



# YOU ARE NOT ON YOUR OWN

The  
Children's  
Society

A booklet to help children,  
young people and adults talk  
about a parent's drinking

[starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://starsnationalinitiative.org.uk)

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**Before you start reading this booklet, this is a space for you to draw, photograph or write about your family, your friends or something that you enjoy doing.**

## WHAT IS THIS BOOKLET ABOUT?

Lots of adults drink alcohol, but in some families the adult's drinking can make things difficult at home and can cause problems and worries.

If this is happening it can make you worry about all sorts of things and can affect different areas of your life, like school, home, friends or money.

This booklet is to help you and an adult who you trust to talk together about what is happening in your life. It is written for children and young people but at the end of each section is a part written for adults.

Children and young people live in all sorts of families. You might live with your parents, grandparents, aunts or uncles.

You might be in care or one of your parents might be in prison. If you are worried about a parent or carer drinking too much then this booklet is for you. 'Drinking too much' means the adult drinks in a way that hurts them or you and your family.

We've spoken with children and young people who have parents or carers who drink too much and this is what they said would help. We hope it helps you.

### Information for adults

This booklet is aimed at children and young people aged 10–14, but can be adapted to suit the child or young person you are working with. It is based on messages from children and young people who are in this situation.

It is not an assessment tool but is designed to help you have a conversation with a child or young person where there is an adult in their life drinking too much. You might be using this resource on its own or as a part

of a larger piece of work you are doing with this child or young person or their family. To help you with this there are some simple exercises for them to complete. We would recommend that you read through all of the sections in this booklet before you begin and that you plan for time-out during your conversations if the need arises. The booklet also signposts you to other resources or organisations that you may find helpful.

# WORRIES ABOUT having this conversation

Children and young people are often worried about talking to adults about what is happening at home. These are some of the worries children have.

Put a circle around the ones you are worried about.

Will the  
adult tell  
someone  
**else?**

Will I  
**GET INTO  
TROUBLE?**

**WILL I GET  
SOMEONE INTO  
TROUBLE?**

**WILL IT  
MAKE  
THINGS  
WORSE?**

Something  
**ELSE?**

## YOU ARE NOT ON YOUR OWN

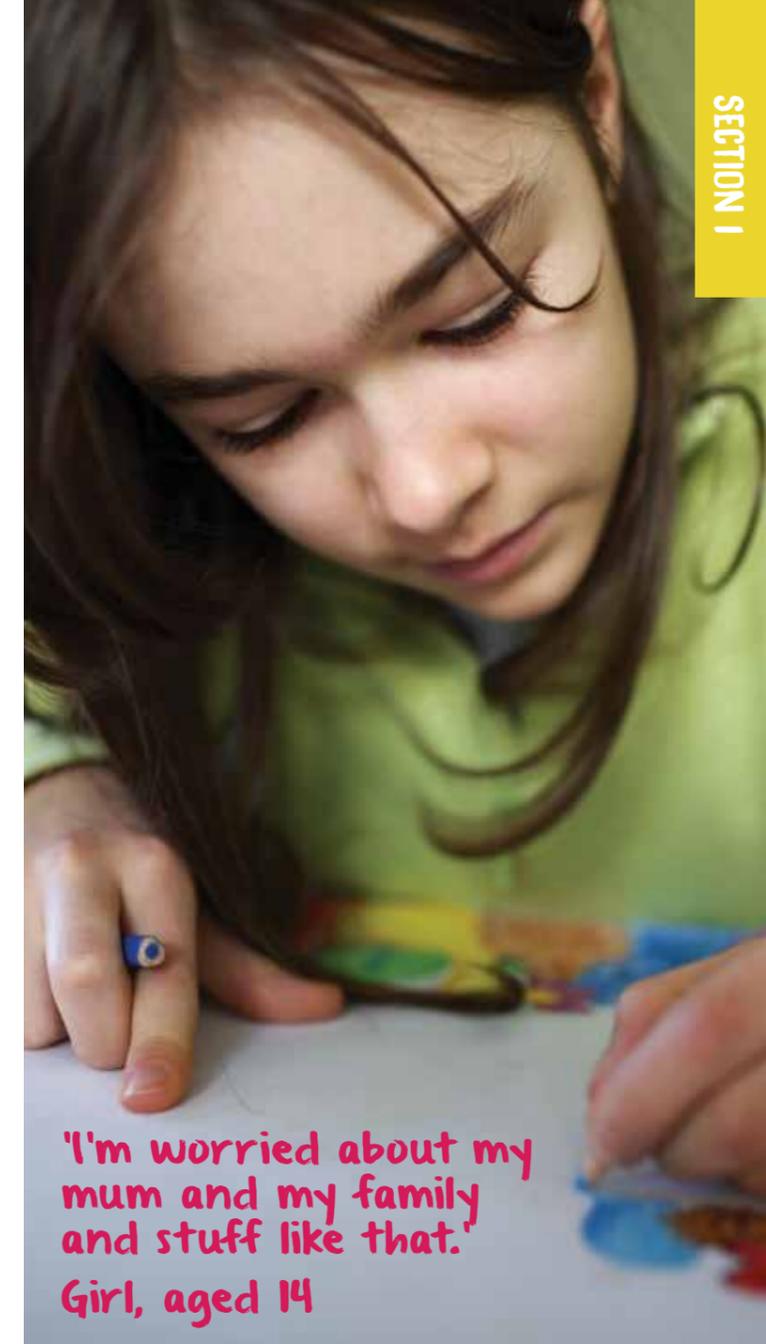
Sometimes children and young people feel like they are on their own and no-one can understand. But you're not alone. There will be others in your school who live with a parent or carer who drinks too much. In fact there are about 2.5 million children and young people in this situation. That might not sound like that many but that's more than double all the people who live in Birmingham, and that's the second largest city in Britain.

