

Social work and substance use: teaching the basics

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This guide to teaching and learning has been written for lecturers and tutors working within social work education. The guidance and activities can be used at both qualifying and post qualifying levels and across a range of modules and practice learning opportunities. It is not intended to be a prescriptive guide, simply a way to support social work educators seeking to increase or consolidate their current teaching and learning in relation to alcohol and other drugs.

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Additional materials (available to download from SWAP)

Learning and teaching digest: Integrating substance use teaching into the social work curriculum.

[Case studies: teaching substance use in social work education.](#)

[Helpsheet: using substance use research tools to promote learning and teaching.](#)

[Information sheet: domestic violence and substance use in the social work curriculum.](#)

[Information sheet: key resources for teaching on substance misuse.](#)

[Helpsheet: involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education.](#)

See page 24 for URL addresses for these documents

Introduction and overview

People use substances for a range of positive and negative reasons. Usually the use of alcohol and other drugs does little or no harm, however the excessive use of substances can cause harm both to the individual and those around them. Responding to such harms has been seen as the remit of health and criminal justice agencies and this is reflected in Government policy and practice, but in recent years there has been growing concern about the social harms related to excessive substance use. In particular calls for better recognition of the harms problematic substance use can cause to children, young people, families and communities have been high on the political agenda.

Social workers are on the front line of responding to social harms and providing support and interventions to protect and safeguard children and adults. Evidence shows that social workers from a range of specialist areas of practice are increasingly encountering problematic alcohol and other drug use among their service users but they have rarely received the training to equip them to intervene.

Complementing a political shift of focus to the social harms of substance use, consultations with newly qualified and experienced social workers have identified areas of training need and lack of confidence among social workers when approaching substance related issues (Galvani and Forrester 2008, Galvani and Hughes 2008).

In preparing this guidance a range of individuals (including practitioners from substance use services and social services, professional representative groups, service users and academics) were consulted on the key topics required for basic training on substance use (Galvani and Forrester 2009). Key messages for the teaching process emerging from this consultation included reminders that:

- Students are likely to have personal experiences of substance use within their family and friendship networks.
- Feelings can run high and views can be quite rigid. It is important to openly acknowledge this at the start of teaching.
- Reminders about ground rules on respect and confidentiality are important.
- Educators need to remind people to share personal experience ONLY if they are absolutely sure they want to and have dealt with the feelings and thoughts this might raise for them.
- There are many stereotypes around alcohol and drugs relating to ethnic origin and skin colour – use the group's experience to debunk some of these myths.
- Educators should allow plenty of time for discussions and activities.
- Educators should make sure they have lists of resources available, e.g. local alcohol and drug services (these may be helpful to them in their professional roles and also in their personal lives).
- Educators should be explicit about availability at break times and after teaching if people want to discuss things further.

In addition to helping educators address these points this guide is designed to support the teaching of the core substance use topics which were identified through the consultation process for this project.

These core topics are:

- Topic 1. Values, beliefs and attitudes
- Topic 2. Reasons people use substances
- Topic 3. Basic awareness of alcohol and other drugs
- Topic 4. Raising the issue/asking the right questions
- Topic 5. Assessment and risk
- Topic 6. Substance use interventions: what there is and how to access them
- Topic 7. The family and substance use and misuse

Examples of teaching activities have been provided for each key topic. However the list is not exhaustive and the examples used may well be relevant across other topics. A selection of the types of activities recommended and rationale for this are below:

- **Reflective exercises** – these are particularly valuable for debunking myths and ingrained stereotypes about people with alcohol and other drug problems. The secrecy and shame surrounding substance use and problematic use is maintained by such stereotypes. Reflection on messages we receive about alcohol and drug use and how these potentially impact our practice are therefore important.
- **Role playing** – two areas that social workers have identified as needing more support around are a) how to ask and talk about substance use and b) how to respond if people deny or minimise their problem. Role plays help people to explore what works and doesn't in terms of skills and how to ask the right questions in the right way. Rather than remaining a conceptual understanding, putting the understanding into words and 'having a go' is key for confidence building.
- **Mini case scenarios for discussion** – case scenarios can be particularly valuable in helping students to identify their own assumptions and stereotypes, getting them to think about the type of intervention they might use, or additional information they would need, as well as considering the wider needs of the person in their home and social environment. They can also be helpful in prompting students to draw on lecture material and research evidence previously presented or gleaned from self-directed learning. The case scenarios could be developed with substance use specialists of different kinds.
- **Quizzes** – these are particularly valuable for topics including drug and alcohol awareness. Many quizzes are available on line and can be downloaded or printed out (just ensure the web based source is a reliable one linked to a national agency). Also quizzes provide a more interactive way of teaching law and policy, and prevalence data. They can be done as 'best guesses' or multiple choice. Best done in pairs or small groups to facilitate discussion.
- **Exercises/tasks** – self-directed learning tasks or group tasks or exercises can focus specifically on a particular area of substance use, eg. take 10 minutes and write down the questions you might ask someone whose substance use concerns you, or split the class into small groups and assign each group the task of considering the impact of substances on a) mental ill health, or b) older people, or c) parenting, or d) children and so on.
- **Essay questions** – alcohol and other drug use is such a cross cutting issue that no matter what the subject being taught there are essays and discussion questions that can be linked to it, eg. 'what is the relationship between poverty and substance use?', 'in what ways can human growth and development be affected by substance use in the family?', 'what contributions have the different social science disciplines made in the development of responses to substance problems?', 'explore the legal and policy frameworks surrounding drug use and the extent to which these are politically or scientifically driven?' and so on.

- **Involving substance use specialists** –Substance use services have also got better at involving and consulting with service users and a number of service user groups should be operating in all regions in the UK. Similarly local drug and alcohol services will usually be very willing to teach a range of subjects from basic awareness to types of services available and how to refer to them/ work with them. (See the [SWAP helpsheet: involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education](#) for how to involve service user specialists.)
- **Accessing specialist resources** - the advances in technology have led to an increasing number of 'short films' or DVDs made with, for or about people who have suffered their own or someone else's substance use. (See the [SWAP information sheet: key resources for teaching substance use](#) for a list of some of those currently available.)

