

When stigma and shame stand in the way.

Ways to help parents in substance use treatment
supporting their children

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TYRiLi

Tyrili Foundation

- Substance use disorder treatment
- 250 patient (in-patients and out-patients)
- 10 units in four regions in Norway

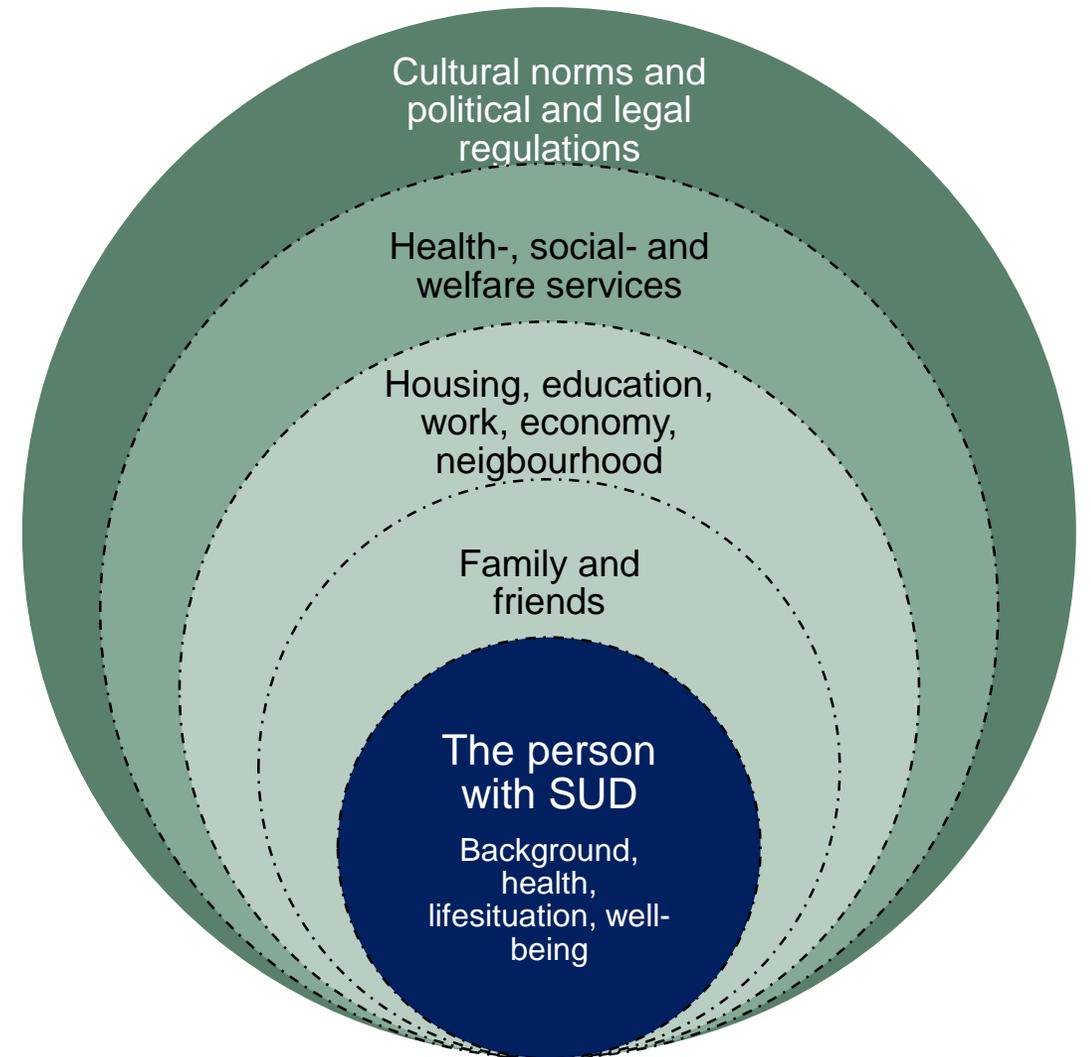


Introduction

- 5000 patients in substance use treatment in Norway have children.
- Legislation instructs health professionals to include children when parents are in treatment (information and support), requires approval from the parents.
- Research revealed that implementation has been challenging, and children are in little degree invited to child- and family conversations

