Parenting a Child Exposed to Meth

In This Issue

Effects of Prenatal Meth Exposure
Postnatal Effects
Parenting Children Exposed to Meth
Additional Information & Resources

Meth is is a synthetically processed, highly addictive drug that stimulates the central nervous system. Meth prompts an immediate release of dopamine into the brain of the user, creating feelings of well-being, omnipotence and euphoria.

According to a 2012 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, 3.10 % of adults age 18-25 reported being regular users, while 5.5 % of adults 26 and older reported being regular users. [Source]

Effects of Prenatal Meth Exposure

The exact effects of prenatal meth exposure can vary, depending on the frequency and intensity of a mother's usage, her other lifestyle habits, access to prenatal care, nutrition and health. Some of the more common and known risks of prenatal meth exposure include:

- Premature birth
- Low birth weight
- Birth defects
- Brain lesions
- Stunted growth

Postnatal Effects

Additional Information & Resources

NACAC - Child Welfare's Next Challenge: Parenting Meth's Young Victims

National Institue on Drug Abuse - Methamphetamine

NPR - Kids Exposed to Meth In Womb Can Struggle With Behavior Problems

OPARC - Parenting Children Who Have Been Exposed to Methamphetamine

A child's environment after he/she is born can have a major impact on his/her development. Even if a child is exposed to meth in utero, sometimes a stable home environment can mediate those effects. Some of the more common postnatal consequences of prenatal meth exposure include:

- Respiratory issues
- Hypersensitivity to touch
- Muscle tension
- Trouble sucking or swallowing

These consequences can lead to more problems later on, like failure to thrive, developmental delays, learning disabilities, cognitive impairments, withdrawal symptoms in babies, and neurological abnormalities.

On top of all this, babies who were exposed to meth prenatally often are exposed to less than ideal environments after birth. Research has shown that a baby's environment is crucial to his/her development. A lack of consistent care makes it hard for them to form trusting relationships, and a lack of stimulation can cause developmental delays and academic issues.

Parenting Children Exposed to Meth

Children exposed to meth do best in homes that are nurturing and calm, with routines and established rules. They do best with parents who can exhibit a lot of patience, empathy, and consistency. A child exposed to meth will need help learning appropriate interactions with others, and how to form healthy, trusting relationships. In order to be successful, parents may want to consider the following plan:

Seek out the help of professionals - You will need to find professionals and organizations in your community that will help you determine what your child's needs are and the best course of action for meeting them.

Build up a support network - All adoptive parents needs a support system post-adoption, but this is especially important for parents of a meth-exposed child. The challenges you face will be unique, so seeking out support from support groups of parents who have experienced/are experiencing the same challenges will be vital.

Don't label - It is very easy for a child to fall prey to

a label or stereotype they hear from a peer, on TV, or even a relative, and then live up to this stereotype in a self-fulfilling prophecy. Role play with your child some responses they can give to intrusive questions or negative labels. Encourage your child to find his/her strengths and celebrate their talents and abilities.

Give your child privacy - While it may be tempting to give a child's teacher or relative the "whole story" to explain where your child is coming from, your child may not be comfortable with you sharing all the details of their past. Instead, give out information on a need-to-know basis.

Establish routines - Meth-exposed children most likely came from a chaotic environment, and in order for them to learn to trust you and feel secure they will need an environment that offers stability and predictability. Come up with a consistent daily schedule for your child, starting with the minute they wake up and ending the minute they go to sleep. Give advance notice of any changes to a child's routine.

Nurture your child physically and emotionally - Babies and children exposed to meth prenatally have issues with being touched and held. Older children may have an impaired CNS or sensitive neurology which makes them have trouble with physical closeness. Slowly incorporate gentle touches and hugs into your child's life, in addition to eye contact. Research attachment issues for suggestions on how to help your child bond. Start off slow, and be patient - it takes time!

Advocate for your child - Your child is counting on you to be their advocate to get the services they need, especially in areas like school in order to be successful. Do some research into what services your child is entitled to and make sure he/she receives them.

Nurture talents and achievements - Encourage your child to explore different activities in the community: sports, art classes, dance classes, etc. Your child may find he/she has an aptitude or talent for a certain activity, which will bolster their sense of self.

Be realistic, but positive - Understand that there are certain aspects of meth exposure that you will not be able to correct, namely the biological effects. As such, become an advocate and encourager for your child.

Practice self-care - It's easy to become wrapped up in caring for your child that you forget about your needs. In order to properly and successfully meet

> your child's needs, you must also meet your own. Carve out some time for yourself every day to do something you love. Seek out respite care as you need it.