The guide also points educators to key resources. The websites below are just a small selection of the numerous websites available. They have been selected because they are either written from a social work perspective or are established and reliable websites run by national agencies. They are regularly updated with research, policy and practice information. The websites can be used by staff and students for information and for links to other resources. Five to consult are:

- www.swalcdrugs.com – website specifically for social workers wanting information on alcohol and drugs within a social work context.
- www.alcoholconcern.org.uk – website for national charity Alcohol Concern. Hosts a lot of factual information, policy information, factsheets on specific issues, eg. women, health, domestic violence, a specialist library and a directory of services by region and town.
- www.drugscope.org.uk – website for national charity DrugScope. Hosts a lot of factual and policy information, a database of research, a specialist library, a directory of services by region and town, and links to its publications and leaflets/posters.
- www.adfam.org.uk – website for national Charity Adfam that works with families affected by someone's alcohol or drug use. Provides news and project updates, hosts a database of support services and provides some stories of people who have a loved one with a drug or alcohol problem.
- <http://drugs.homeoffice.gov.uk/> - Government's website for drugs primarily. Contains news, policy updates, events listings, organisation search and specialist information on current policy priorities, eg. young people.

Topic 1: Values, beliefs and attitudes

Why it's important for educators to address values, beliefs and attitudes

Principles that underpin social work practice include non-judgmental attitudes, empathy and advocacy, yet often people who experience alcohol or other drug problems are viewed as less worthy and less deserving than those with other physical or mental health support needs. Such prejudicial views are reinforced by the media, our own families and friends and often our cultures and religions. Overcoming this prejudice is therefore not a simple task and it needs particular consideration.

Key messages to convey

- People with alcohol or other drug problems and people living with those individuals are often stigmatized and feel shameful about the substance use.
- This is compounded if people have made unsuccessful attempts to change their substance use as it can serve to heighten their sense of failure and self efficacy.
- Additional stigma and shame is experienced by people whose culture or religious beliefs openly condemn alcohol or other drug consumption.
- Disclosing something you are ashamed of is hard and is particularly concerning if you don't know how the person you are talking to is going to respond.
- It is extremely important to reflect on our value base and prejudices about people who use or have problems with alcohol and drugs.
- People who have alcohol and drug problems are no less deserving of an empathic and supportive service than anyone else with support needs.

Learning and teaching examples

Values exercise (30 to 75 minutes depending on group numbers and discussion time allowed)

Ask students to get into pairs and discuss the messages they have received from their immediate family, e.g. parents, grandparents, extended family. Ask them to consider how they think these messages have been shaped by their:

- cultural heritage
- religion
- personal experiences of substance use, be they your own or that of family and friends
- media and external influences

Take feedback within the large group to allow students to share experiences and learning. Ask for volunteers only, reinforcing the sensitive nature of disclosing family or personal experiences. Encourage discussion about the teachings of different religions on alcohol and other drugs and whether alcohol and other drug use is viewed in the same way or differently depending on the substance, gender, age etc. Ask about the reality versus the ideal. Finish off in the large group by drawing up a list on a flipchart and inviting people to call out the potential impact of these messages on a) people's thoughts and behaviour and b) their social work practice. Ask people to spend time outside the classroom reflecting on their own learning and potential positive and negative implications for their practice.

Role play (approx. 45 mins)

- With the full group ask people to give their views on what it must feel like to disclose something they feel embarrassed or ashamed about to a social worker they've only just met. Write their responses on a flipchart.
- Ask the group to give their views on how they should approach working with someone who may be disclosing something embarrassing or shameful, i.e. what might they do or say in practice to make it easier? Responses could be theoretical, e.g. 'empowering practice' but must also be applied, e.g. 'I'd say "I'm not going to judge you" '. Ensure verbal and non-verbal communication has been considered.
- Ask each member of the group to think of something they have done in the past that they were embarrassed or ashamed about – but to keep it to themselves
- Ask the students to get into pairs and to take it in turns to be the interviewer. The task is to make it as comfortable and as safe as possible for the other person to disclose their embarrassing or shameful past behaviour.
- Invite students to convene in a large group and ask for feedback on each stage of the process including what the 'interviewers' said or did that helped or hindered as well as how it felt disclosing to someone in the group.
- Remind students that if they found it difficult with fellow social work students, imagine what it must be like for someone disclosing to a social worker who has powers and duties over them.

Sample essay questions (These could also be used as small or large group discussion questions.)

- To what extent are alcohol and other drug problems self-inflicted? Explore the implications of your conclusions in relation to the delivery of social work services for people with alcohol and drug problems?
- 'Social workers should not be intervening with people who do not want to change their alcohol or other drug use'. Discuss.
- To what extent has social work as a profession sought to identify and address substance use among its service users – a literature review.
- 'People with alcohol and other drug problems are not honest about their substance use.' Explore this statement with a view to the evidence and implications for practice skills and knowledge.

Selected resources

For a more detailed list of resources see Key Resources for Teaching on Substance Use.

DVDs/films

- Option 2, Cardiff (12 mins): first of two DVDs from Option 2 that presents its intensive approach to working with families who are at risk of separation through a parent's substance use. Contains powerful messages from service users about how their social workers worked with them and what they found helpful.
Available from: www.option2.org/Publications.htm. There may be a small charge.
- Short film – A cup of chocolate (2mins) - Amusing and poignant short film made by Cumbria user's forum substituting chocolate for alcohol or other drugs
www.virginmediashorts.co.uk/films/film/a-cup-of-chocolate/ Free to download.