Understanding the parents to see, protect and support the children

- Alcohol, prescribed drugs and all other substances
- In all socioeconomic classes, occupational groups and geographical areas
- Understanding the substance use as a way of coping with adverse experiences, mental health problems, and demanding living conditions – a **biopsychosocial approach**



(Duncan, 2021; Engel, 1977; Hole, 2014)

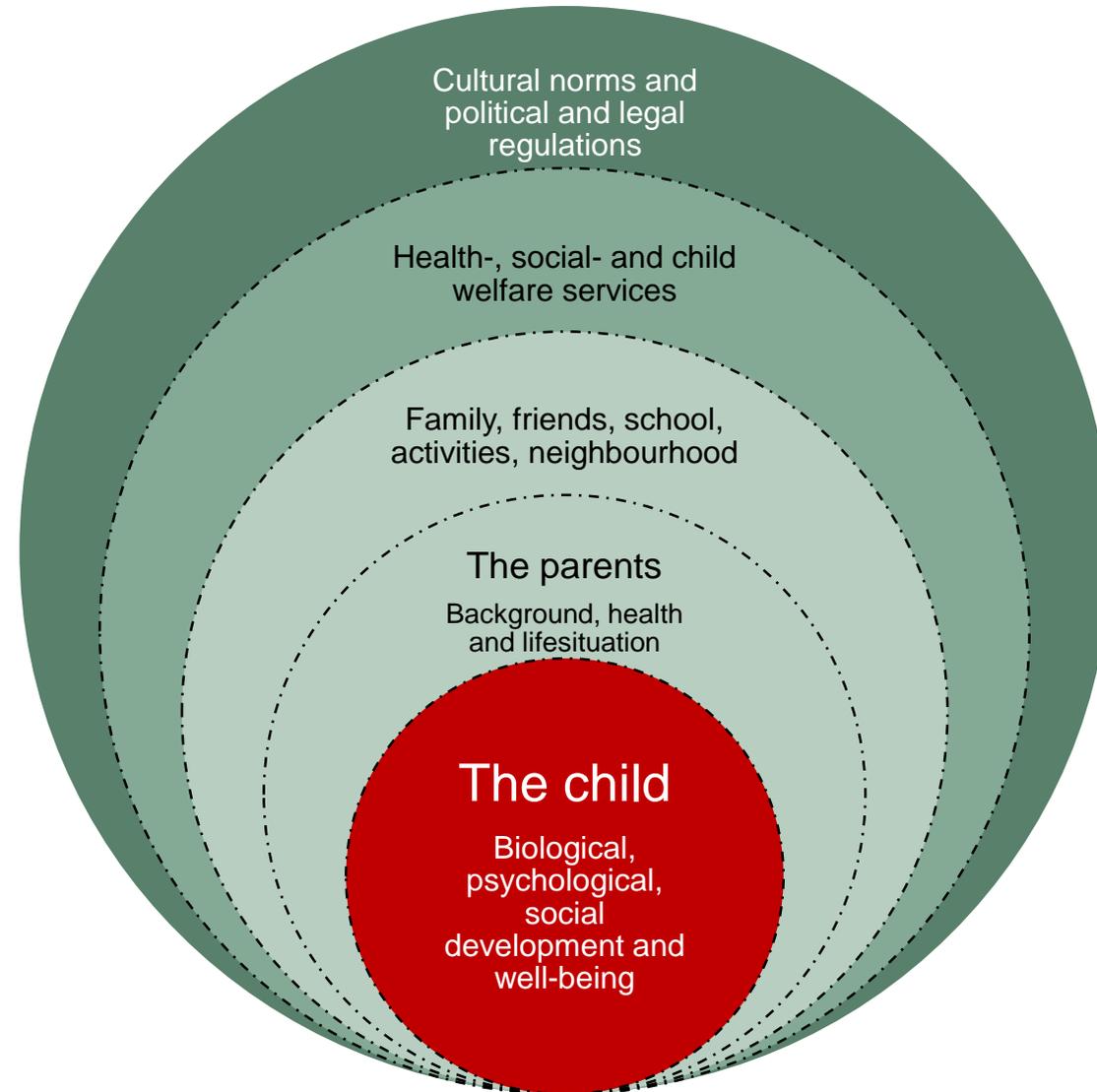
I loved being a mum. I was a caring mother. I was totally without drugs until she was four years old, and we had a great life together.