You might not tell people about your worries, because you are scared or embarrassed but there will be other children and young people in your school feeling the same.

If things are really bad, don't forget there are people out there who understand and want to help.

### Information for adults

Remember that you will need to follow confidentiality and data protection procedures in relation to this booklet. Make sure that the child or young person understands what will happen if they tell you confidential information, and state this each time you use the booklet. Also decide on a safe place where the booklet will be kept and explain this to them. If, as an adult, you find anything difficult to deal with as you talk through the resource, seek support from your line manager.



'I'm worried about my  
mum and my family  
and stuff like that.'  
Girl, aged 14

# HOW IT AFFECTS MY LIFE

Whether or not you live with the adult drinking too much, or have regular contact with them, being in this situation can make life more difficult for you.

**Preeti** is nine and her dad drinks every day. She has to get her brothers and sisters ready for school in the morning and is often late for school. When she gets home she is never sure whether her parents will be fighting. She cooks the dinner and tries to keep the house tidy.

**Jayden** is 12. He lives with his gran because his mum drinks and his dad is in prison. He sees his mum most days. He finds it hard to concentrate in class and often doesn't do his homework. He is always in trouble at school. Last week he got excluded after a fight with a boy who laughed at his mum.

You can see that having a parent or carer who drinks too much affects Preeti and Jayden in lots of different ways. What are the ways it affects you?

AT HOME

AT SCHOOL

OTHER

## Information for adults

You may want to explore how Preeti and Jayden might be feeling before moving on to discuss how the child or young person is affected by their own parent's drinking.

Lots of children and young people find themselves with increased responsibility at home, which can affect how they cope at school. Contact [www.youngcarers.net](http://www.youngcarers.net) (for children and young people) and

[www.youngcarer.com](http://www.youngcarer.com) (for professionals) for more information about being a young carer, or your local Children's Services for information about local young carer projects. Remember that siblings in the same family can have very different experiences.

Positive experiences at school or social clubs can increase a child's self esteem and ability to cope.



# HOW IT MAKES ME FEEL

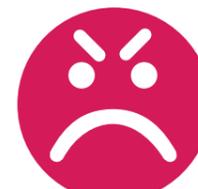
## Feelings

You might have lots of different feelings when someone you care for drinks too much. It's normal to have these feelings, and your feelings may be different on different days.

Do you ever have any of these feelings?



