



Under The Influence

What to do if you suspect that a parent/carer is under the influence when collecting their child.



It is known that parental alcohol and drug abuse can negatively impact on children's physical and emotional wellbeing, development and safety. A report in 2024 by the NSPCC¹ identified that more than 70,000 children in England have a parent struggling with alcohol misuse. Similarly, Public Health Wales² identified that about 5000 children are receiving care and support due to parental substance misuse.

Safe collection procedures

A child's welfare and safety are always paramount, so it is important that you understand the steps and measures that should be taken when you have concerns.

As part of your safeguarding responsibilities, you need to be clear about the actions you will take when you have concerns that a parent may be under the influence of drug and/or alcohol, and you feel that they are not in a fit state to care for their child.

The appropriate steps to take include:

- attempting to keep the child on premises whilst arranging an alternative collection.
- contacting another family member or authorised person to collect the child.
- recording the incident as a safeguarding concern.
- contacting the police, if the parent/carer is aggressive or attempting to drive.
- where you believe a child is at immediate risk, contacting children's social care.

It is important to also remember that people who are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol, can become irrational and aggressive. This can make your attempts to keep the child on your premises whilst you contact other family members and authorised people challenging. Ultimately if a parent is insisting that



SUGGESTION FOR STEPS TO FOLLOW

It can be helpful to have a written record of the steps the setting chooses to take, that could be shared with parents, if appropriate for the settings context. Suggestions include:

If a parent/carer arrives to collect a child and it is deemed that they are intoxicated or clearly under the influence of alcohol and/or drugs (prescription or illegal), we will always put the safety of the child first. This means that we may refuse to release the child into the care of the person intending to collect. In this situation we will:

- 1 Phone the family member, emergency contact, or authorised others to collect the child.
- 2 Record the incident as a safeguarding concern.
- 3 If, despite our best efforts, we are unable to keep the child with us, we will contact the police, make a safeguarding referral to children's social care and write a full report of the incident.
- 4 If the person collecting, who appears intoxicated or under the influence, attempts to drive, we will contact the police immediately.
- 5 If the person collecting, who appears intoxicated or under the influence, becomes physically or verbally aggressive, we will contact the police immediately.

they are taking their child, you will have to release the child into their care but should contact the police immediately, make a safeguarding referral to children's services and write a full report of the incident.


Good parent partnerships are vital for ensuring that children are supported to fulfil their potential. This starts from the moment the parent first engages with your setting. During the registration and settling in period, it is important that if you established clear boundaries and expectations from parents, which includes clear information about the actions you will take if a parent is not deemed to be fit to care for their child. Where this is understood in advance, it can mean that parents are not surprised and angry about your response. One way to achieve this is to have a section within your safeguarding or collection policy that outlines the actions that you will take in such as situation.



It is also important that the policy is communicated and shared with all parents directly, and perhaps also through a section in your parent handbook.

Support for parents /carers with drug / alcohol dependencies

If there are repeated instances, this becomes a safeguarding concern that needs to be escalated to children's social care. This may also indicate that the parent/carers have a substance use problem and are in need to further support.

There is a range of support options available for parents/carers that have dependency issues. These include support groups such as Alcohol Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous, treatment and rehabilitation programs through local health departments, parenting support and programs that support parents to develop healthy parenting skills and strategies. 

SUPPORT FOR PARENTS /CARERS

It is important that you carefully consider and decide on the procedure that you will follow in such circumstances and make sure that you communicate this effectively with parents/carers and any staff.

- www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/support-for-parents/alcohol-drugs-parenting/
- www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/
- ukna.org/

Resources

- Dropping off and picking up before and after school | NSPCC Learning: bit.ly/4kbLdzq
- Safeguarding children affected by parental alcohol and drug use: bit.ly/3Xdl5dH
- Safeguarding Children Wales: bit.ly/42w7Tma
- NSPCC Parental Substance Misuse: bit.ly/4gQeP2C

References

- ¹More than 70,000 children in England have a parent struggling with alcohol misuse | NSPCC: bit.ly/3F0ijlJ
- ²Data on substance misuse in Wales – Public Health Wales: bit.ly/3XaXNW3