

# DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN

## Guide for Law Enforcement



**COPS**

Community Oriented Policing Services  
U.S. Department of Justice



**NATIONAL ALLIANCE  
FOR DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN**

Rescue. Defend. Shelter. Support.





**DRUG  
ENDANGERED  
CHILDREN**  
Guide for Law Enforcement

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# Message from the COPS Office Director

Dear colleagues:

It is estimated that more than 9 million children live in homes where a parent or other adult uses illegal drugs. The impact on children growing up while surrounded by illegal drugs is devastating. They are three times more likely than children in safer environments to be verbally, physically, or sexually abused and four times more likely to be neglected. It is not easy to find and protect these kids.

Fortunately, organizations like the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children have made great strides in establishing training and resources that help law enforcement, social workers, educators, community groups, and others track and assist children growing up within such tragic circumstances. We can provide a powerfully visible alternative to the neglect and violence that are part of the daily lives of too many children. We can reduce the incidence of children's exposure to violence and neglect. We can intervene more effectively to help mitigate the long-term negative effects children face when they are exposed to this kind of trauma.

Identifying and responding to drug endangered children through trauma-informed approaches has not yet become a central part of law enforcement's mission to serve and protect. The better the availability of training opportunities and tools focused on identifying and helping drug endangered children, the better chance we have of making it one. It needs to be clear that there is an alternative to the neglect, violence, and fear that is part of the daily lives of these children. This guide is designed to help you and your agency in collaborating with others in the community to identify and serve these children at risk and to make it a part of your daily routine. Every child deserves to grow up in a home that is free from abuse and neglect. Together, we can make that a reality.

Sincerely,

Bernard K. Melekian

Director

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

# Message from National DEC's President

Dear law enforcement leaders:

As the president of the National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC), I am pleased to introduce this guide for law enforcement professionals on how to effectively deal with the risks that children face when their caregivers are involved in drug activities or substance abuse. We know that law enforcement leadership in a collaborative approach to helping drug endangered children is critical to breaking the multigenerational cycles of abuse and neglect that we see too much of in our communities. From the many law enforcement professionals who are part of our national network of concerned and dedicated practitioners, we also know that implementing the DEC approach presents a significant opportunity to make a positive impact on the lives of drug endangered children.

Incorporating the DEC approach into all aspects of law enforcement takes leadership, vision, commitment, perseverance, and creativity. The DEC approach is inherently a community policing approach under which law enforcement works closely with other disciplines and agencies to create effective solutions to the risks faced by children exposed to drugs and the often related violence and abuse. This collaborative approach results in greater resources, a broader perspective, and the creation of local alliances that have proven to be very effective in making sure drug endangered children don't fall through the cracks of our criminal and child welfare systems.

Since its inception in 2003, National DEC has worked with thousands of professionals across the country to develop training programs that provide tools for reducing the risks of abuse and neglect of children in drug environments. We hope that this guide is another tool that will help that mission. It is intended to be a practical roadmap on how to take the knowledge we have about the risks faced by drug endangered children and use it to identify ways that we all work more effectively together to reduce those risks. This guide incorporates the collective experience of law enforcement professionals from across the country who have helped create and participate in local DEC alliances, which they firmly believe have significantly improved efforts to protect children in their communities.

Thank you for taking the time to read through this guide. We hope this guide is useful to you and we welcome your comments and feedback on how to make it as effective as possible for the work you do each day. We also invite you to participate with or help develop drug endangered children alliances in your state, tribal, and local communities. National DEC exists to help spread the DEC mission and help implement the DEC approach across the country. Please contact us if we can help: [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

Best regards,

Chuck Noerenberg

President

National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children

# Acknowledgments

The National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC) is indebted to many talented, knowledgeable, and dedicated professionals who provided their time and expertise in the development of the Drug Endangered Children Guide for Law Enforcement. We would like to start by expressing our appreciation to the project's advisory group that included law enforcement professionals from local and state law enforcement as well as child welfare professionals. The advisors helped direct the project's format and practical information and reviewed the content to make it as useful to law enforcement and other practitioners as possible.

We would also like to thank Bernard Melekian and Ronald L. Davis, past Directors, and Phil Keith, Director of the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS

Office), U.S. Department of Justice, for their leadership on the drug endangered children issue and their agency's significant financial and programmatic support for the drug endangered children effort and National DEC.

