

Handout:  
Alcohol and Drug Use Continuum and Implications for Child Welfare

<b>Alcohol and Drug Use Continuum and Implications for Child Welfare</b>	
<b>Alcohol and Drug Use Continuum</b>	<b>Implications for Child Welfare and Examples of Risks to Children</b>
<p>Substance use—the use of alcohol or other drugs to socialize and feel their effects. Use may not appear abusive and may not lead to dependence; however, the circumstances under which a parent uses can put children at risk of harm.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Driving with children in the car while under the influence</li> <li>• Use during pregnancy can harm the fetus</li> </ul>
<p>Substance abuse—includes at least one of these factors in the last 12 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effects have seriously interfered with health, work, or social functioning</li> <li>• Person has engaged in hazardous activity on a recurring basis, such as driving or operating machinery under the influence</li> <li>• Person has experienced use-related legal problems</li> <li>• Person has continued use despite ongoing or recurring problems caused or exacerbated by use—this includes a maladaptive pattern of use, such as binge drinking</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children may be left in unsafe care—with an inappropriate caretaker or unattended—while parent is using alcohol or other drugs</li> <li>• A parent may neglect or sporadically address the children’s needs for regular meals, clothing, and cleanliness</li> <li>• Even when the parent is in the home, the parent’s use may leave children unsupervised</li> <li>• Behavior toward children may be inconsistent, such as a pattern of screaming insults then expressing remorse</li> </ul>
<p>Addiction (or substance dependence)—a pattern of use that results in three or more of the following symptoms in a 12-month period:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tolerance—needing more of the drug or alcohol to get “high”</li> <li>• Withdrawal—physical symptoms when alcohol or drugs are not used, such as tremors, nausea, sweating, and shakiness</li> <li>• Unable to control use—a strong craving or compulsion to use and an inability to limit use</li> <li>• The alcohol or drug increasingly becomes the focus of the person’s life at the expense of all other areas, including family, work, social, and recreational</li> <li>• Continued use despite ongoing or recurring physical or psychological problems caused or exacerbated by the alcohol and drug use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Despite a clear danger to children, the parent may engage in addiction-related behaviors, such as leaving children unattended while seeking drugs</li> <li>• Funds are used to buy alcohol or drugs, while necessities, such as buying food, are neglected</li> <li>• A parent may not be able to think logically or make rational decisions regarding children’s needs or care</li> </ul>
<p>Sources: American Psychiatric Association, 2000; SAMHSA, 2005.</p>	