

# 'We count too'

Good Practice Guide and Quality Standards  
for work with family members affected  
by someone else's drug use

Second edition



Adfam  
Families, drugs and alcohol



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## What makes a good service for partners of a drug user?

Partners have a different type of relationship with the drug user than other family members. All family support services should be aware of the particular issues involved and take steps to ensure that the service is accessible to partners. Even if the organisation is not able to provide a specialist service itself, it can be aware of and liaise with other services that can provide information and support, including services for children and young people affected by someone else's drug use.

### A good service for partners knows about:

- What it's like to be the partner of a drug user, including how it feels, what can happen, ways of understanding the situation and ways of dealing with it.
- The specific issues for partners of a drug user, e.g. sexual health and domestic abuse including emotional and mental abuse.
- Drugs, dependency and treatment options including harm reduction and dual diagnosis.
- The Law.
- Child protection issues and systems.
- Local childcare provision and how to access it.
- Effects on children of having a drug-using parent, and how to help them deal with this.
- Where to get practical help and advice, signposting other services, resources and networks.

### A good service for partners is able to:

- Clearly state in advertising and promotional literature that it provides a service specifically for partners.
- Provide a service that recognises the diversity of relationships within the local community, e.g. gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender as well as heterosexual, with staff and volunteers who reflect and can relate to partners from a range of relationships.
- Provide an appropriate service for partners of drug users from a range of age, gender, cultural and ethnic backgrounds that reflects the diversity of the local population.
- Meet the needs of partners with physical and sensory impairments, e.g. using accessible venues, providing a BSL interpreter, producing written information in large print, Braille or on tape as required.
- Provide specific support groups for partners, including single-gender groups.
- Provide one-to-one support to partners and links to services that will work with the wider family.
- Advocate on the partner's behalf with other services and on child protection issues.

### A good service for partners is:

- Respectful of each partner as an individual.
- Aware that:
  - There are feelings of shame and stigma associated with being the partner of a drug user.
  - Other family members may blame the partner for the drug user's behaviour.
  - There may be strong social and/or family pressure on the partner either to remain with or leave his/her drug-using partner, and that this can contribute to the partner's emotional turmoil and a sense of powerlessness.