

Introduction.

Good Morning/Afternoon and welcome to today's event. My name is Aisling Reddy and I am the children's centre Manager for SAOL BEAG, the only women's addiction service for women and children in Ireland.

I would like to thank Gary Broderick for asking me to discuss some of the work that takes place in SAOL BEAG and the Children's Centre's role in supporting children and women and highlighting the importance of relationships and providing supports.

Within this presentation

- I will touch slightly on the legislation in Ireland with regards to the protection of children,
- Attachments
- Relationships
- Supports
- Strengthening Recovery

Slide 1.= Legislation

The Child Care Act 1991 has affirmed children's rights and needs and the concept of the best interests of the child. The enshrinement in the Act of the principle that parental responsibilities are at least as important as parental rights points to a significant shift in focus in terms of child protection.

While adhering and implementing the legal frameworks it is highly important to highlight that in the early year's services we have to implement these frameworks and also emphasises to the parent that while these frameworks are in place this is not sufficient to trigger child protection agencies. We try to place in many supports before it is necessary to deem a child at risk!

It is important to emphase to parents when dealing with their addictions that we work on building up on many levels of trust and bonding for them and their children. While many parents feel concerned about being judged it is important to recognise that everyone has struggles with parenting and making the right choices for their children so while parents may also be in addiction this can add a more level of anxiety when trying to work with on the relationships.

While the HSE have a duty to ensure that support services for children 'in need' are provided; unnecessary intrusion into family life should be minimised. We then in turn try to offer many levels of supports in order for to minimise the risk for children while also reaffirming the mothers that supports are available for them to achieve goals while the level of protection for their children and will work on maintaining that relationship of parenting.

Articles 41 & 42 of the constitution

Slide 2= Attachment.

Attachment is defined as an affectional bond to another person and healthy human beings continue to rely on attachment relationships in times of danger, vulnerability or illness (Bowlby, 1988). What differentiates attachment relationships from other close relationships is the need to maintain proximity in times of distress, the use of the attachment figure as a "secure base" from which to explore the world and as a "safe haven" to flee to for comfort and reassurance (Bowlby, 1988).

Attachment is the drive for physical and emotional closeness with other people. It ensures infant survival by bonding infant to mother and mother to infant. Throughout life the attachment drive impels us to seek relationships and companionships, maintains family connections and helps build community.

In order for attachment to develop is when a caregiver shows awareness to a child and their emotions and quickly attends to a child when they are distressed. By being present for the child it will comfort them to know that they have your attention and focus on them for whatever reason. By giving the child this level of awareness it is the starting of secure attachments, thus the child is in the comfort to be able to explore their environment and give them the sense of security.

A child can also feel emotional distress when their parent is physically present but emotionally unavailable. A child will seek to reconnect and a loving response will release endorphins and ease a child's discomfort. If this is unavailable to a child they will seek other forms of coping mechanisms such as thumb sucking, rocking to escape any forms of discomfort.

Our role in SAOL BEAG is to provide all the children with the environment to explore and to be able to regulate their emotions in a

healthy and positive environment. The childcare team works on building up on creating a safe and healthy relationship with both the mother and child and thus equates to giving the mother's the necessary tools to work on building on their recovery as well as working on building on the relationships with their child. It is also emphasized that supports are available at every level for the mother as they can be open and honest with the team plus they don't have to hide who they are.

Secure attachment is developed when a caretaker shows awareness of a child's emotions and quickly attends to the child when distressed. The child perceives the caretaker as consistent in presence and provision. Securely attached children feel the freedom to explore their world because they have a sense of certainty that their caretakers are available, should they be needed.

As cited from Tus Maith laith na Hoibre the short report which was published by SAOL in October from the words of a mother herself stated

"They understand what the project is about. You're not being judged as a mother. If you went to another crèche you wouldn't tell them you were a drug addict. Here you don't have to hide your past".

Slide 3= Relationships.

It is one of the most important elements when working with mothers is building on the relationship. This isn't just working with mothers in addiction but in all cases of being a childcare worker working in partnership with families.

While being a childcare worker in SAOL we are working with families who may be experiencing stress and this could put families under further harm, it is important to identify these stresses and help provide as much support as possible, as sustaining recovery is only possible through supports. It is putting interventions in place in order to help strengthen families and focus on the positives. It is giving the necessary tools in order to work on positive parenting and also providing the opportunity to role model positive relationships and behaviours which brings and highlights more positives for the children.

It is important to highlight that trust and respect provides important benefits to this relationship as you are providing the parent with regularity and consistency thus gives the parent the opportunity to work on their road to recovery knowing that their child is in the best environment and relieves the stress on the parent.

It is ideal while working on securing relationships not to cause further stress which can damage recovery and damage the relationships and cause further trauma. Thus the benefits of SAOL is that we work closely with the mothers key workers which allows us to know what stresses and strains may be going on at a particular time and then the childcare team can step in and offer additional support. Thus this is one of the many elements of an effective relationship.

Slide 4= Supports.

Within SAOL not only have we the understanding of addiction and the stress and trauma of recovery we have a vast understanding of addiction and the role of supports in which are needed to be put in place to be able to sustain recovery. We look at the whole perspective of a person and also the supports which are in place for the family.

It's more important for affection and not just protection

Sustaining thru supports

Supports we offer.....

By having the understanding of addiction and the supports in place therefore leads to a non judgemental approach of working with the women and treating them with the utmost dignity, respect and empathy. Building relationships of trust doesn't just happen. It takes time and a dedication with a clear sense of purpose, an this purpose is making sure that the women and children have the relationship necessary to what everyone deserves.

Slide 5 = Strengthening Recovery.

If you are a good mother, chances are you're getting better at recovery.

Evidence indicates that supporting the family through parenting skills and training is beneficial for the family.

Parents plus programme not only delivering an effective model but it is doing it in the environment where the parents are supporting each other by sharing their stories and opinions but the level of guilt felt is shared by similar women so it's open and honest and thus hopefully this level of guilt can be eliminated.

Addressing substance use problems in primary care setting would help to reduce the stigma associated with these problems; these should be increased to allow people to seek the services needed as it will provide additional supports in both recovery and also seeking at maintaining the family relationships. By putting more supports into primary care settings for people in addiction would enhance the road to recovery as less stressor are in place which could enforce relapse.

While dealing with the effects that substance dependency not only are you dealing with withdrawal symptoms and also have physical and emotional distress it also entails vast changes. Where family relationships have been affected by substance misuse, there is a need to redevelop quality ties in relationships between family members, strengthening connections and the basis for building trust