We are grateful to the U.S. Department of Justice for their continuing support in the effort to break the cycle of abuse and neglect of children exposed to illicit drug use, sales, possession, or manufacturing and other substance abuse and addiction. We would like to thank the COPS Office, which helped create the vision of a more effective law enforcement response to drug endangered children. We are grateful particularly to Deborah Spence of the COPS Office for her ongoing support and guidance to National DEC throughout the course of this project.



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## The Drug Endangered Children Effort: The DEC Approach

The DEC approach is a multidisciplinary strategy to change the trajectory of drug endangered children's lives through a common vision, ongoing collaboration, and ongoing change. These elements assist in increasing the likelihood of better outcomes for children, families, and communities. This approach allows various disciplines to perform their job duties while also assisting in meeting the needs of drug endangered children.

Law enforcement professionals see the risks and consequences of drug activity and its destructive impact on children every day. With a focus on public safety, law enforcement agents are trained to identify illegal activity, which may include abuse and neglect of children. Within the DEC approach law enforcement is a crucial entity in identifying children at risk of harm due to drug activity as well as a crucial part of a system focused on helping children.

The DEC approach recognizes the likelihood of harm and the extensive risks that drug endangered children face. It creates a collaborative mindset among law enforcement officers, child welfare workers, prosecutors, and other practitioners in an effort to break the cycle of abuse and neglect. All disciplines play an equally important and vital part in the DEC approach.

The DEC approach recognizes that children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are three times more likely than other children to be verbally, physically, or sexually abused and four times more likely to be neglected.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing that these children need earlier identification

and intervention is the first step in assisting them and changing the trajectory of their lives. Law enforcement has a unique opportunity to be involved in children's lives and make a positive difference.

National DEC's "Children + Drugs = Risk" perspective and trainings recognize that law enforcement and other disciplines can perform a critical role in their everyday work by identifying children at risk, gathering evidence and information, and sharing evidence with other disciplines. Upon completion of the DEC approach trainings, law enforcement will have the necessary tools to paint a more complete picture of the child's life and the potential risks they are facing. The information gathered will further serve to enhance and streamline the identification of services available for children at risk.



1. Jessica M. Solis et al., "Understanding the Diverse Needs of Children whose Parents Abuse Substances," *Current Drug Abuse Reviews* 5, no. 2 (2012), 135–147, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3676900/>.

## Benefits of the DEC Approach

The key benefit to children of the DEC approach is earlier identification and intervention, which will assist in breaking the cycles of abuse, neglect, and substance abuse for the next generation. This in turn gives children a greater opportunity to receive more timely and relevant interventions and services from other disciplines. In addition, the DEC approach offers law enforcement agents opportunities to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness in their response to drug endangered children.

Opportunities to increase efficiency and effectiveness include the following:

- Expanded knowledge of and access to other disciplines
- Enhanced and increased partnerships with other disciplines and agencies
- Greater willingness of other agencies to provide information for law enforcement investigations
- Opportunities to leverage knowledge, information, and services with other disciplines
- Enhanced knowledge of evidence gathering, increasing law enforcement's ability to file all applicable charges
- Improved crime reporting
- Increased crime prevention
- Heightened morale and job satisfaction

### Expanded knowledge of and access to other disciplines

When law enforcement officers collaborate with experts from other disciplines regularly, they gain a greater understanding of the complexities, mandates, protocols, and needs of other agencies. This improved understanding generates very positive outcomes, including decreased frustration, increased officer safety, quicker response times, and more innovative solutions for successful collaborations on behalf of children.

Meetings and further contacts between law enforcement and other disciplines should include cross-training so each system understands the resources, policies, and limitations of the others. When agencies develop a collaborative mindset, their combined efforts begin to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness for all involved. Together, the disciplines develop new responses that would not have been identified in isolation.

### Enhanced and increased partnerships with other disciplines and agencies

Enhanced and increased partnerships between law enforcement and other agencies result from a recognition that multiple agencies have a common interest in serving drug endangered children and their families and that each brings a unique perspective and a unique set of information about the issues these families face. Through collaborative partnerships, the efforts of each of the agencies involved are enhanced and the overall efforts have the advantage of a richer picture and understanding of the lives of these children.