Sad



Angry



Anxious



Scared



Happy

## Worries

Children and young people in this situation often have lots of worries.

**Casey is nine and when she is at school she worries about what is happening at home, being bullied and falling behind with work.**

**'I didn't realise there were other kids like me - I thought I was all alone.'**  
Boy, aged 12

**Liam is 11 and when he is at home he worries about what will happen next, how to keep his sister safe and about people finding out.**

# WHAT DO YOU WORRY ABOUT?

## Information for adults

Having someone listen to your worries can be very powerful, and it might be the first time the child or young person has spoken about it – this takes a lot of courage. It may make them upset or it might be upsetting for you to hear how hard it is for them; this is OK.

Make sure you have the time and space set aside to have these conversations and have thought about what you will do if there are any child protection concerns. You both might need

a break before returning to other activities.

To find out more about parental alcohol and wider substance misuse, and its impact on children and young people, see The Children's Society's awareness-raising and training DVD resource 'Ask me about me' or download our free worksheets to help you talk through a variety of issues at [starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://starsnationalinitiative.org.uk). Our website will also signpost you to other useful resources.

# IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

**There are lots of reasons why someone might drink too much. Whatever the reason why, other children and young people in your situation said the most important thing for you to know is...**

- \* It's not your fault
- \* You can't stop them
- \* There are people who understand

Some people cannot stop drinking once they start without the help of professionals, while others can drink sensibly. There are lots of reasons why this can happen. Nothing you have done made your parent drink too much – even if they say this when they have been drinking or when they are angry it's not true.

**Just because your parent or carer drinks too much it does not mean that they are not good people or that they don't love you.**



## Information for adults

Some people think alcohol abuse or dependence is an illness and others think it is a coping tool that means they find it difficult to stop without help. We don't really know why some people drink too much when others do not, but whatever the reason you can still be supportive by listening to the child or young person and helping them to understand that it is not their fault. Children say that being told that it is not their fault is a very important message for them to hear. Make sure that you spend time talking about this.

*'I always thought it was my fault and that I caused all this. I'm a lot older now but I know others will think that their parents don't love 'em, or that they don't mean anything, or that it's their fault, and it's not... they're just tied up in it and it's part of their lives.'*  
**Young person, aged 18**

# KEEPING SAFE

## You have a right to be safe.

Being safe means not being in danger and being looked after (like having enough food, clothes or heat in your home).