(...) Suddenly I was there, with the needle in my arm. I actually do not know why. I just did it. (Karen, 47)

There were alcohol and drugs at home; both my parents were addicted. I took care of my younger siblings from the age of five

(...) Using drugs, to me - it was protection, survival, a way to escape. (Lise, 36)

Potential vulnerability and protection



(Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Sameroff, 2019)

Growing up with parental substance use problems



These children's need

- Adults who see them *and* understand and act.
- Adults who talk with them about their parents with respect.
- Protection against substance use, but not necessarily against their parents
- Support in the regulation of contact with their parents
- Creation of meaning through conversations with and without the parents present
- A safety plan in case of parents' relapses, violence, etc.

Barriers that prevent children from being seen, protected and supported

- Barriers within the child
 - Barriers within the professionals
 - Barriers within the parents
- Stigma:
 - being marked by others
 - Shame:
 - A destructiv feeling of being wrong, unwanted and unworthy of love
 - Ethical shame – a compass for action

Substance use
problems

Not being able to
care for their
children

Double stigma and shame

...which also influence the children and
professionals

...which leads to **silence**

*Some themes are almost impossible to talk about with others
- it is too shameful. Things my parents have done, like
prostitution ... I find it very hard to talk about it; what will
people think?*

(Jane, 25)

To overcome the silence

- Talking about substance use problems with empathy not stigma
- Talking about parents' shame and grief
- Understanding the complexity of substance use problems and the recovery-process
- Making the children and their needs visible
- Supporting parents in taking their children's perspective

The workshop

- Three days gathering located in a course resort
- 30 - 45 patients/parents from seven treatment units participated
- group-therapists from the units
- Combination of psychoeducation, short films, exercises individual and in groups and plenary summaries



The aims of the workshop

Making the children
more visible



Being aware of the
childrens
perspectives

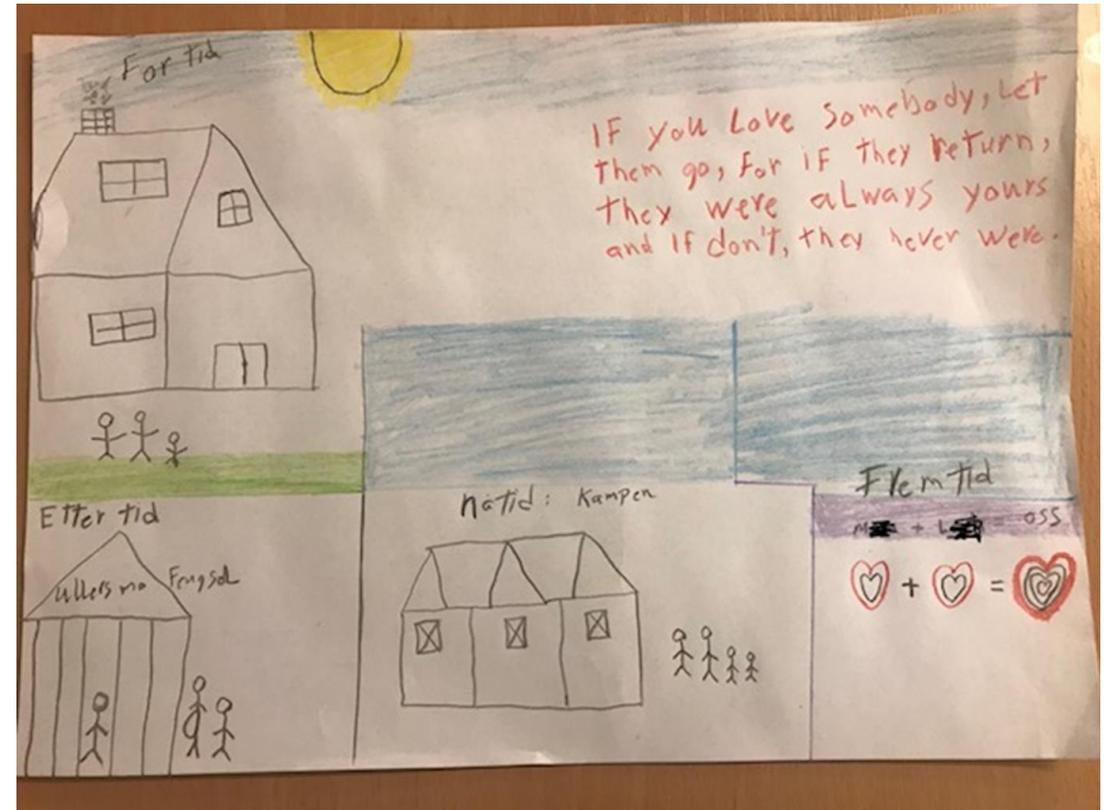
Becoming a more
supportive parent

Coping with stigma
and shame

Understandig the
influence of ones own
childhood
experiences

Theme and task 1: The important relationship

- The participants introduced themselves and their children to the rest of the group
- Create an illustration or symbol to describe the relationship between you and your children



