

SELF HARM & HARM TO OTHERS

Alcoholism

The Dictionary Definition is: The essential feature of alcohol abuse is the maladaptive use of alcohol with recurrent and significant adverse consequences related to its repeated use. Alcoholism is the popular term for two disorders, alcohol abuse and alcohol dependence. The hallmarks of both these disorders involve repeated life problems that can be directly attributed to the use of alcohol. Both these disorders can have serious consequences, affecting an individual's health and personal life, as well as having an impact on society at large.

When people need a drink [beer, lager, wine, vodka, gin, brandy, whisky, sherry] a lot of the time. Many people drink alcohol but if you drink too much too often it can be a problem. Your birth mummy drank too much alcohol and sometimes drank it all through the day and in the night times too. Sometimes people get better from alcoholism and stop drinking but they need lots of help and it takes time to know they are really better. It can be very difficult to stop. People often become alcoholics because they are not very happy about things in their lives. Alcohol can at first make them feel happy and relaxed. Too much alcohol is not good for a person or for children around them and all that the person can think about is having more to drink. It can make people loud, angry and clumsy. They can only care about what they want when they are drunk and not what anyone else thinks or says.

Relate the alcohol abuse to the child's particular history and give examples if you can of the type of scenario's that might have occurred for the child. If these are not in the reports that you have been given, then make sure you use the word 'might' when you give a story.

Mummy might have been asleep [as alcohol can make you sleepy] when it was dinner time or bath time or when you needed to get to school/play group/the park.

Drug Abuse

There are many types of drugs with different personal and criminal consequences attached to them. The drugs used by the birth family might have been cocaine, crack, heroin, marijuana, and amphetamines.

Drugs can make people behave in many different ways depending on which drug is depended on. It is worth finding out about the particular drug known to have been used by the birth parent so that you can describe it in a calm and measured way.

Most drugs have the capacity to distort the user's perception of reality in both positive and negative ways. Their effects can range from feelings of euphoria, peace, calm, to aggression, paranoia, and isolation.

Understanding of social interactions and thought processes can become distorted and fragmented over time.

What is common to all who are dependent on them is a perceived need for the drug. Life seems unbearable without the presence of the drug. The chosen drug originally led to an enhancement of the birth parents experience of life but over time, life for any length of time, is dominated by the need for the drug just to feel normal.

The feeling when not taking the drug is of imbalance, psychological pain and overwhelming need that can even become a physical pain. The person will go to great extremes to be calmed by the temporary peace the drug brings. The 'extremes' when living a life of poverty can manifest as stealing and prostitution as a way of obtaining money to finance the drug. This can then lead to the neglect of children as described above and result in them coming into care.

Your birth mummy/daddy did love you very much but they had a problem with drugs, which meant they could not manage their life very well. We do not know why your birth mummy took drugs but it could have been because people she knew did it or because she did not feel very happy about things. Once people start to take drugs it can be very difficult to stop and people just want more and more. Drugs are illegal which means they are against the law and the police and the Judges in the Courts can punish you if they find you taking them.

The trouble is that, a bit like chocolates and fizzy drinks, they can make you feel great for a while but like chocolate if you ate it all the time you would get very, very fat and ill. Grown ups tell you how much chocolate is safe for your body to eat. Drugs are like this and are only legal if a Doctor gives them to you or you buy them in a chemist where the amount you have is controlled by someone who understands how they work. Bad drugs can even kill you if a Doctor is not in charge of them. All you can think about is getting more of the drug. Drugs are expensive too. Drugs can

make them do things that are not right, like steal money to buy more of the drug and all people can care about is getting more of the drug.

When people use drugs they feel lots of different feelings. Sometimes they are happy sometimes sad, sometimes they are angry and sometimes worried. It is hard for children living with a birth mummy on drugs as they don't know what their birth mummy is going to be like. They might get ignored or shouted at even if they have done nothing wrong. Taking drugs can be a bit like taking the wrong medicine that makes you ill instead of making you better. Drugs can stop a grown up being themselves and making the right choices. Drugs did not help your birth mummy behave in a way that was safe for you.

