**GUIDANCE ON TACKLING THE TOXIC TRIO**

**Domestic Abuse**

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**Substance Misuse**

**Mental Health**

**Difficulties**

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# Introduction - What is the Toxic Trio and why/how do we work together well?

## What is the Toxic Trio?

Research shows that the environment in which a child lives is crucial to his or her health, safety and well-being. Domestic abuse, mental ill-health and substance misuse are parental factors that impact that environment. The term 'Toxic Trio' describes the co-existence of these factors.

This guidance is useful whether you are working on one or any combination of these issues.

## **Why are we focused on it**?

Toxic Trio factors have been identified as common features of families where harm to children has occurred and is a common theme in Serious Case Reviews and Domestic Homicide Reviews. Without support to address them adults are also likely to experience significant impacts on their safety, health and wellbeing whether they are parents or not.

It is our ambition in Cheshire East to support families to live safe, healthy and productive lives and so to take action on the Toxic Trio is a priority.

To do this effectively we need to adopt a co-ordinated approach avoiding duplication of resources and repeat questioning of families by different agencies with different areas of concern. The best outcomes are achieved where engagement with families is strong and so starting from their perspective rather than our individual agency or sector processes should be a priority.

## Who should be addressing the Toxic Trio?

All frontline staff in the following sectors have a responsibility to identify, protect and support in an integrated, whole family way:

* + Specialist services for each of the issues
	+ Early intervention services for adults and children in the statutory and voluntary sector
	+ Statutory adult and child protection services

## What is common about the way these issues impact families?

* + they cause real harm to children and adults in the short and long term
	+ they are issues which tend to be hidden and so can become more serious before they are addressed
	+ they cause parents and children some level of shame and fear so there can be reluctance to seek help or to reveal the extent of the problem
	+ by the time the seriousness of the issue becomes known the ability of parents and carers to take action can be compromised
	+ they are interconnected in that one contributes to the other e.g. the experience of domestic abuse can lead to poor mental health or those who harm others often do so under the influence of alcohol

## What makes these issues hard to tackle?

* + These issues affect families but the legal and safeguarding structures which require or permit intervention are separate across adults and children’s workforces, resulting in different process and priorities
	+ the issues also span a range of sectors including health, criminal justice, social care which each have different targets and ways of working
	+ in relation to those affected the issues are linked to complex dependency, feelings of loyalty and love and engrained patterns of behaviour all of which make change challenging

## How do we take an integrated whole family approach given the above barriers to effective ‘family’ approaches?

Clearly we need to work together to identify, protect and support all those who are impacted using shared language, tools and approaches. In working with families we need to know:

1. how serious each of the issues is for the Adults/parents
2. how seriously the issues affect children
3. what lessens the impact for children
4. what capacity parent/carers have for protection and change through
	* + Engaging them in understanding the impact of their behaviour on their child/ren
		+ Being clear and honest about the need to prioritise children’s needs
		+ Reminding them that we are committed to the principle that children are best placed with their families, provided it is safe for them
		+ Adopting a strengths based approach
		+ Identifying what motivates or blocks change
		+ Supporting them to make change
		+ Constantly monitoring progress

## How do we ensure that we put children and young people at the centre of planning and action?

This is about focus and involvement. Some agencies work directly with children and others don’t. However, we all have a responsibility to keep them central by:

* + Ensuring their views and voice are captured as fully as possible – if we can’t do this we can ask others how the child or young person is
	+ Focusing on their resilience as well as vulnerabilities
	+ Working together across sectors – ‘wrapping around the family’
	+ Sharing and triangulating information
	+ Reviewing and making good decisions about the extent of change

# TOOLS

Below are a range of tools, some of which are ‘specialist’ in relation to each issue and some of which are generic.

You may use any one or a combination of several to get enough information and engagement to form a plan of action.

It should not matter whether you start with the generic and then identify the need to go in depth or start from the specialist and recognise the need to draw others in by using a multi-agency framework such as CAF or referral to Children’s Services.

If, at any point, you become concerned that a child or adult is ‘at risk’ of serious harm you must follow your agency safeguarding procedures.

Links or embedded files will take you to each tool. These should also be available on the LSCB website on the Professional Support pages – look out for ‘xxx’ resources.