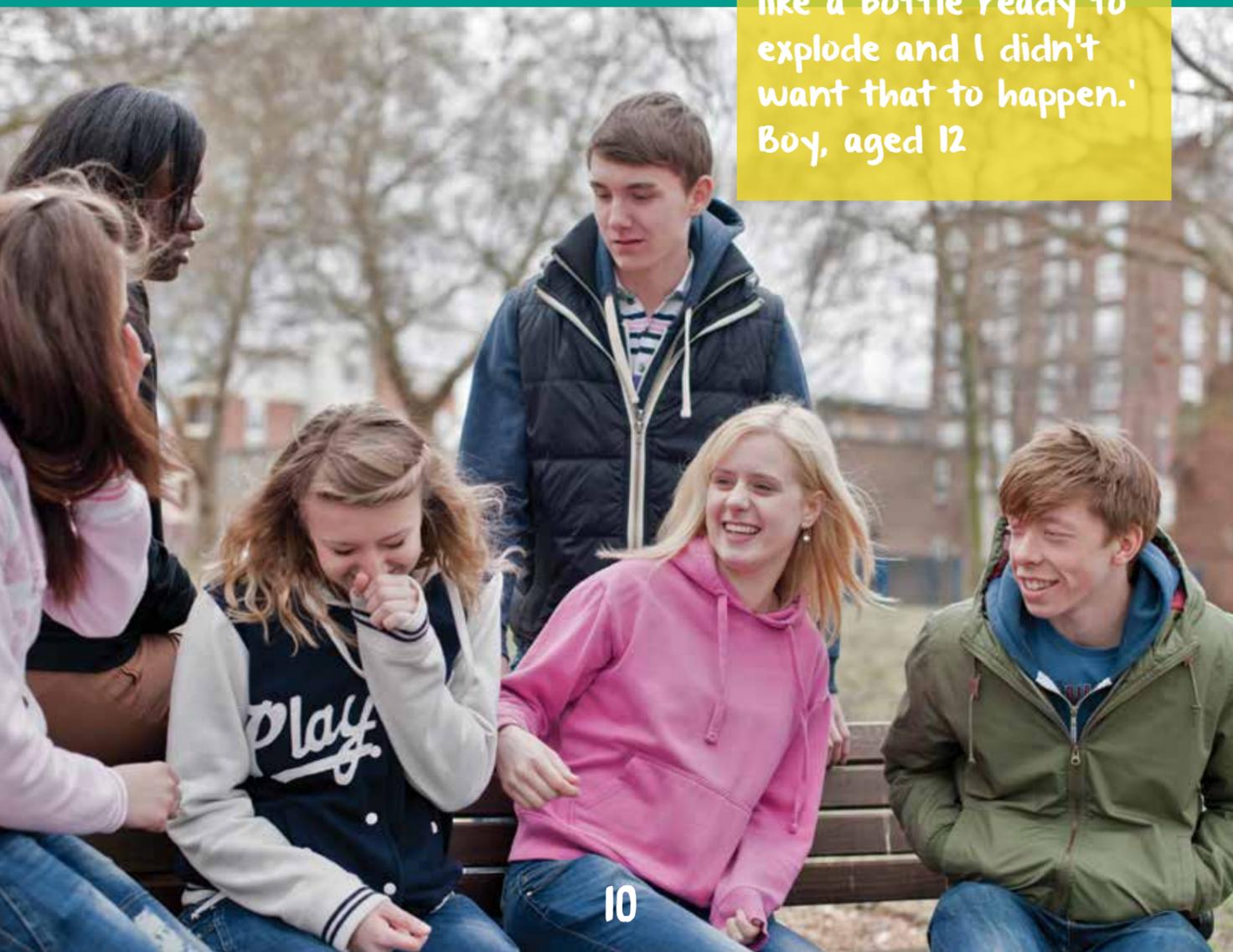
When your parent or carer drinks too much things might happen to you or around you that make you feel unhappy or unsafe.

They might not be around much, they might have gone missing, they might be doing things that make the house unsafe, or saying and doing things you don't like. Someone might be hurting you or someone else in your family. Someone might be encouraging you to drink or take drugs. If this is happening talk to a trusted adult.

Some children and young people have been hurt trying to stop their parents drinking, being violent or doing dangerous things. Don't try to stop this yourself – phone the police or an adult you trust.

If your parents or carers are asleep or out, and someone you don't know or don't trust rings the doorbell, don't answer the door. Remember you can always call **Childline 0800 1111** if you feel unsafe.

'It felt really good when I could talk to people because I felt like a bottle ready to explode and I didn't want that to happen.'  
Boy, aged 12



# YOU MIGHT FACE AN EMERGENCY

## This could be:

The adult hurting themselves because of drinking (for example falling over), hurting themselves on purpose (for example cutting themselves) or not being able to wake up. If this happens call an ambulance. This is really easy, just follow these steps:



1. Dial 999
2. Tell them where you are (if you don't know your address maybe you should practise it or write it down somewhere)
3. If you know what has happened tell the ambulance people; it might help and you won't get into trouble
4. Stay with the person who is poorly until the ambulance gets there.

Dealing with an emergency is not nice and you shouldn't have to do it, but if you do, it would be good not to have to do this alone. It might be helpful to come up with an emergency plan just in case something does happen (eg where will you go to keep yourself safe? who will you call?)

## Information for adults

If you have any child protection concerns for this child or young person then you need to follow your local child or young person protection protocol. Your agency should have a folder which has the protocol clearly written down and should advise you on what to do. Some agencies (like schools) have a named person, so contact them first. Seek support from your line manager if you are unsure about what to do.

You could role-play the emergency plan with the child or young person or talk through what they might do if they felt unsafe (eg. who could they ask for help in an emergency?).