Service user involvement

- Contact your local drug and alcohol agencies and ask if they have a service user group or service user representatives that would be prepared to contribute to teaching. (See SWAP helpsheet: 'involving substance use specialists in social work education' for more information)

Literature

- Galvani, S. (2007) 'Alcohol or drug problems'. In: M. Davies (Ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Work*. (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Galvani, S. and Hughes, N. (2008) 'Working with alcohol and drug use: exploring the knowledge and attitudes of social work students', *British Journal of Social Work*, advanced access online <http://bjsw.oxfordjournals.org/cgi/reprint/bcn137v1>
- Galvani, S. (2007) 'Refusing to listen: are we failing the needs of people with alcohol and drug problems?' *Social Work Education*, 27 (7), 697-707.
- Forrester, D., Kershaw, S., Moss, H. and Hughes, L. (2008a) 'Communication skills in child protection: how do social workers talk to parents?', *Child and Family Social Work*, 13 (1), 41-51.
- Forrester, D, McCambridge, J., Waissbein, C. and Rollnick, S. (2008b) How do child and family social workers talk to parents about child welfare concerns? *Child Abuse Review*, 17 (1), 23-35.

Topic 2: Reasons people use

Why it's important for educators to examine reasons for substance use

We often don't think about the reasons people start, and continue, using alcohol and other drugs. Yet when individuals develop problems with their substance use they are often depicted as selfish, weak willed, manipulative and undeserving of support, particularly if they fail to attend appointments or don't do what professionals expect or require of them. They are not always considered as people who may be vulnerable, have experiences they are trying to escape from, and who are in need of warmth, respect, care and support. Teaching on this topic area needs to make time for students to stop and reflect on the reasons people use substances and to enable them to think more empathically in their work with service users living with substance problems.

Key messages to convey

- The reasons why people start using, why use becomes problematic and difficult to control and why they stop may be different.
- No-one starts using alcohol or other drugs hoping to develop a problem.
- If the effects of alcohol and drugs were all bad far fewer people would use them.
- People often start using alcohol or drugs for reasons that are, or appear, positive, e.g. to feel more confident, take a risk, fit in with the crowd, forget bad experiences.
- For individuals who develop problematic use, the substance often has positive impacts for them – even if these are not immediately obvious. These might include coping with difficult emotions (including shame about substance use), having a social group who tend to misuse substances or preventing withdrawal effects.
- The key point is that, whatever the view from the outside, people with substance misuse issues will tend to be ambivalent about changing their substance use and you need to be aware of both the pros and cons with them.
- People with alcohol or other drug problems don't want to be people with alcohol or drug problems but may be worried about how to function without the substance.
- Think holistically. Be ready to support people with alternatives to alcohol and drug use – what can you offer them to take its place?

Learning and teaching examples

Large or small group discussion (30-40 mins each)

- Invite students to state why they think people a) start, b) continue, and c) stop using different substances, including prescription drugs and perhaps substances often considered harmless like coffee. Ask for responses to each in turn and write them down on flipchart. Take care to identify and debunk stereotypes or prejudices and to expand discussion on others. (Alternatively break participants into three groups and give them one each to discuss then feed back to the bigger group.)
- Ask people to consider the reasons people from different groups may start using or have problems with alcohol or other drugs, e.g. people who are different ages or people from different classes or ethnicity. How might these factors affect what substance they use, how they use it and the help they might get?

Sample essay or dissertation topics

1. What is the nature and extent of the relationship between substance use and one of the following:

- Child abuse
- Domestic violence and abuse
- Poverty
- Mental ill health (eg. PTSD, depression)

2. Explore the evidence on why people use alcohol and other drugs and discuss the implications for social work practice. Discuss your own reflections on your value base and knowledge in light of your findings.

Exercise using 'Crossing the Line' DVD (45 -120 mins – latter if use all DVD content)

- 'Crossing the Line' (primarily crack and heroin use) was developed with four former drug users who talk powerfully and openly about how their use started and continued and the difficulties in changing their using behaviour.

Currently available at www.kgbproductions.co.uk/

What were the reasons given by the four people in this film for starting, continuing and stopping their substance use? What were the challenges they faced in changing their substance using behaviour? How can social work interventions support people through this process and in their continued abstinence?

Selected resources

For a detailed list of resources see key resources for teaching on substance use.

Short films/DVD

- www.inexcess.tv. Contains short films and video clips. Has a 'talking heads' section with service users discussing their own stories of alcohol and drug problems and their efforts to change. Also includes voices of family members. Free to download
- Crossing the Line (primarily crack and heroin use) – see details above. £85.

Literature

- Barber, J. (2002) *Social work with addictions*. (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Frisher, M., Crome, I., Macleod, J., Bloor, R. and Hickman, M. (2007) *Predictive factors for illicit drug use among young people: a literature review*. Home Office Online Report 05/07. Available at: www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/rdsolr0507.pdf
- Galvani, S. (2007) 'Alcohol or drug problems'. In: M. Davies (Ed.) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Work*. (3rd ed.). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- McCarthy, T. and Galvani, S. (2004) 'SCARS: a new model for social work with substance users.' *Practice*. 16 (2), 85-97.

Service user involvement

- Contact your local drug and alcohol agencies and ask if they have a service user group or service user representatives that would be prepared to contribute to teaching. (See SWAP helpsheet: involving substance use specialists in social work education' for more information)

Topic 3: Basic awareness of alcohol and other drugs

Why it's important to teach basic awareness

Understanding basic information about alcohol and other drugs is important to ensure social workers:

- Do not make erroneous assumptions based on ignorance or a limited knowledge of substances and their effects, e.g. “alcohol is not as harmful as heroin”.
- Feel able to raise the subject with people when appropriate and understand what their replies mean.
- Assess the potential risks someone is taking with their own health or well being, or that of others in their care.
- Feel able to talk to people about the positives and negatives of their substance use in an empathic and sensitive way.
- Avoid simplistic solutions, eg. “if they stop using they/the children will be ok”.
- Carry out a basic assessment of their substance use and discuss what may be appropriate next steps in the support process.

