

ALCOHOL AND BRAIN DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDHOOD

It sometimes seems like a child never stops growing! And it's true, they are rapidly developing throughout childhood – especially the brain.

As children involve themselves in the new world around them, their brain is forming brand new connections which support their intellectual and emotional development.

Each time a child uses their senses to experience the world – touch, taste, smell - their brain begins to make new connections. These connections begin to shape the way the child feels, thinks and behaves.

Because of this, the type of environment in which a child is raised can have an important effect on their brain development.

Interacting positively with parents & experiencing love, affection and consistent routine promotes the growth and development of the brain.

A difficult home-life can reduce the quality of caregiving and parenting a child receives.

If a parent is struggling to cope with their alcohol-use for example, this may affect their ability to parent. They may find it difficult to consistently show warmth to their child and/or to provide them with a good routine. Their alcohol use may prevent them from playing with their children or engaging with them in a way that promotes their emotional/behavioural development.

In some cases, alcohol is a trigger for abuse in the family.

If these problems remain unchanged or the family remains unsupported, it can begin to impact on the child's brain development.

Research has linked a negative home environment during a child's early years with a host of developmental problems for the child, including:

- Impaired brain skills
- Behaviour problems & mental health difficulties
- Poorer school performance

It is important to recognise that problem alcohol use affects the whole family, particularly children.

KEY ADVICE

- If you are struggling with alcohol-use at the moment, your whole family will benefit too if you seek help to address and overcome this. There are people and services who can help you.
- If you are affected by a family member's alcohol use, it is important to know you are not alone. You are not betraying anyone by talking about it.