## Greater willingness of other agencies to provide information to law enforcement investigations

A common element for change is the recognition of an unacceptable situation. When the fact that “children + drugs = risk” is emphasized as a key consideration for the work of law enforcement, identifying children becomes a primary focus; this focus creates a new decision-making

process by which relationships between professionals are built, disciplines collaborate, and information is shared. This exchange of information enhances law enforcement agents’ ability to make more informed decisions during criminal investigations. In turn, when law enforcement agents share their report and evidence, other disciplines are able to make decisions based on more complete information. More information leads to better decisions, which improves outcomes.

### Discussion Points

Common elements for change, which lead to a greater willingness to share information, include a shared vision for a desired outcome, strong leadership, guided activities of many, and persistence. A shared vision of keeping children safe and providing intervention will break the cycle of abuse and neglect for the next generation.

- **Do we share that common vision?**

Each agency involved in DEC will have a unique mission with individual objectives. These should be generally understood so mutual objectives for the overall effort can be crafted without being in conflict.

- **Do we have strong leadership?**

Ensuring you have leadership buy-in will help keep the DEC movement supported in your agency. When participants engage middle management in the process, the middle managers can keep the entry-level personnel educated and trained. The middle managers can communicate up to the director about the successes of the effort.

- **Do our DEC efforts involve the guided activities of many?**

Certain agencies will generally be involved in the crisis intervention portion of DEC. For example, a law enforcement raid or arrest would cause an intervention at the point of family crisis. A child protective services referral investigation would be similar. Other stakeholders such as emergency medical services, victim assistance programs, and various mandatory reporters would all have roles in the initial intervention for families. At some point in the establishment of local DEC efforts, individual agencies should consider formally promulgating policies to reinforce DEC objectives. Multidisciplinary agreements can also be helpful in establishing the structure for multidisciplinary collaboration.

- **Are we persistent?**

The DEC response is an outstanding model of community policing. It started as a grassroots movement in 1993, when law enforcement began to recognize they were missing opportunities to identify children living in drug environments. Failure to identify these children as victims of abuse and neglect meant no services were provided to protect them.

**National DEC was formed in 2003 by these passionate leaders who recognized that to be successful, the movement needed strong leadership and national oversight to coordinate and leverage resources. National DEC promotes a model that calls for collaboration between agencies and coordination between the social and political systems charged with preventing, intervening in, and treating these cases. In short, National DEC promotes transformation or social change from the old response to a new response. There will be great success when identifying and protecting drug endangered children becomes part of our routine response and it is seen as everyone's responsibility.**

Opportunities to leverage information, knowledge, and services with other disciplines

Implementing a multidisciplinary collaborative approach to helping drug endangered children greatly enhances the extent of information, the collective knowledge, and the awareness of services available to all the disciplines and agencies that are serving these children and families.

Enhanced knowledge of evidence gathering

Insufficient information equals poor decisions, which equals poor outcomes, so it is critical to gather evidence of and information about abuse, neglect, or maltreatment of children when investigating drug-related crimes. If law enforcement agents fail to identify drug endangered children as victims, they will miss the opportunity to safeguard the welfare of the child and open doors for services.

Most states' child welfare agencies in the United States formalize the process of assessing risk and safety by using some type of structured decision-making process or tool. Risk assessment tools generally include broad categories related to abuse and neglect, behavioral descriptions, and procedures to determine levels of risk, all collected on standardized forms for recording this information. Safety assessment tools are used to assess the immediate safety of the children at that moment. Information from the family, child, and other disciplines as well as other sources are used for these assessments. Before child welfare agencies intervene with families, they are generally required to identify suspected maltreatment or the suspected risk of maltreatment. Therefore, the assessment of risk and safety is a critical part of child welfare agency work.<sup>2</sup>

As discussed in this guide, abuse of drugs or alcohol by parents and other caregivers can have negative effects on the health, safety, and well-being of children. Nearly all states, the District of Columbia, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands have laws within their child protection statutes that address the issue of substance abuse by parents. Two areas of concern are the harm caused by prenatal drug exposure and the harm caused to children of any age by exposure to illegal drug activity in their homes or environment.<sup>3</sup>

While DEC efforts are not focused solely on the prosecution, identifying potential criminal charges can often be an important factor in helping children and families. Gathering evidence and filing charges related to abuse and neglect can give prosecutors the ability to influence terms of pretrial release, sentencing, probation, or parole.