Key messages to convey

- The effects of drugs including alcohol will vary from person to person depending on many factors including tolerance levels, gender, what else they've used, to name a few.
- Ask the people you are working with what effects it has on them and what the positive and negatives are – they are the experts in their own use.
- People use substances for a range of reasons – some of these may need addressing at the same time that the person is looking.
- Don't be afraid to say you don't know – you can always find out.
- Don't get caught up with knowing/using the street names for drugs – you can ask if you don't understand. Just use the terms you are comfortable with – it is more genuine.

Learning and teaching examples

Interactive lectures

The content for two core interactive lectures are proposed here. They could be presented separately or combined.

1. Alcohol awareness. Include information and exercises on units of alcohol, alcohol consumption benchmarks, its impact on the body and behaviour and information about different patterns of consumption.

2. Drug awareness. Include information on the different types of drugs available and how they are currently categorized, eg. CNS stimulants, depressants etc. Also aim to include information on general effects at different levels of use, poly drug use, routes of administration, medication to support reduction or withdrawal from the drug use and some clear messages about individual differences determining effects and harm to self and others.

All this knowledge should be applied to practice. For example, ask people why it is important they know about units of alcohol or routes of drug administration. These lectures could be delivered by academic staff with the requisite knowledge or by alcohol and other drug specialists. Many alcohol and drug agencies will have a training package ready to use that covers this type of information and more (see SWAP helpsheet: involving substance use specialist in social work education').

Quizzes (varied times for quizzes – allow plenty of time for discussion of answers)

- The drugs quiz in the NCB toolkit “Adult Drug Problems, Children’s Needs” (49-56) is a good classroom based quiz.
- Consider combining or adapting a number of available online quizzes, eg. 10-item quiz on alcohol by BUPA, with the 5-item CBBC newsround quiz on children and alcohol.
- Invite students to complete quizzes online in their own time. Googling “alcohol quiz” or “drugs quiz” results in a range of self-assessment tools both for personal assessment of use or to check general knowledge. You could set tasks for students to find and complete two quizzes (one of each) and feedback to the rest of the group on what they found and where.
- Ask your local drug and alcohol agencies. Their training departments may do it for you or lend you their materials.

Selected resources

For a detailed list of resources see key resources for teaching on substance use.

DVDs/films

- ‘Crossing the Line’ (primarily crack and heroin use) is a short film for use in adult training environments. It was developed with four former drug users who talk openly about how their use started and continued and the difficulties in changing their using behaviour. Currently available at www.kgbproductions.co.uk/
- ‘Seeing and hearing the child’ – NSPCC video and toolkit series. Good for basic awareness of impact of parenting on children and families from the perspective of children. Also contains social work and other academics discussing issues presented in the clips.

Literature

- Gossop, M. (2007) *Living with Drugs*. (6th ed.). Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Petersen, T. and McBride, A. (2002) *Working with substance misusers. A guide to theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Kroll, B. and Taylor, A. (2003) *Parental substance misuse and child welfare*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Shapiro, H. (2007) *The essential guide to drugs and alcohol*. London: Drugscope.
- Shapiro, H. (Ed.) (2008) *The Essential Student Reader on Drugs*. London: Drugscope.

Additional website

- www.talktofrank.com – government website primarily aimed at young people but with lots of information on drug use, chemical reactions and combinations of substances.

Topic 4: Raising the issue

Why it's important to think about how to raise the issue of substance use

Substance use and misuse is all too often a hidden and secret activity; even when it is clearly an issue family secrecy can silence professionals and lead to substance misuse being the “elephant in the room” that nobody talks about (Kroll and Taylor, 2002). On the other hand crude attempts to talk about substance misuse can be unhelpful and lead to confrontation (Forrester et al 2008a, 2008b).

- Educators can often proceed quickly to discussion of more advanced issues – such as theories of addiction – without covering the more basic issue of how substance use and misuse issues might be raised.
- Sensitive – but if necessary assertive – raising of substance misuse concerns provides the crucial first step in addressing drug and alcohol problems.
- In practice, students tend to love the practical and focused approach necessary for raising the issue of substance use.
- The skills learnt are generalisable: raising sensitive issues is a central element of social work, and the best ways of doing it around alcohol or drugs are similar to those for a range of issues, from domestic violence through to cultural differences in parenting.

Key messages to convey

- There is no one way to raise issues of drug and alcohol use. Educators should emphasise that raising such issues depends on the context and the relationship between worker and client, as well as the use of key skills by the worker.
- Given this variability there are some important questions to ask, including:
 - Why do you need this information?
 - How might the client feel about being asked?
 - What is the context within which I am asking this question (for instance, is it a child protection investigation or an interview with someone seeking treatment)?
- It may be useful to explore raising difficult issues with one another in role plays – or imagining how one might feel being asked about difficult or secret things.

Learning and teaching examples

Groupwork exercise (approx. 30 mins)

Please be aware that this exercise is an emotionally charged exercise. It can produce powerful feelings. This is part of its strength – but it also needs to be handled carefully. One of the key learning outcomes of the exercise is that it puts students into a similar situation to the one many clients find themselves in. In this context, resistance, denial and minimization are normal and understandable responses. Furthermore, the exercise can be used to explore other key elements of the social work relationship. Students are invited to use authority and power. The issue of confidentiality is also a theme – the idea that information disclosed to a social worker can eventually be revealed to many people. The exercise is ideal for a group of around 12, but can be used with larger groups.

- Ask everyone to stand in a circle, shoulder to shoulder and facing inwards with enough room around the outside for you to walk around the circle.
- Ask everyone to close their eyes and to keep them closed until you say it is OK for eyes to be opened. Emphasise the importance of this. (continued overleaf)
- Then start to walk around the circle. As you do so, ask the group members to think about their “deepest, darkest secret”. Something they are likely to be ashamed of and may have told nobody about. Allow them some time to think about this.

