

Background

1

The term 'trigger or toxic trio' is used by some professionals to describe the issues of domestic abuse, mental ill-health and substance misuse. This 'trio' has been identified as common features of families where significant harm to children has occurred.

The trio combination has a clear link with increased risks of abuse and neglect of children and young people, but professionals MUST remember that there are many risk factors and complex issues which can increase the risk of harm within a household.

Domestic Abuse

2

- Creates an inconsistent and unpredictable environment for adults and children.
- Carers may demonstrate a lack of emotional warmth and/or higher levels of aggression.
- Children will experience emotional abuse living in a household where there is domestic abuse.
- Professionals must establish the links between domestic abuse, neglect and the physical abuse of children.
- It can impact baby brain development, and CYP may develop mental ill-health connected to neglect and abuse.

Substance use

3

It is not inevitable that substance use will affect parenting capacity; however, it is a significant feature in cases where children have been seriously harmed or killed. Professionals should be aware that if the trilogy of risk is identified, it does NOT mean that the child will experience significant harm; but you MUST be professionally curious about those risks presenting.

- Alcohol dependence linked with depression is particularly associated to inconsistent parenting.
- The impact of alcohol/substance use on the child is often underestimated by professionals. Always review the impact of work in terms of the outcomes for the child.

Substance use cont.

4

- It can lead to an unstable home life:
 - with children becoming a carer for other siblings
 - being coerced into criminal activities by the parent/carer
 - experiencing neglect and/or being placed at risk

Mental health

5

- Conditions such as depression can inhibit a parent's ability to respond to their child's emotional cues and offer consistent care to the child.
- They can cause a parent to be either 'intrusive and hostile' or 'withdrawn and disengaged', causing the child to experience emotional abuse and behaviour.
- Adults with mental health problems are statistically more likely to abuse drugs or alcohol; people who abuse drugs have a markedly increased lifetime occurrence of diagnosable mental health issues.

What is my role?

6

Be careful not to overlook other factors and barriers present in a family's life such as parental ACEs, cultural or language barriers, disability, poverty/deprivation, and availability of support services.

Understand how trio elements interlink, to ensure appropriate and effective interventions are in place. Be aware of the trio risk factors, including parents/carers having a history of childhood abuse/neglect, or other family history with social care services.

Cases involving the trio elements must always involve more than one agency to be effective. Having a full history and situational picture from partnership working, makes for informed decision making.

Be curious, think critically and systematically. Talk to all family members, new and ex-partners/carers alone. Escalate your response if you experience non-engagement to keep children safe.

Resources and further learning

7

- [Protecting Children from Domestic Abuse](#)
- [Parents with substance use problems](#)
- [Unity Service for Norfolk](#)
- [Matthew Project](#)
- [Change Grow Line](#)
- [Parental mental ill-health problems](#)
- [Words Matter](#)
- [Just One Norfolk](#)
- [Children's Needs – Parenting Capacity](#)
- [NSPCC Learning](#)
- [Children's Commissioner](#)
- [Norfolk & Suffolk Victim Care](#)
- [Norfolk Police Online Reporting](#) or call 999/101 in an emergency
- [Report Domestic Abuse](#) - Norfolk County Council
- [Adult Social Care](#)



**NORFOLK COMMUNITY
SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**