



Working with **First Responders** in Drug Endangered Children (DEC) Efforts

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 defines first responders as individuals who protect life, evidence, property, or the environment during the early stages of an emergency (www.dhs.gov). Firefighters, EMS, law enforcement personnel, medical personnel, utility workers, and public health professionals are examples of first responder professionals.

First responders are often the first to arrive on scene; first to interact with children and families; first to gather information; and first to see things other disciplines may not. What is documented during any phase of their response could be impactful to not only the situation, but those impacted by the situation, including the children.

Some of the most inconsequential items observed, documented, and identified could be valuable information for:

- Medical professionals who are treating a victim who is injured or ill
- Child welfare in making decisions about the safety of the child and services for the family
- Law enforcement and prosecutors who may be building a case
- Service providers that may work with the child and family
- Other professionals helping the child and family, whether short or long term.

First responders may have the opportunity to identify children at risk or families in need of help. For example, fire/EMS responding to a drug overdose should be aware of children living in the residence or on scene. Or when there is an intoxicated driver involved in an accident, law enforcement and medical can identify children at risk due to a parent's substance misuse. This identification is key in getting children and families the help they need.

First responders may have information on:

- *What risks were present at the scene: drugs, weapons, intoxicated people, dirty house, lack of food, lack of supervision, etc.*
- *Signs of substance use or drug activity: lab materials, pipes, drug residue, etc.*
- *Signs of drugs and paraphernalia*
- *Information on who was present and who lives in the home*
- *Signs of children: toys, car seat, etc.*
- *Reactions and interactions of children and adults on scene: fearful, cooperative, etc.*
- *Statements made by children and adults*

First responders may need training and information on:

- *What to look for when on scene: signs of children; signs of abuse and neglect; signs of substance use and drug activity; signs of risks to children*
- *Mandatory reporting: what to look for; what to report; how to report; who to report to; when to report; the importance of reporting; how reporting impacts children and families*
- *Risks to children of parental substance use and drug activity*
- *Long-term impact to children of parental substance and drug activity*
- *What they can do to help: gather information; pass information along to others; provide information on scene*

For more information please contact us at info@nationaldec.org or on our website at www.nationaldec.org.