

Facilitator Guide

Supporting Families Affected by Substance Use

[**Access Online Learning Modules**](#)



Before proceeding, plan for the following:

Some participants may find it somewhat stressful to explore this content. Acknowledge that everyone has their own histories and life experiences that influence how they take in, handle, and process certain topics. Let participants know that they may signal you if any of the conversations feel upsetting. Allow anyone who needs to take a break do so as needed.

Icebreaker

Supply a slip of paper to each participant. Provide a few minutes for them to write their responses to this question:

“When you have a difficult day, what are three things you can do (other than drink or use a substance) to make yourself feel content and/or happy?”

Then invite them to interact with each other while walking around the room and try to find at least 2 other people who identified a similar strategy to one of theirs. Provide about 5 minutes for this activity, then debrief by generating a list of the ideas they came up with.

If virtual, use break out rooms to group them for the conversation.

In this module, they learned about the ways that use of substances can affect those who develop disorders. It's useful to be aware of healthy coping mechanisms that people can use when stressed. They can share these ideas with families to assist them in practicing more adaptive strategies.

Review Learning Objectives

After having completed this module, home visitors should:

- Have a basic understanding of the factors that contribute to addiction and how substance use disorders impair thinking and decision making.
- Be able to create a plan for sharing information about this topic with all families as a comprehensive approach to both prevent and respond to problematic use of substances.
- Know about screening tools that may be used to identify risk of substance use.
- Be aware of the stigma that those with substance use disorders often face, and understand that the resulting feelings of shame present barriers to treatment and recovery.
- Be prepared to provide a compassionate and effective response to an individual affected by substance use.
- Be ready to assist a family to navigate the available system of care.



Acknowledge Limitations

Completion of this professional learning experience will not qualify home visitors to treat this disorder. It will enable them to provide information, recognize when an intervention may be warranted, provide a compassionate response, and have a greater awareness of treatment options.

Activate Prior Knowledge

In the module, participants learned about the brain science that explains how substance use can lead to addiction and affect a person's ability to stop use after problems occur.

Prompt the group to recall the ways that substances affect the thinking, emotions, and motivation of those who use them.

Explain Term

In the module introduction, there is comment that "When a parent is addicted, the lizard brain places the drug to be the most important thing." Ask the participants to discuss what they think was meant by this. If they are unsure, you could supply an explanation:

When a human brain is hijacked by substances, the person is not able to do his/her best thinking. People sometimes describe this to thinking like a lizard, an animal with limited brain function.

The important takeaway is that when we understand how substance use may be affecting the individual's ability to process complex information, we can have a bit more compassion for why it's difficult for them to make sound decisions.

Think-Pair- Share

Post or read aloud this statement:

"A person with a substance use disorder can NOT simply choose to stop using."

Have participants identify something (other than a necessity) that they would sorely miss if they had to give it up. (Provide a few examples to get them started such as watching TV and eating sweets.) Have them imagine what it would be like to go without that item or experience, without even an occasional indulgence.

Ask them to think how it would feel if:

People around you were still going to enjoy this thing in your presence but you were expected to not join in.



Invite them to turn to a partner and discuss.

If meeting virtually, assign partners and use the chat feature for conversation.

Then wrap up the conversation with the following message:

Although a true addiction would be much harder to control due to physical dependence and chemical changes in the brain, try to remember this exercise when feeling frustrated with someone who is affected by substance use and making decisions that you think may be harmful.

Whole Group View/Discuss Video

Stigma

A campaign was launched called “Stop the Shame,” which released two public service announcements aimed at breaking the stigma of addiction. The videos can be difficult to watch but are effective at conveying how people living with addiction can be, and often are treated. One of the videos was included in the module. You might re-watch that one or the other version, or just discuss the participants’ reactions to it.

Then use the following prompts to lead a discussion about stigma.

- What have you learned about stigma?
- Why do you think it persists?
- How does stigma affect those with SUDs?

Personal Reflection

Provide a minute for quiet reflection. Invite participants to:

Explore and acknowledge your own implicit bias and the effects your beliefs have on your relationship with a family affected by a substance use disorder.

Walk About

Some strategies to reduce stigma were identified in the module. Write each of the prompts on the following page on large pieces of paper and post on walls around the room ([or use break out rooms if virtual](#)). Divide participants into 4 groups and assign them each to a strategy. Have them gather around their poster and discuss their thoughts and experiences with that particular idea. After ample time for discussion, rotate the groups so they can consider additional strategies.



