



Beyond the Headlines of the Opioid Epidemic: Issues and Promising Interventions for Children from Ages 0-3

Opioid-Specific Case Example Exercise

Sarah is a 23-year-old single mom living with an opioid use disorder (OUD). Her 10-month old daughter, Julia, was removed from her care and placed in protective custody after Sarah was found unconscious in her car before dawn after having overdosed on heroin laced with fentanyl. Julia was in her car seat in the back seat. A shopper coming out of a nearby gas station heard Julia crying through a cracked window, but was unable to wake Sarah through the window of the locked car. Bystanders broke a window to remove Julia and called 911. Sarah was revived with Naloxone, taken to the hospital for treatment, and then arrested for outstanding warrants. Julia appeared hungry and had a soiled diaper, but did not show other obvious signs of maltreatment or neglect and was dressed appropriately for the weather. She was placed with her maternal grandmother.

How can the Child Welfare Team Support Julia and Sarah?

- Early intervention with the family is key—Julia's brain architecture (and nearly all important pieces of her development) depend on it. Chronic neglect can alter the development of a child's biological stress response systems in a way that compromises their ability to cope with adversity throughout the lifespan.
- Sarah's neurochemistry has also been impacted by her opioid misuse, and her own childhood adverse experiences may also impact her parenting. Beware of the common stigma against opioid "addicts" and look deeper to understand how her experiences affect her choices.
- MAT is the gold standard of OUD treatment and should be made available and encouraged for parents seeking a path to recovery.
- Family treatment services should be evidence-based, targeted to young children, work to improve parental reflective functioning, and concurrent with evidence-based OUD treatment.
- Julia's grandmother, the kinship provider, must be supported—she might be the safe and stable adult that helps Julia keep the stress from difficult life events from turning toxic. (Learn more about supporting kinship providers by viewing the 11/29/18 webinar, "Raising the Children of Florida's Opioid Epidemic: Support and Solutions for Grandfamilies" at www.fadaa.org/training_library)