It is important to know that a heavy drinker should not stop drinking suddenly. They will need support from an alcohol service to reduce drinking gradually. For further information on alcohol misuse see [www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)

## WHAT IF THIS HAPPENS?

**You are really important. You are not on your own, and there are laws and people who can help to keep you safe. Don't forget you have a right to be safe.**

### Information for adults

You may feel it is appropriate for the child or young person to record their address and plan on a separate piece of paper to take away with them. Often drinking doesn't come in isolation and there may be additional issues such as drug misuse, domestic violence or mental health issues.

For information about this see:  
[www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk)  
[www.womensaid.org.uk](http://www.womensaid.org.uk) (for adults)  
 or [www.thehideout.org.uk](http://www.thehideout.org.uk) (for children and young people).  
[www.rethink.org](http://www.rethink.org)

## MY PLAN



## WHAT CAN I DO FOR ME?

You are an important unique individual with a wonderful future ahead of you. Although it might not feel like it, your situation will change because you will grow up and have more choices. The fact that you have a parent or carer who drinks too much does not need to stop you doing things or limit what you can do in your future. You can choose to be different.

To help with the situation you are in right now, other children and young people have found these ideas helpful:

### Find someone to talk to

It's good to have someone to talk to, but choosing someone can be hard. You could talk to other children and young people about who they trust. Some children and young people can talk to their mum, dad or carer, but some can't. Other people you might want to talk to are people at school like a teacher, helper, dinner supervisor or school nurse.

Some children and young people get on with an aunt or uncle, grandparent or older brother or sister. You might have a friend whose mum or dad you trust.

If you don't want to tell someone who knows you, you could download worksheets from [www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk). You could also visit these websites which have been specifically created for children and young people in situations like yours: Children of Addicted Parents and People (COAP) at [www.coap.org.uk](http://www.coap.org.uk) or The National Association for Children of Alcoholics (NACOA) at [www.nacoa.org.uk](http://www.nacoa.org.uk) or you could call **Childline 0800 1111**.