Strategy 1:

Share what you know about how substances affect the brain. Educate the families you work with and share this information with other people you know, as appropriate.

- How aware do you think most families are about this issue?
- Where does their current knowledge come from?
- How do you weave this topic into conversation?

Strategy 2:

Use respectful language and challenge inaccurate or disparaging comments when you encounter them. Also, check in with people about which terms they are comfortable with.

- What is considered appropriate is ever changing. How do you keep current on best practices?
- Families differ in their use of terminology. How do you learn about what they know and introduce accurate terms without causing confusion?
- Be aware that hand-outs might not contain the most current terms. (Even some of the national organizations have the term “substance abuse” in their names.)

Strategy 3:

Work to think more positively about families affected by substance use.

- What are some of the reasons that bias exists?
- How do you keep sight of a family's strengths when there may be a multitude of issues that concern you?

Strategy 4:

Learn more about harm reduction strategies and carefully consider their potential value to individuals and society.

- Identify some examples of these.
- Why are many people opposed to harm reduction when it comes to substance use?
- Do you think opinions might change with education about this disease?

Whole Group Discussion

Talking to all Families

Children whose parents or caregivers use drugs or alcohol are at an increased risk of short- and long-term consequences, including medical problems and behavioral challenges. In the module, it was recommended that home visitors might ask a parent to consider a few possible scenarios related to their decision to use.



Have participants recall some of the potential issues related to substance use that could jeopardize a child's safety or healthy development. Ask how they might broach such a conversation with families. It might be helpful to prompt them to recall a conversation they've had with a parent about safety (e.g., bed-sharing or bathtub supervision). How might they employ a similar strategy to this conversation?

Small Group Activity

Within small groups ask participants to work together to:

Develop an "elevator speech" – a simple but compelling explanation that you could use when sharing information with families about the effects of substance use. Work with your teams to identify the most important information to include. Then write a concise script that you think would be effective.

Have each group choose a reporter to read their message to the large group.

Use Quote as a Prompt

When Use Is a Problem

Post or read aloud the following quote from the module:

"You may think, 'How can they pick up when they have a child?' but their brain isn't reasoning that way. Their brain is making that child unimportant and making that next fix very important for survival."

- Ceci Iliff, Concerned Family Member

Tell participants: If you have encountered families struggling with substance use, it's probably one of the more challenging aspects of your work. Take a moment to recall some of the feelings this work has evoked in you.

Think-Pair-Share

Post the following list for all to see.

- Why won't they open the door today?
- Why isn't this mom more engaged?
- Why can't he recognize his potential?
- Why doesn't she put her child's needs first?



Ask if they have ever had any of these thoughts about someone with an SUD. Invite them to share other frustrations they may have experienced in this work. Then have participants work with a partner. Either choose one of those on the list, or identify their own frustration. Then work together to reframe the idea from a place of understanding based on what they have learned about this disorder.

Whole Group Discussion

Prevalence

Ask participants: Based on your experience, how widespread of a problem do you think a family member's substance use is for children?

Then share the following:

Many young children are affected by a family member's substance use. For example, more than 10 percent of U.S. children live with a parent with alcohol problems. Excessive drinking or use of other substances can lead to cognitive impairment, distorted perception, and poor judgment. Parents who engage in this behavior may have diminished capacity to keep their young children safe and to provide them with the care they need to learn and develop to their full capacity.

Share the graphic "Caregiver States" that appears on the last page of this guide and ask participants to consider the implications for their work.

Whole Group

Treatment

Invite participants to recall some of the potential barriers to treatment that were listed in the module. These include:

- lack of available treatment options
- long waiting lists
- lack of transportation and childcare
- lack of insurance or other payment difficulties
- fear of losing custody of their children
- fear of confidentiality violation
- prior negative experiences with treatment



Small groups

In small groups, have home visitors share some of the strategies they have used to assist families to overcome the types of barriers listed on the previous page.

Whole Group

Ongoing Support

Post the slide "The Home Visitor's Role" found at the end of this Guide. Have participants identify the strategies they are already utilizing (such as supporting self-regulation and parent-child attachment). Reinforce the idea that home visitors have a crucial role and do have competence in areas that are essential for families affected by substance use.

Whole Group Discussion

Hospital Experiences

Have participants share about the protocols (rooming in vs. NICU) that hospitals in their families' communities are using to support newborns exposed to substances.