When the criminal justice system files criminal charges of abuse and neglect it may impact what happens in child welfare dependency court. When these two systems work together they strengthen each other's response and their ability to identify the appropriate services for the child and the child's family.

Here are seven reasons, outlined by the Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, why gathering evidence and filing child abuse and neglect charges can be an important step to breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect:

1. It can safeguard the welfare of the child.
2. It identifies the child as a victim for services.
3. It can influence terms of pretrial release, sentencing, probation, or parole.
4. It may impact what happens in child welfare or dependency court.
5. At sentencing, the court establishes sanctions and activities considered necessary for rehabilitation.
6. Even if child endangerment charges are dismissed, the prosecutor can still ask that the court consider conditions relating to the child endangerment charge.
7. Even if one parent or caregiver is not charged with endangerment, the prosecutor can influence terms of probation for the other parent.

National DEC's Core DEC and DEC Approach trainings provide law enforcement with a better understanding of what evidence and information to look for and gather during their investigations and during other aspects of police work to identify drug endangered children. The training also provides tools to help officers document their findings

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2. Amy D'andrade, Michael J. Austin, and Amy Benton, "Risk and Safety Assessment in Child Welfare," *Journal of Evidence-Based Social Work* 5, no. 1–2 (2008), 31–56, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/19064444>.

3. Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Parental Drug Use as Child Abuse* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Children's Bureau, 2016), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/drugexposed.pdf>.



in a way that describes the “life of the child” and not just a day or a moment in time. Ultimately, this will strengthen the case for each of the courts: criminal justice and child welfare, civil dependency, and neglect. This detailed information can provide other disciplines with information to support their involvement with the family as well.

## Improved crime reporting and increased crime prevention

Identifying children associated with illegal drug activity or under the supervision of an incapacitated caregiver is a critical step in breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect and diminishing future criminal activity as well as preventing future substance abuse. This type of crime reporting will help identify the strong correlation between drug abuse and child abuse. More children will be identified as victims, and that identification will open the door to services that can help keep these young children out of the criminal justice system as juveniles or adults.

Law enforcement is responsible for public safety and has always seen its role in drug investigations as it relates to supply reduction. Basically, take the drugs off the streets and arrest those who are distributing, manufacturing, possessing, or using illegal drugs. The drug endangered children effort has broadened the perspective to include demand reduction. By identifying the children who are at high risk of becoming the next generation of users, law enforcement can start the process of breaking the cycle of “children see, children do.”

What is known to be true includes the following:

- Children of parents with substance use disorders have a higher likelihood of developing substance use problems themselves.<sup>4</sup>
- Children whose parents abuse alcohol or drugs are three times more likely than other children to be verbally, physically, or sexually abused and four times more likely to be neglected.<sup>5</sup>
- Children who experience child abuse and neglect are 59 percent more likely to be arrested as juveniles, 28 percent more likely to be arrested as adults, and 30 percent more likely to commit violent crimes.<sup>6</sup>



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4. Laura Lander, Janie Howsare, and Marilyn Byrne, “The Impact of Substance Abuse Disorders on Families and Children: From Theory to Practice,” *Social Work in Public Health* 28, no. 3–4 (2013), 194–205, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/19371918.2013.759005>.

5. *You Can Help: A Guide for Caring Adults Working with Young People Experiencing Addiction in the Family* (Rockville, MD: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, n.d.), <https://ncsacw.samhsa.gov/files/TrainingPackage/MOD6/YouCanHelp.pdf>.

6. Janet Wiig, Cathy Spatz Widom, and John A. Tuell, *Understanding Child Maltreatment and Juvenile Delinquency: From Research to Effective Program, Practice, and Systemic Solutions* (Washington, DC: Child Welfare League of America, 2003).

- As many as two-thirds of the people in treatment for drug abuse reported being abused or neglected as children.<sup>7</sup>
- About 30 percent of abused and neglected children will later abuse their own children, continuing the horrible cycle of abuse.<sup>8</sup>
- It is estimated that between 50 and 60 percent of child fatalities due to maltreatment are not recorded as such on death certificates.<sup>9</sup>
- Approximately 8.3 million children— 12 percent of all children in the United States—live with a parent who is dependent on drugs or alcohol.<sup>10</sup>

## Heightened morale and job satisfaction

By using the DEC approach in everyday law enforcement duties, law enforcement agents have the satisfaction of knowing they are an integral part of breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect for that child and for the next generation.