- Then say that in a moment you are going to tap one of them on the shoulder. State that “if you are tapped on the shoulder, I am going to ask you to share your deepest secret with the group”. Emphasise that everybody should keep their eyes closed during this process.
- Walk around the whole group. Ask anyone who opens their eyes to close them again.
- State that everyone can open their eyes – and that you will not be tapping anyone on the shoulder.
- With the group remaining in the circle ask them what they would have done if you had tapped them on the shoulder? Ask them how they felt.
- Usually the group begin to make links with the social work role, but you can also prompt them by asking what the lessons are for us as social workers.
- It is important to debrief – for instance emphasizing that participants do not need to tell anyone their secret.
- Follow the exercise with a break.

Small group/pairs exercise (30-40 mins)

- Using a case study (either from the SWAP case study: teaching substance use in social work education, or one/s you have designed) ask each group to brainstorm as many ways of raising the issue as possible. Do not evaluate – and do not just come up with the “right” answer.
- Once the group has a list, evaluate the pros and cons of different approaches. Discuss how the context might influence which approach was best

Small group/pairs exercise (45 mins)

- Using the adapted “Helpful Responses Questionnaire” as provided in the SWAP helpsheet: using substance use research tools to promote learning and teaching, each individual can prepare a response to what a client might have said. Obviously, the HRQ can be adapted to suit the particular focus of your teaching.
- Gather in a small group to discuss and compare different approaches.
- The broader group can discuss the elements of effective responses – and “roadblocks” to helping people
- If appropriate this can be compared to the ways in which social workers completed the responses in the original research (as described in Forrester et al, 2008a)
- Another option is to explain the empathy rating scale and then evaluate one’s own or that of others using that. Such an approach would be strengthened by referring to Forrester et al 2008b or chapter 7 in Forrester and Harwin (2009) which highlight the importance of empathy even in confrontational situations.

Exercise with DVD

- Motivational interviewing: professional training videotape series. Show excerpts of Tapes B and C which are focused on ‘opening strategies’ or raising the issue. Also useful is tape D focuses on ‘handling resistance’. Follow the video/DVD with group discussion and student role play. These videos provide an excellent (and occasionally humorous) introduction to good practice. Available through www.motivationalinterview.org

Selected resources

For a detailed list of resources see [SWAP information sheet: key resources for teaching on substance use](#) and [Case study: teaching substance use in social work education](#).

- For raising the issue of alcohol and drugs, Activity 4 in the NCB toolkit. *Adult Drug Problems, Children's Needs* (65-67) is a good role playing exercise.
- Forrester, D. (2004) "Social Work Assessments When Parents Misuse Drugs or Alcohol" in Phillips, R (Ed), *Children exposed to parental substance misuse: Implications for family placement*, 163-180, BAAF: London.
- Forrester, D, McCambridge, J., Waissbein, C., Emllyn-Jones, R. and Rollnick, S. (2008) 'Child risk and parental resistance: the impact of training social workers motivational interviewing', *British Journal of Social Work*, October 2008; 38, 1302 - 1319.
- Forrester, D., Kershaw, S., Moss, H. and Hughes, L. (2008a) 'Communication skills in child protection: how do social workers talk to parents?', *Child and Family Social Work*, 13 (1), 41 – 51.
- Forrester, D, McCambridge, J., Waissbein, C. and Rollnick, S. (2008b) 'How do child and family social workers talk to parents about child welfare concerns?', *Child Abuse Review*, 17 (1), 23 – 35.

Topic 5: Assessment and risk

Why it's important to consider assessment and risk

- Social workers are often asked to assess substance use and misuse, including the risks that it may pose for the individual or others around them
- Substance use provides a good exemplar of the key issues in risk assessment work – including how to evaluate the potential for behaviour change

Key messages to convey

- At the heart of all risk assessment is a key dilemma: it is not possible to be certain what will happen in the future. All attempts at risk assessment should therefore be undertaken with the humility that this fact entails.
- It is possible, in broad terms, to identify likely patterns of future events. Doing so is vitally important if the needs of individuals and the welfare of those they are responsible for are to be supported and protected.
- There is much key information that can and should be collected in an assessment around substance use and misuse. The selected resources section outlines the range of information that one might collect.
- The key learning points for students are not about what information to collect so much as how to collect information. Educators could emphasise that:
 - Good assessment involves understanding the meaning and context of substance use. The place of the alcohol and/or other drugs within the person's life story and their current day-to-day lifestyle are crucial.
 - This allows the practitioner to understand the reasons for use and misuse, and the difficulties that it causes the individual, in context.
 - Crucially students need to learn that assessing substance use is not about collecting information in a procedural manner but about forming a relationship that allows the worker to understand the place of substance use within the individual's life.
- Skills of empathic listening, wisdom and judgment are as important as specific substance use knowledge.
- In practice, workers often have to test out the ability of individuals to change while managing the risk they pose to themselves or others.

Learning and teaching examples

Small Group exercise (1hr with time for reading; less if read ahead of discussion)

Invite students to read the "SCODA Guidelines" for assessing parental drug misuse in preparation for discussion. The guidelines provide an excellent range of information to assess parental drug misuse. They were of seminal importance in establishing that not all drug users are unable to care for their children. However, they do not focus on the child's views, they pay scant regard to broader social issues (such as gender or race) and most importantly they do not consider how the information collected should be analysed. Furthermore, they consider the collection of the information as unproblematic. This may be true for someone seeking treatment, but would be very different for a parent in a child protection investigation.

- Ask the group to consider the strengths of the guidelines
- Invite the group to discuss the limitations of the guidelines

Case study exercise (30-60 mins)

- Using a case study (see SWAP case study: teaching substance use in social work education or develop your own) and apply the SCODA guidance to the case.
- Ask individuals to predict future substance use and misuse. Invite the group to consider the different prognoses and how workers might manage this range of views.