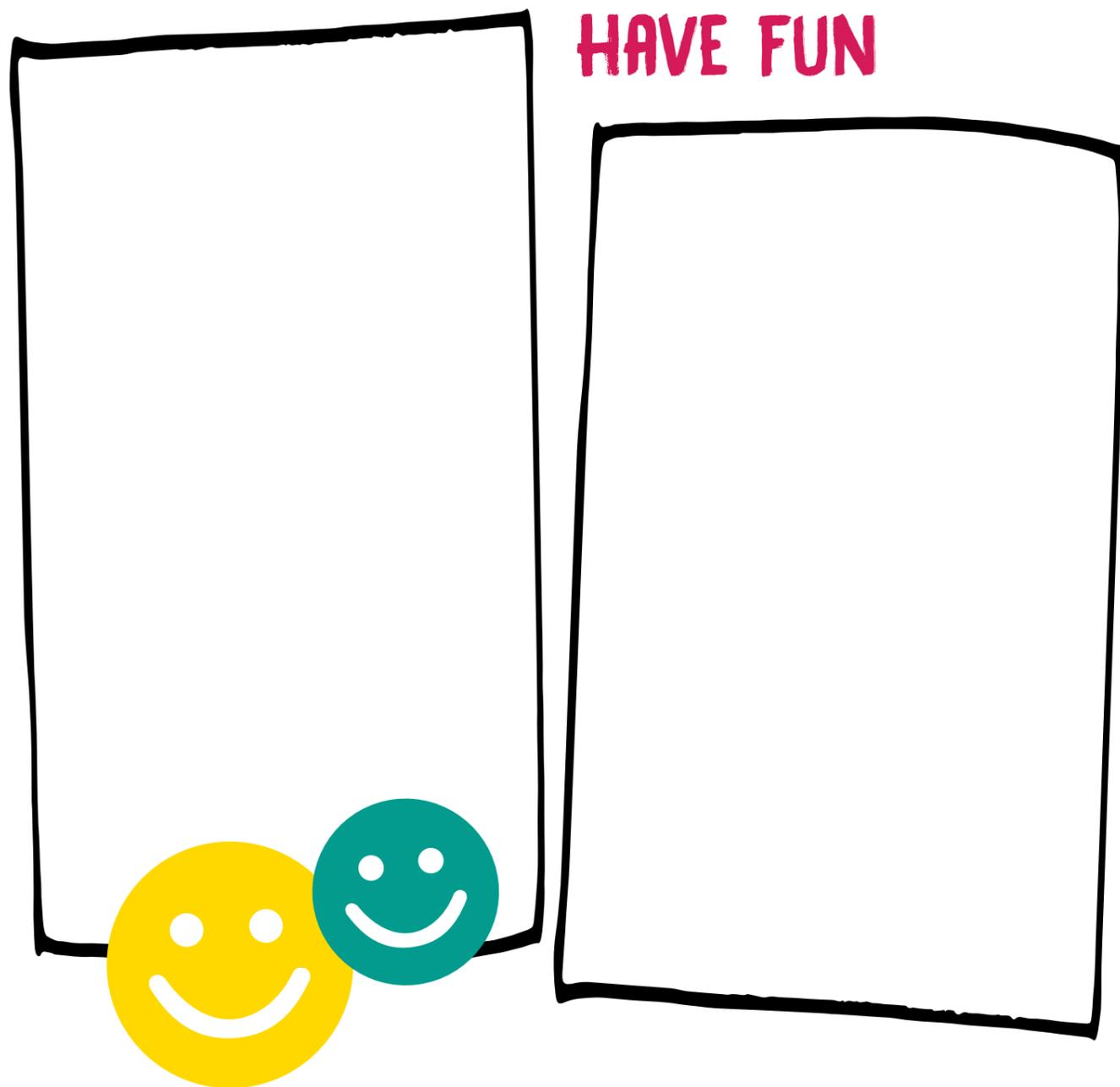
### Have fun

When your parent or carer drinks too much, it can be easy to forget to have fun. You are still a child or young person and should be able to do lots of things that you enjoy or make you laugh and smile. Having hobbies or going to a social club can be great fun and so can hanging out or chatting with your friends.

*'When you sit in a group like this, you realise everyone else has these problems.' Girl aged 14.*

