toolkit, visit www.health.vic.gov.au/aod/pubs/index.htm or telephone (03) 9096 5534.

It is hoped that this toolkit contributes to your work with parents. Over time, you can adapt and build up your toolkit by identifying and establishing relationships with local parenting, child and family services, and by adding your own collection of resources that are relevant to your work and treatment setting.

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