Sample essay or other assignments

- What are the key issues in assessing the impact of substance use?
- “The future cannot be predicted with complete accuracy”. Discuss the implications of this statement with reference to the assessment of risk around parental substance use.

Selected resources

- Forrester, D. and Harwin, J. (forthcoming, 2009) *Parents who misuse drugs or alcohol. Effective interventions in social work and child protection*. Chichester: Wileys.
- Forrester, D. (2004) ‘Social Work Assessments When Parents Misuse Drugs or Alcohol’ in Phillips, R. (Ed), *Children exposed to parental substance misuse: Implications for family placement*, 163-180, BAAF: London.
- Forrester, D. and Harwin, J. (2008) ‘Outcomes for children whose parents misuse drugs or alcohol: a 2-year follow-up study’, *British Journal of Social Work*, 38, December 2008, 1518 - 1535.
- LGDF/SCODA (1997) *Drug using parents: policy guidelines for inter-agency working*. London: LGA.

Topic 6: Substance use interventions: what there is and how to access it

Why it's important to know what services are available

Social workers are not expected to be specialists in alcohol or other drugs. As outlined above, they are expected to know the basics, be able to raise the subject sensitively with the people they work with, and assess and discuss the options available to people who may want or need support. Discussing concerns about a person's substance use without knowing what support is available and how to access it is not good practice. In addition, the emphasis on inter-disciplinary and partnership working has been high on the political and practice agenda for some years. Social workers are expected to work closely with health, social care and criminal justice colleagues to ensure coordinated care. The substance use field is no different and its recent national strategies have placed working with families and communities high on its agenda (Home Office 2008). This preparedness to work with the social aspects of substance use means social work needs to be ready to maximise the partnership opportunities this presents and to have some understanding of alcohol and drug services, how they work, and what they offer.

Key messages to convey

- There is no 'one size fits all' intervention for people with alcohol and drug problems.
- There are a lot of myths about what services expect from people. These can be off-putting and act as barriers to people considering help. Knowing some facts about local services will help overcome these barriers.
- Services offer a range of services from 1-1 counselling to educational groups, family/couples work and work with children. They will also offer therapeutic groups.
- People needing medical detoxification may need residential care and rehabilitation, although community detoxification programmes are also widely available.
- Some people may want to cut down their substance use, others may want to give up completely. Some services cater for both, some will expect abstinence.
- There are also self-help groups available run by service users. Many of these are run by Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) but increasingly independent self-help groups are emerging.
- Don't expect alcohol or drug interventions to be a magic pill to resolve bad behavior or improve mental or physical health.
- People may still have a range of problems without the substance use. Indeed the substance use may have been a coping mechanism and more support may be needed once it is removed or reduced.

Medical versus social models

Underpinning all approaches to alcohol and drug interventions are theories and models for practice. Simplistically, these can fall into two main camps: social and medical models. Medical models see alcohol and drug problems as an illness or disease and the cure is therefore abstinence from all mind-altering substances. Interventions tend to be more prescriptive and challenging and for many people who need more direction, these can be the most suitable. Social models see alcohol and drug problems as being a learned behavioural response to a person's experiences and environment. The latter is more likely to focus on the function the substance serves in the person's life. While the language between the models will differ, e.g. alcoholic or addict versus problematic alcohol or drug use, and the approaches are conceived differently, there are also many similarities. For example, both approaches are likely to use elements of cognitive behavioural approaches, both are likely to focus on the person's willingness and readiness to change behaviour, and both understand the importance of positive social support to help people make changes in their substance use.

Accessing services

For full details of how to find local and national services see Involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education. Here are five main ways to access services:

- Services are provided by both the voluntary and statutory sectors. Most will accept self-referrals as well as referrals from other professionals.
- There are specialist services for families, women, people in the criminal justice system, people from particular BME communities, young people, to name a few.
- Ask the specialist services about their confidentiality and information sharing policies and be prepared to share your own. Don't wait until you're asking for information about an individual as misunderstandings can occur and damage joint working relationships.
- Good practice means finding out the referral procedures ahead of time. Making an inappropriate referral wastes everyone's time and may dissuade an already nervous or reluctant service user from trying again.
- Drug and alcohol services are listed in local telephone directories, GP surgeries, and in a range of health and social care settings.

Learning and teaching examples

Group exercise suitable for a self-directed learning task either as part of a formative assessment or as part of time limited task to complete during the teaching day (2hrs max).

- Ask students to get into pairs and find out what drug and alcohol services are available locally, what their referral policies are, and who they accept. Ensure that they are able to say how they found out about these services.
- Ask the group to convene to share their findings and compare sources – identifying the ones which were most helpful and the range of sources identified

Sample essay or discussion questions

- What are the internal and external factors that may help or hinder a person seeking access to an alcohol or drug service? (eg. waiting lists, motivation, child care facilities etc.)
- What are the range of methods and approaches used within substance use services – what are the key similarities and differences?
- In what ways can social workers intervene with someone with an alcohol or other drug problem?

Case scenario/role play (combining skills development and knowledge of substance use services – allow approx 1hr min).

Organise participants into groups of three – where each participant is designated social worker, service user or observer. Provide roles for each based on a case scenario of a social worker discussing two service options with a service user who is considering referral to a substance use service. Ensure the brief for the social worker gives details of the options or set this as a pre- role play task. Ensure the brief for the service user informs them that they are being offered two options and may be willing to give one a go depending on how it is presented to them and whether it meets the needs they will tell the social worker about. Give people 15 to 30 minutes (depending how much time you have) to role play followed by constructive feedback from the observer on the skills used and their observations of how the role play went. Also allow time for both service user and social worker to feedback on their personal reactions to the service options and the discussion that ensued.

Selected resources

For a detailed list of resources see [SWAP information sheet: key resources for teaching on substance use](#).

Additional website

- www.nta.nhs.uk/about_treatment/default.aspx This is the website for the National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (primarily illicit drugs). This link is to a section on different types of treatment.