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

Here are some starter questions for opening up a conversation about any of these factors where you have some concerns. Question 4 in each case is intended to lead you on to a more in depth consideration of the factor using the specialist tools below.

MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES

1. You seem upset/low/under the weather. How are you feeling now?
2. Have you ever had contact with your GP or other mental health services about how you’re feeling?
3. Do you think this affects the way you care for your child/ren?
4. Can we talk a bit more about this to see how we can best support you?

SUBSTANCE MISUSE

1. Sometimes people cope with difficulties by drinking or taking stuff. Have you or anyone else ever been worried about this?
2. Have you ever had support?
3. Do you think this affects the way you care for your child/ren?
4. Can we talk a bit more about this to see how we can best support you?

DOMESTIC ABUSE

1. How are things at home? Are you afraid or worried about your relationship?
2. Have you ever had support about this?
3. Do you think this affects the way you care for your child/ren?
4. Can we talk a bit more about this to see how we can best support you?

The presence of all 3 should cause you to take further action – see Action Planning below:

## SPECIALIST ASSESSMENT TOOLS

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **DOMESTIC ABUSE** |  |  |
|  | **How serious is this for the adult? Use the Risk Indicator Checklist. NB this is also a referral form for support** |  |
|  | **How does this impact any child? Use the Domestic Abuse Risk and Needs Assessment**  |  |
| **SUBSTANCE MISUSE** |  |  |
|  | **How serious is this for the adult?**  |  |
|  | **How does this impact any child?** |  |
| **MENTAL HEALTH DIFFICULTIES**  |  |  |
|  | **How serious are these difficulties for the adult?** |  |
|  | **How do these difficulties impact any child?** |  |

## GENERIC TOOLS

Common Assessment Framework - <http://cheshireeast.gov.uk/children_and_families/common_assessment_framework/common_assessment_framework.aspx>

The tools below can be found on the assessment pages of the LSCB website

* [Neglect screening tool (MS Word, 168KB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/docs/neglect-screening-tool.doc)
* [Neglect Graded Care profile tool (PDF, 160KB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/pdf/professional/ce-neglect-graded-care-profile-tool.pdf)
* [Child Sexual Exploitation screening tool (MS Word, 3MB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/docs/pan-cheshire-cse-screening-tool-v5.doc)
* [Emotional responsiveness assessment tool (MS Word, 323KB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/docs/emotional-responsiveness-assessment-tool.doc)
* [Motivation, ability and opportunity for change tool (MS Word, 318KB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/docs/motivation-ability-and-opportunity-for-change-tool.doc)
* [Motivation, ability and opportunity for change tool - accompanying document (MS Word, 318KB)](http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/docs/motivation-ability-and-opportunity-for-change-tool-accompanying-document.doc)

**ANALYSIS**

In analysing the information it is important to think about:

* The combined impact of multiple issues on adults, children and the family as a whole
* What strengths and resilience the family has
* Whether the parent recognises the problems or denies them
* Whether the parent is willing and/or able to take action
* What risk management is already in place
* How needs are already being met
* Whether there is any difference in the information or views shared between professionals or practitioners and the family

**ACTION PLANNING**

* If at any point you have an immediate concern follow your safeguarding procedures
* If you have identified all 3 factors you must talk with your manager about next steps as this may indicate a safeguarding concern that needs action
* Talk with your manager or consult with a lead in the domestic abuse/substance misuse sectors if you need more specialist advice or to check out information
* Encourage and support parents to access support for themselves and their child/ren
* Consider opening a CAF where issues can be dealt with at this level
* Refer to ChECS if there are significant safeguarding concerns
* Using the evidence you’ve completed in the analysis will help ensure that families are supported at the right level
* Continue to support family members in addressing any of these issues even if they are accessing specialist help – ask how it’s going and check out any continued concerns

**TRAINING**

The Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB), Cheshire East Workforce Development team and Cheshire East Domestic Abuse Partnership (CEDAP) all provide training to support practitioners in multi-agency approaches to tackling these issues.

The LSCB Training Programme can be found at:

<http://www.cheshireeastlscb.org.uk/learning-and-development/training-programme.aspx>

This programme includes ‘Tackling the Toxic Trio’ which has been jointly designed and is jointly delivered by staff from all safeguarding sectors.