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| Good Practice Bulletin |
| Spotlight on substance use and services available for parents  Office of Professional Practice, Issue 9, May 2018 |

# Chief Practitioner’s welcome

# Tracy Beaton

Reducing harm to children and providing treatment and support options for parents is a crucial role played by child protection practitioners when parental alcohol and other drugs (AOD) are a protective concern.

A new AOD initiative is now available for parents whose children are subject to a family reunification order and there is an AOD condition attached.

This new initiative – Alcohol and other drug treatment initiative for family reunification – supports parents to get the assessment and treatment they need as soon as possible. The focus on timely access to catchment-based services recognises the urgent timeframes involved in family reunification.

Our aim: to maximise the chances of reuniting children and parents where AOD is a protective concern.

## Case study

Josephine is eighteen months old. She was removed from her parents care a week ago due to significant methamphetamine use by both parents and neglect associated with this parental substance use.

Josephine’s parents, Amanda and Ryan, have separated and reunified a number of times since Josephine was born.

Josephine is subject to a family reunification order and lives with Amanda’s mother.

The family reunification order includes the following condition for both Amanda and Ryan:

‘[Parent] must engage in drug and alcohol assessment and treatment as directed by DHHS, and allow reports to be provided to DHHS. For the purposes of making a referral, DHHS will provide [Parent’s] details to a drug and alcohol intake provider to enable service provision.’

Given this condition, the child protection practitioner was able to provide Amanda and Ryan’s contact details to the relevant AOD intake service.

The local area AOD service provider contacted each parent the next day. Both Amanda and Ryan are highly motivated to address their substance use issues. They have attended their first appointment for assessment, and a treatment plan is being developed. They understand the urgency for Josephine and both say they are committed to demonstrating sustained change so they can care for Josephine.

## Discussion prompts

When and how would you discuss drug and alcohol treatment options with parents?

What behavioural and attitudinal changes are you looking for from parents who use alcohol and other drugs?

How would you know when substance use issues have been addressed? What would this look like for the child?

Remember: The wording of the AOD condition is key. If a family reunification order with an AOD condition for the parent is made without the wording shown in the case study above, the child protection practitioner should seek the consent of the parent to provide their details to the local AOD intake service.

# Tips . . .

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| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | For more detail, see the [fact sheet](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/CP%20fact%20sheet%20-%20AOD%20and%20FRO%20initiative%20v1.pdf) and [procedure](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/policies-and-procedures/court/family-reunification-orders-and-alcohol-or-drug-treatment-condition) for the Alcohol and other drug treatment initiative for family reunification |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Key AOD intake and service provider contacts can be found [here](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/information-sheets/health/aod-treatment-initiative-family-reunification-fact) (by area) |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | Keep in mind that parents of children involved with child protection are already on a priority list for AOD treatment. |
| Ok, Check, Todo, Agenda, Icon, Symbol, Tick, To Do, Gui | When considering returning a child home to parents who use substances consider the following resources available on the manual to support your assessment:  - [Drug and alcohol assessments](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/health-and-medical/drug-and-alcohol-assessments) - advice  - [Family reunification – advice](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/advice/case-planning/family-reunification) (in particular ‘assessing parental capability’)  - [Parental substance abuse assessment tool](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/advice-and-protocols/tools-checklists/assessment-tools/parental-substance-use-assessment-tool)  - [Families with multiple and complex needs specialist practice resource](http://www.cpmanual.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/Families%20with%20multiple%20%26%20complex%20needs%20specialist%20resource%203016%20.pdf)  (in particular page 58 – Impact table 1: How does parental substance use affect parenting?) |

On behalf of the Office of Professional Practice, we hope you have found this issue of the Good Practice Bulletin useful. If you have any feedback or ideas about what you would find useful to include, please email *officeofprofessionalpractice@dhhs.vic.gov.au*

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