Short films

- www.fead.org.uk - a series of short films by leading academics, clinicians and policy makers on a range of issues relating to drugs and alcohol. Useful for those discussing particular types of intervention and treatment.
- www.inexcess.tv - contains short films and video clips. Has a 'talking heads' section with service users discussing their own stories of alcohol and drug problems and their efforts to change. Useful for hearing service user perspectives on the interventions and treatment they received.

Literature

- Barber, J. (2002) *Social work with addictions*. (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Heather, N. and Stockwell, T. (Eds.) (2004) *The essential handbook of treatment and prevention of alcohol problems*. Chichester: Wileys.
- *National Children's Bureau toolkit* (2008) 'Adult Drug Problems, Children's Needs' contains a briefing on drugs and treatment options (109-113).
- Petersen, T. and McBride, A. (2002) *Working with substance misusers. A guide to theory and practice*. London: Routledge.
- Rotgers, F., Keller, D.S., and Morgenstern, J. (2006) *Treating substance abuse: theory and technique*. (2nd ed.). London: Guilford Press.

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Home Office (2008) *Drugs: protecting families and communities. The 2008 drug strategy*. London: Home Office.

Topic 7: The family and substance use

Why is substance misuse in the family important?

Many people use drugs or alcohol. However, even more live with someone who has a problem. This includes not only children living with a parent with an alcohol or other drug problem, but also partners and mothers and fathers. Any work with families will therefore often bring social workers into contact with alcohol and drug use. For most of these families there is no specialist alcohol or drug worker involved. Substance misuse in the family is therefore not somebody else's problem – it is a key issue in all social work practice. Parental substance misuse is well established as a key issue in child and family work. However, misuse by individuals experiencing mental illness or by carers, and the involvement of substance misuse in much elder abuse, are likely to be key issues that have received less attention to date.

Key messages to convey

- Be sensitive to the emotional impact of this work – many individuals will have had family experience of alcohol or drug problems; some may have struggled with, or be struggling with, their own drug or alcohol use, now or in the past. Work in this area brings up powerful issues, and educators need to be sensitive to this.
- Don't assume that experiences of parental substance misuse – or substance misuse problems – are experienced solely by clients.
- Let participants know that they can talk to you after the teaching if personal issues arise that they do not wish to discuss in the group. Be prepared for individuals to disclose current or previous difficulties. This is not uncommon after a session.
- Ground rules about confidentiality and sensitivity are particularly important for this type of work
- Try to normalise the range of responses to alcohol or drug issues e.g. by starting the session by getting individuals to explore their own attitudes and beliefs, or experiences.
- Most children with a parent with a serious alcohol problem go on to have no identifiable problems as adults (Velleman and Orford, 1999). This provides a good starting point for considering the interplay of risk and resilience factors.

General issues in teaching around substance use in the family

Learning about substance use in families provides an opportunity to address knowledge, skills and values that will be applicable across the range of social work practice. For example it raises issues in assessing risk and resilience or the interaction of psychological and social issues in complex family situations.

It is very difficult to provide sufficient teaching for students to feel confident in working with this issue. There are so many aspects that need to be taken into account that even 2 or 3 dedicated days are unlikely to create confident and skilled practitioners. It is therefore particularly important to make the links with other learning. Students may need to be helped to see how skills of empathic listening or reflective assessment learnt elsewhere on the course might be applied to substance misuse situations. Exercises focusing on parental alcohol or drug misuse within the family can be useful media to explore complexities of practice – particularly in the following core themes:

- Values, feelings and anti-discriminatory practice
- Assessment, risk and need
- Balancing the needs of parents and those of children

In addition, case studies and skills based work including individuals and families affected by substance use can also be usefully included in teaching on theories and methods.

Delivering effective teaching: partnerships and collaborations

The topic of substance misuse in the family provides an ideal area for involving service users or practitioners with expertise in this area. Such individuals can provide powerful teaching experiences that provide a lasting impact and challenge students values, beliefs and attitudes. However, the key to effective involvement of experts by experience or through practice is good preparation (see SWAP helpsheet: involving substance use specialists in social work education for further guidelines on this).

Assessment, risk and need

Substance misuse in the family is a useful area to explore issues around risk and resilience, and the complexities involved in assessing future harm to children or adults. It may be particularly helpful to combine some teaching based on theories and research and specific case examples, so that students can explore the complexities in this area. It is also an area in which the emotional impact of work and the research literature can both be explored simultaneously. Substance use within the family can provide an ideal forum for exploring advanced theoretical issues that are likely to be of great significance for practice.

Substance use within the family also provides an ideal topic for learning around inter-disciplinary working, as students can consider the roles and input of different agencies to families with complex problems including substance misuse. As such, assessment of substance use within the family is a productive way of offering integrative learning toward the end of a social work course or for teaching and learning at post-qualifying level.

Key messages to convey

- The dangers of too heavy an emphasis on risk should be balanced against the dangers of too much emphasis on resilience. Focussing just on risks fails to understand that many children thrive in adversity – and in particular it fails to link processes of assessment with plans for how to help families. On the other hand, there are no invulnerable children, and often harm can be masked by apparent resilience.
- Risk and resilience need to be understood within an ecological framework, as social contexts and processes of disadvantage and discrimination mediate the impact of drink or drug use on children.
- The complexity of work in this area can be helpfully explored through case studies that highlight the potentially conflicting needs of family members. For instance, a parent may need time to address their substance misuse but the perils of waiting for a young child may be considerable; a parent may be under great stress caring for a son or daughter with a substance misuse problem, but the alternatives for the young person may include becoming homeless.
- Issues in interagency working can be explored through students taking different roles in relation to a family.
- While substance misuse within families is a complex issue, it is important not to leave students feeling de-skilled. Many of the basic skills used in any good social work situation are the same as those required in assessing substance misuse within the family. This is complicated by the potentially (but not necessarily) competing interests of different family members, but this should not obscure the key elements of good practice.