Remind them that:

Families are often unaware that they have options. Home visitors can provide non-judgmental support to pregnant women and assist them to access appropriate medical care.

Partner Activity

Developing a Plan of Safe Care

Provide a template and allow time for participants to work in pairs to practice creating a plan. One in the role of a mother, one in the role of a home visitor.

Small Groups

Have participants discuss some of the strategies they could use to support a family to care for an infant affected by prenatal exposure to substances.



Additional topics for discussion:

Concurrent Disorders

Mental health disorders and other stressors have potential relationships to problematic substance use.

Certain drugs can cause people with an addiction to experience one or more symptoms of a mental health problem. Mental health problems can sometimes lead to alcohol or drug use if substances are used as a form of self-medication. Furthermore, mental and substance use disorders share some underlying causes, including changes in brain composition, genetic vulnerabilities, and early exposure to stress or trauma.

Teen Substance Use

Adolescent use of alcohol and marijuana is common. Unfortunately, this population is the most vulnerable to addiction. Research indicates that substance use during the teenage years could interfere with normal adolescent brain development and increase the risk of developing a use disorder.

Behavioral Therapies

Home visitors may not understand the use of behavioral therapies. In some cases, these approaches may seem at odds with their own philosophies. However, these therapies have been found to be very effective in addiction treatment.

- Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) teaches those recovering from addiction to find connections between their thoughts, feelings and actions and increase awareness of how these things impact recovery.
- Contingency management uses motivational incentives and tangible rewards to help a person become abstinent from drugs or alcohol.

Gender Differences

Males and females are affected differently by substances, which is why gender-specific treatment programs are beneficial and many people prefer them.

According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, research has shown that women often use drugs differently, respond to drugs differently, and can have unique obstacles to effective treatment as simple as not being able to find child care or being prescribed treatment that has not been adequately tested on women.



Individual reflection

Encourage Self-Care:

Take a moment to reflect on the steps you are currently taking to address your own self-care to avoid the burnout that may accompany this work.

Action Plan

Invite participants to:

Identify 3 specific strategies you'll try in your work with families on this topic. Then, make a plan for something you will do for your own self-care in the next week.

Closing

Summarize the good news:

Although this is a difficult and troubling topic, there are reasons to be hopeful as you support a family affected by a substance use disorder:

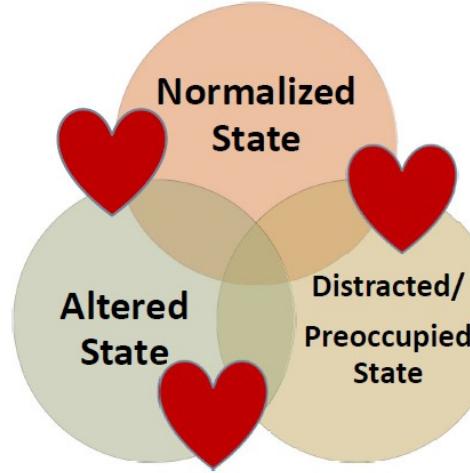
- There are effective treatments.
- There are various program options designed to support families.
- With the proper supports, people can, and do, get better.
- Families and children are resilient.
- There are things you can do to help.

This document was created by the Center for Early Childhood Education at Eastern Connecticut State University for the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood. It is part of "Supporting Families Affected by Substance Use," a learning module for home visitors.



Caregiver States

Most children in substance use environments live in a world where caregiver floats between three states while caregiving



- **Normalized**
 - Caregiver tries to function normally but maintains high levels of toxic stress and guilt – may be capable of meeting child's needs but capacity is limited
- **Distracted/Preoccupied**
 - Caregiver may be focused on obtaining substances or managing relationships related to their substance use; may have some ability to meet child's needs but highly limited
- **Altered**
 - Caregiver unable to monitor child's safely and respond to child's basic needs

Melissa Mendez, 2019

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The Home Visitor's Role

Although most home visitors do not provide treatment for substance use disorders, you still have an important role. The best way for you to support families is to:

- Help them understand how their use affects young children
- Treat them with compassion and the understanding that SUD is a disease
- Utilize motivational interviewing to support their wellness
- Refer them for an evaluation when appropriate
- Help them access other needed resources (housing, etc.) to reduce their stress
- Coordinate services with treatment providers (if the parent permits)
- Help them explore and develop healthy coping strategies
- Assist them in improving parental consistency
- Support co-regulation