



PREGNANCY, PARENTING, & SUBSTANCE USE: NAVIGATING SYSTEMS

Module 2.3: Child Welfare

Statistics on Child Welfare Involvement Related to SUD

Nearly 19 million children in the United States have at least one parent with a substance use disorder (SUD), and more than 7 million live in a household with a parent who has a moderate or severe SUD.² Some parents who struggle with substance use have difficulty providing the physical and emotional support their children need. This can result in children experiencing an unstable and unpredictable home environment. When parental substance use is identified during pregnancy, delivery, or postpartum, child welfare* may get involved. This means families may have to work with multiple social service agencies and professionals, whose goal is to determine the best outcomes for a child’s safety and well-being (National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare, 2024).³

The child welfare system’s overarching goal is to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children. Their aim is to work with parents to increase their capacity to build protective factors—strengths or positive elements that reduce the risk of child abuse and neglect. {U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), 2020 #496} Peer support specialists and coaches (“peers”) can play a key role in supporting participants in their parenting goals and in navigating child welfare systems. When parents feel seen and supported, they are more likely to stay engaged with services and work toward reunification and healing. {National Center on Substance Abuse and Child Welfare (NCSACW), 2025 #535}

Substance Use and Child Welfare Involvement Data

The Adoption Foster Care and Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data shows that of the 175,283 children who entered the child welfare system during 2023, alcohol and drug use (either alone or in combination with other reasons) were associated with the decision to remove 38% of those children from their homes. It should be noted though, there is



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significant variability between states. When looking at data from the three states with the highest removal rates, drug or alcohol use was associated with child removal in 82% of cases in Alaska, 42% in West Virginia, and 39% in Montana.

Unfortunately, research has shown that families affected by parental substance use have a lower likelihood of successful reunification and their children tend to stay in foster care longer than children of parents without a substance use history.¹ This highlights the important role peers can play in supporting these parents in identifying and working towards their goals for their family.



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