Assessing substance misuse within the family situation is a relatively advanced area of practice. It requires students to have a good grasp of:

- The impact of substance use and misuse on individuals and on others.
- An understanding of general issues in assessment and specifically in assessment of substance use and misuse.
- An awareness of one's own values and feelings and how they may impact on the work.
- A knowledge of how to raise the issue sensitively with service users.

However, assessment of substance misuse within the family requires the practitioner to balance the rights, needs and feelings of different family members within the statutory context provided by law.

Learning and teaching examples

Case studies

- Invoke discussion and role plays relating to a case study (see [SWAP case study: teaching substance use in social work education](#), or develop your own.)
- Group work based on a case scenario with an emphasis on developing an assessment plan and/or carrying out role plays (for instance taking one of the case studies, asking students in small groups to prepare an assessment plan and then role-playing meetings with different family members).

Sample essay questions

- “Most children with a parent with an alcohol problem go on to lead happy and productive lives.” Discuss the evidence for and against this statement, demonstrating an understanding of the interplay of risk and resilience factors in families affected by parental alcohol misuse.
- “Alcohol and drug misuse are good predictors for children appearing in child protection statistics. They are not however good predictors for further harm or injury to children.” (Thorpe, 1994,141) Discuss this statement, considering the evidence for and against it and the implications for practice.
- Does misuse of illegal drugs by parents pose more risks to children than misuse of alcohol?

Balancing the needs of parents and children

Parental substance use and misuse within the family provides a good area for exploring issues of good practice in talking with adults about difficult issues, communicating with children and working to help people to change.

Working with adults

Key challenges in working with parents in child and family work – such as maintaining empathy while raising difficult issues or concerns – are at the heart of work in this area. It therefore provides excellent learning opportunities for generalisable learning.

Key messages to convey

- Parental substance use and misuse is a complex issue and it may be more appropriate to focus on it when students have had input around basic communication skills (including perhaps communication around substance use when a child is not involved)
- Parental substance misuse is an issue that many students will encounter on their placements. It can provide a good opportunity for relating placement learning to college teaching, in relation to a range of issues.

Learning and teaching examples

Experiential and evidence based activities

- Direct work requires experiential learning. This can include role plays and videos of others using different approaches (see SWAP information sheet: key resources for teaching on substance use). It can be particularly powerful to have students' video themselves and review the way they work in a role play.
- The substance misuse field has produced a number of very promising approaches which are supported by evidence. Most likely to be of general interest on a social work course is Motivational Interviewing. Miller and Rollnick (2002) provide a highly accessible introduction to MI in their book and more resources can be found on the MI website. MI is a central aspect of most current responses to parental substance misuse within the child welfare field. Hamer (2005) provides a very good introduction to the use of MI in child welfare settings.

Communicating with Children

Talking to children affected by parental substance misuse requires sensitivity, an awareness of child developmental needs and an ability to use a range of communication approaches. It is therefore an ideal opportunity for students to practice and develop their direct work communication skills.

Key issues to bear in mind with this work

- Communication with children affected by parental substance misuse has many similarities to communication with children about a range of other sensitive issues that social workers need to talk to children about – the skills for such communication are broadly transferable and are fundamental to good social work practice (see SWAP information sheet: key resources for teaching on substance use).
- A particular issue in families where there is parental substance use may be secrecy. Children may often be reluctant to disclose information because they have (explicitly or implicitly) been silenced.
- In general, the key thing is to get to know the child in the round: it is rarely helpful to focus specifically on the substance use or misuse, at least until some trust has been built with a particular child.

Selected resources

- Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs (2003) *Hidden harm: responding to the needs of children of problem drug users*. Report of an inquiry by the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs, Home Office: London.
- Barnard, M. (2007) *Drug Addiction and Families*. London: Jessica Kingsley.
- Forrester, D. and Harwin, J. (forthcoming, 2009) *Parents who misuse drugs or alcohol. Effective interventions in social work and child protection*. Chichester: Wileys.
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- Hamer, M. (2005) *Preventing breakdown – a manual for those working with families and the individuals within them*. Lyme Regis: Russell House Publishing.
- Kroll, B. and Taylor, A. (2002) *Parental substance misuse and child welfare*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

- Miller, W.R. and Rollnick, S. (2002) *Motivational Interviewing: preparing people for change* (2nd ed.) New York: Guilford Press.
- Velleman, R. and Orford, J. (1999) *Risk and resilience. Adults who were the children of problem drinkers*. Amsterdam: OPA.

DVDs, toolkits and other materials

- Hart, D. and Powell, J. (2006) *Adult Drug Problems, Children's Needs. Assessing the impact of parental drug use: A toolkit for practitioners*, National Children's Bureau, London.
- NSPCC (2007) Drugs and alcohol misuse video and accompanying materials

Websites

- Alcohol Concern (2008) Alcohol and Families Website: www.alcoholandfamilies.org.uk/
- More on Motivational Interviewing: www.motivationalinterview.org

Other SWAP resources

SWAP (2009) *Social Work and substance use. teaching the basics*. Retrieved, November 2009 from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/guide_su_learning&teaching.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Learning and teaching digest: integrating substance use teaching into the social work curriculum*. Retrieved, August 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/digests/swapdigest_7.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Helpsheet: involving alcohol and other drug specialists in social work education*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/helpsheets/hs_substancemis1.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Helpsheet: using substance use research tools to promote teaching and learning*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/helpsheets/hs_su_researchtools.pdf

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SWAP (2009). *Information sheet: Key resources for teaching substance use*. Retrieved November. 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/infosheets/is_keyresources.pdf

SWAP (2009). *Case studies: teaching substance use in social work education*. Retrieved November 2009, from www.swap.ac.uk/docs/casestudies/cs_substancemis2.pdf

SWAP (2010). *Information sheet: Blood Borne Viruses and substance use in the social work curriculum*. Retrieved, January 2010 www.swap.ac.uk/docs/infosheets/is_subusebbv.pdf

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