Describe the particular circumstances of the neglect or abuse and their connection to drugs if this seems relevant.

Domestic Violence

This is when one part of a couple behaves in a way that is threatening or violent to the other partner. This could involve hitting, slapping, punching, kicking, biting, stabbing or hitting any part of the body with an object.

On rare occasions domestic violence can result in the death of a partner. Whether this was intentional or not would be explored in court and a verdict reached. If murder rather than manslaughter

was the term that was used then the description below could still be useful in parts. Great emphasis could be put on any remorse displayed and how dangerous violence can be. Other more positive qualities of the birth father would need to be emphasised and advice sought from professionals experienced in sharing this information.

A book called 'When father Kills Mother: Guiding children through trauma and grief' by Jean Harris, Tony Kaplan and Dr Dora Black is particularly recommended for adopters in this situation. The website *Winston's Wish* also covers how to talk to children affected by death from murder or manslaughter.

Sometimes your birth daddy was very unkind to your mother and they shouted and rowed together. Your birth daddy could not manage his temper and even hit and hurt your birth mummy. It is very wrong when this happens and if the police get to hear about it they know that the law has been broken.

When grown-ups hit and hurt each other it is very frightening for anyone who is there. For children they love both their parents even if they don't like what is happening and it leaves them feeling muddled about what is wrong and right. It is wrong for a daddy to hit a mummy or a mummy to hit a daddy. It means that the grown-up who is so angry that they hit people needs help with their bad temper and must learn to be kind. It can be quite hard for grown ups to change. Most grown ups and mummies and daddies do not hurt each other like this.

[Suicide](#)

Children who are adopted may have to discover at some point that one of their parents or close relatives killed themselves. It will be natural that they will want to know how and why the parent killed themselves

This is a frightening subject as it invites children to contemplate the extremes of psychological suffering and on occasions [if the act was performed in a violent way] the physical pain of a person intimately connected to them. Not only can it be seen as an act of ultimate self negation and despair but suicide can contain a reproach to anyone who cared about them. It could suggest to a child that they were not good enough or lovable enough to want to stay with, in life. It is even possible that some children due to the act being performed by a 'parent' may see it as a model of behaviour they could copy as a response to future distress and sadness.

People who commit suicide may or may not have mental health problems although one in five who kill themselves have seen a mental health professional in the previous year [UK stats]. Three times more men than women kill themselves in the UK.

We know that the beliefs and feelings about suicide vary widely from culture to culture. The causes of suicide will exist in the social, political and cultural environment and personal context of the individual. People's attitude to their lives can be circumstantial and they can be vulnerable to the influence of other people e.g. suicide pacts between friends and partners.

It is also important to remember that many people die in a way that could be accidental or could be suicide e.g. an overdose of a drug that they were addicted to any way or extremely dangerous

driving with an unexplained collision with an inanimate object.

Your birth mummy felt so low and fed up about her life [be specific about what you know was going wrong] that she wanted it all to stop hurting. The part of her that loved people and enjoyed her life she could not feel. She could not think properly and she did not have anyone she wanted to talk to so she just gave up.

If appropriate say; it was because of your mummy's illness [depression/bi polar disorder/schizophrenia] that she could not see that there were lots of important things and people to stay alive for.

For a child under 10 it is best to keep it as simple as possible and then see what path the conversation takes. They will not have all the projections an adult has on the subject although they may have conscious memories of feeling despairing which the information could tap into.

It is important not to underestimate the power of children's imagination and it could be a subject that you need to return to. The child may need reassurance that it is not something 'in the genes' and that worries and feelings do not get so huge and overpowering to result in suicide if they are shared with other loving people as they come up.

Natalie Salaman. October 2009.

Anxiety Alcoholism Death Domestic Violence Drug Abuse Emotional Abuse Learning Difficulties/Disabilities Manic Depression-Bi Polar Disorder Mental Ill Health Neglect Non Accidental Injury Personality

**Disorder Rape Schizophrenia Suicide Sexual Abuse-context sex
and sexual awareness Unknown Fathers**