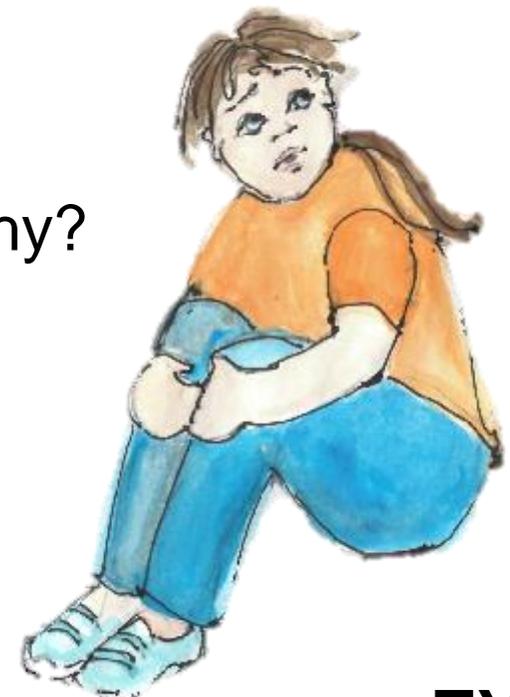
Theme and task 2:

We all have been children once

By understanding yourself and your childhood, you can better understand your children

Discuss in the groups:

- Tell about some nice memories from your childhood
- Who were important persons during childhood – and why?
- What will you bring along from your childhood into parenting?
- What will you not bring along?



While looking back on my own childhood, I understood that I had to talk with my son. I've always thought it was best to leave him alone, but suddenly I remembered how it was for me when I was a child - all my wanderings and no one there to explain. (Peter, 34)

Theme and task 3:

The childrens perspective - How it`s your child really doing?

Talk about:

- What thoughts and concerns do you think occupies your child?
- What wanderings and questions do you think she/he has about you and your situation?
- What makes your child feel safe?
- What makes your child unsafe?
- What makes it difficult to se things from your child's perspective?



Theme and task 4

Talking with your child

Imagine that you are having a talk with your child

- What is important to talk about?
- What could the opening sentence be?



It was what I learned at the parenting seminar about taking the children's perspective, which was most important to me. I went straight home to my children and talked to them. What I managed this time was to actually listen to what they said, I didn't try to explain and defend myself. (Linda, 37)

Theme and task 5

How can we support the children together?

Protection
against the substance use

Relationships
with parents and other
important persons maintain
when possible



Meaningfull
convercasions
The child has someone to talk
with about thoughts, feelings and
experiences

Discuss in groups and write it down:
Who and what is important for your child?

A friend's father was a football coach, he always made sure I made it to training and matches. Mum was mentally ill and mostly lay on the sofa. Now I realize how important he actually was to me. (Anders, 29)

Concluding reflections

- A challenging and important theme to work on
- The therapists got inspiration and courage to continue to work on the theme after the workshop
- The patients perceived to have enhanced the understanding of their child's needs of protection and support
- There has been an increased focus on parenthood and children in the treatment program
- There has been conducted more conversations with parents and children in Tyrili

First of all, I have to stay drug-free, right! And then we have to get to know each other in a new way, and I have to show my son that I can recognize his thoughts and feelings. I think I should start by writing a letter to his mother, so she is not so skeptical of me all the time, although I understand that she is. (Jonas, 38)

- Questions?
- Reflections?
- Anyone who wants to share some experiences?



Issue 2

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«Jeg vil jo så gjerne bli en god, trygg og rusfri pappa»

Erfaringer fra foreldreseminar med pasienter i rusbehandling

“I really want to be a good, safe and sober dad”

Experiences from a workshop with patients in substance use treatment

FOTO: ANDERS BISGAARD



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