## WHAT MAKES ME SMILE?

## THREE THINGS I WILL DO TO HAVE FUN



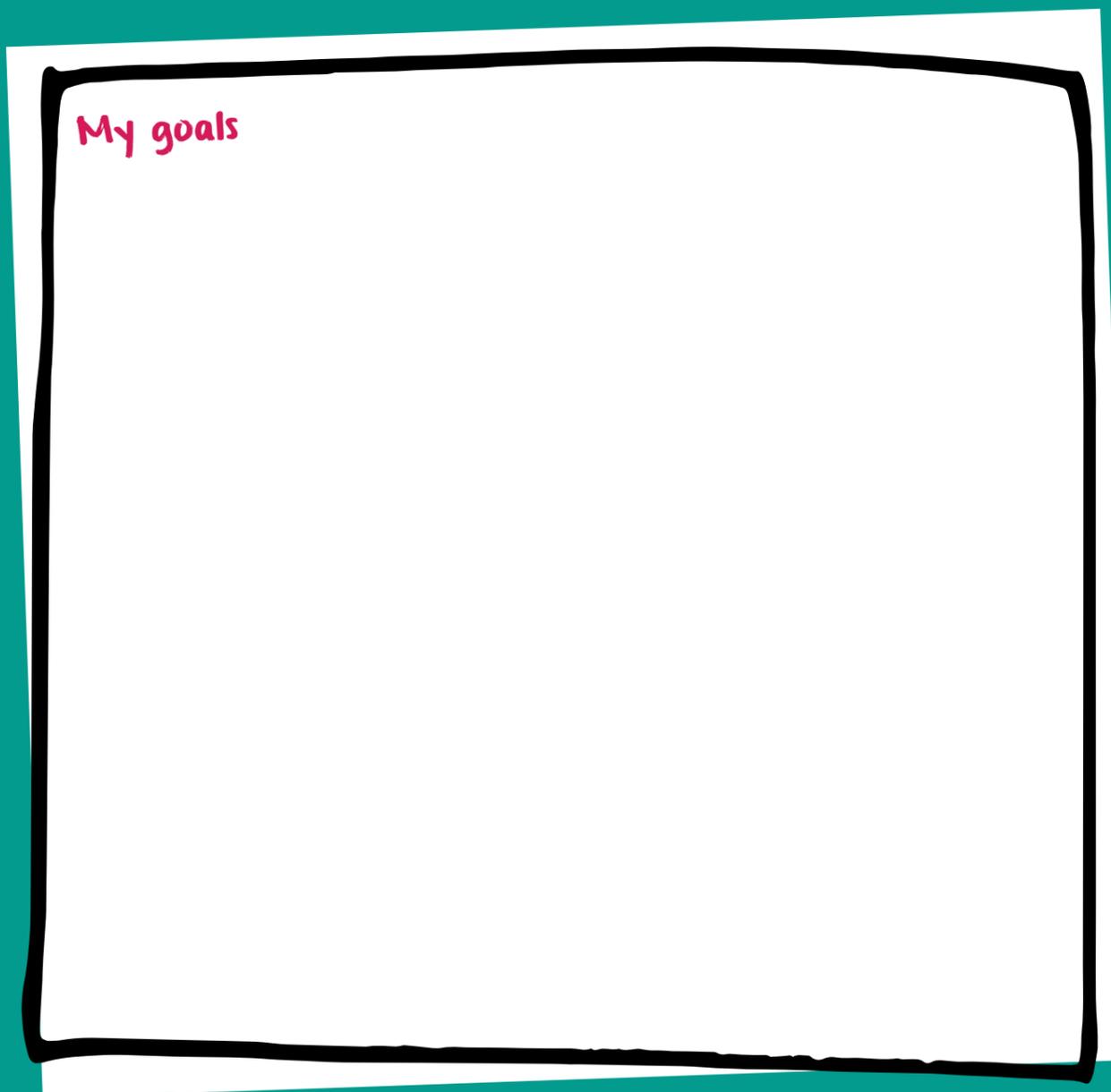
### Information for adults

There are a number of things that can help a child or young person to have a more positive future. Find something they are good at or interested in and use this to encourage positive friendships or activities and find

positive role models. Doing this builds self-esteem and helps children and young people feel they have choices and some control in their life.

## PLAN YOUR FUTURE

Having clear goals for your life can help you achieve your dreams. Why not make a list of goals for your future every year? Let's start now:



### Information for adults

You can't solve all of a child or young person's problems, but by listening to them and working through this booklet you have already made an important difference. If you would like more information, guidance and resources visit

[www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk). If you would like to work with younger children to explore this issue the Rory Activity Pack is a good resource:  
[www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/rory](http://www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/rory)

## About The Children's Society

The Children's Society helps change children's stories. Trusted for over a century, we are working towards a country where all children are free from disadvantage.

Our extensive network of frontline services and army of volunteers work to tackle child poverty and neglect. Together we help families trapped in debt, support young carers and runaways and stop sexual exploitation.

We fight for change based on the experiences of every child we help and the solid evidence we gather. Through our ambitious campaigns and determination we expose injustice and address hard truths to change attitudes, challenge misconceptions and influence policy.

We are determined, through our campaigning, commitment and care, to give every child the greatest possible chance in life

## About the Children's Commissioner

The Children's Commissioner for England is Anne Longfield OBE. She has a statutory duty to promote and protect the rights of all children in England in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Children and Families Act 2014 gives her special responsibility for the rights of children who are in or leaving care, living away from home or receiving social care services.

### Further information and resources:

[www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk](http://www.starsnationalinitiative.org.uk)

[www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk](http://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk)

### Contact us:

**Stars National Initiative** Email: [sni@childrenssociety.org.uk](mailto:sni@childrenssociety.org.uk)

We also welcome feedback on this resource.

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- CRI, Dudley

Based on an original publication written in 2010 by The Children's Participation Consultancy in conjunction with Anna-Joy Rickard and Joanna Manning (The Children's Society) and Jenny Clifton (Office of the Children's Commissioner).

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