Instead of picking up a child who is sitting on the floor during an undercover drug investigation and thinking to yourself, “Unfortunately, I will see you in 10–15 years,” officers now see how they can play a significant role in changing the trajectory of the child’s life.

After attending the Core DEC Train the Trainer Session, Tribal Police Officer Jayel Whitted with the Cahto Tribal Police Department in California wrote, “Throughout my law enforcement career I have felt like I was where I needed to be, but lately I’ve felt like I was meant to do more, but I didn’t know what. I now feel like not only do I know what I was meant to do but I feel like I have a good foundation to save children. Thank you!”



7. “Child Maltreatment Statistics in the U.S.,” American Society for the Positive Care of Children, accessed June 10, 2019, <https://americanspcc.org/child-abuse-statistics/>.

8. “Child Maltreatment Statistics in the U.S.” (see note 7).

9. Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities 2016: Statistics and Interventions* (Washington, DC: Children’s Bureau, 2018), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/fatality.pdf>.

10. Child Welfare Information Gateway, *Parental Substance Use and the Child Welfare System* (Washington, DC: Children’s Bureau, 2014), <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/parentalsubabuse.pdf>.

# Challenges of the DEC Approach

Enhancing the response to drug endangered children requires changing some of the values, attitudes, and beliefs in law enforcement agencies. Any time changes are introduced to an agency, it creates challenges. Overcoming the challenges requires a comprehensive, long-term strategy as well as reinforcement until the changes become integrated into the agency as standard operating procedure.

Some challenges are as follows:

- Competing goals and priorities
- Establishing buy-in
- Limited training resources
- Insufficient information about other agencies' roles and responsibilities
- Difficulties in measuring success

## Competing goals and priorities

We know collaboration can be challenging, but why is it challenging? One reason is that all disciplines involved in the DEC approach have different responsibilities and therefore different goals and priorities. For example, law enforcement's goals and priorities are public safety—it is their job to investigate crimes and to file charges when applicable. Child welfare will have different priorities—it is their job to keep children safe. These differences may

cause each discipline to use different approaches to achieve their goals, which could make the road to a common resolution rather difficult. By working collaboratively and understanding the possible difficulties, each discipline can maintain their goals but work as a team in the best interest of the child. This in turn will have a greater impact than each discipline working separately in silos.

Other reasons why collaboration is challenging—adapted from “Team Energy Drains” by Frank M. J. LaFasto and Carl E. Larson—include the following:<sup>11</sup>

- Relationship issues may arise when two or more members of the effort allow relationship difficulties or differences to determine their behavior rather than allowing the actual goal to determine their behavior.
- Control issues may arise when the question of who's in charge becomes more important than what the group should do.
- Conflict may arise when those involved in the effort are in contention over what they value, how the effort should be defined, what behaviors are appropriate, etc.
- Efforts may be stalled when members doubt their ability to achieve the goal or have an impact or feel that too many critical factors are beyond their control, or they may adopt a strategy of going through the motions without changing anything.

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11. Frank M. J. LaFasto and Carl E. Larson, *When Teams Work Best: 6,000 Team Members and Leaders Tell What It Takes to Succeed* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001).

## Discussion Points

- **Can we be patient and understand that trust is earned?**

Several of the DEC stakeholders may find that they have a great deal of mistrust based upon old experiences and the silo mentality. Others may not have worked collaboratively with law enforcement in the past and therefore have never been able to cultivate trust. Trust must be earned over time, and patience is necessary to ensure trust is built.

- **Does our DEC effort foster opportunities for trust?**

All multidisciplinary interactions are opportunities to begin building trust. The more often these interactions occur and the deeper the level of collaboration, the more rapid and meaningful the basis for trust.

- **How does our communication system fit with building trust?**

Establishing feedback and conflict resolution will help build trust among stakeholders.

## Establishing buy-in

Sustaining the DEC approach requires buy-in at many levels—including line-level practitioners, middle management, and executives—to help implement the transformation or social change.

As mentioned previously, the DEC efforts began with officers in the field who were responding to drug deals or other calls and missed the risks to children. The buy-in of the DEC approach by the officer is relatively easy because they are involved in identifying the problem and finding a solution. However, if the first-line officers don't have support from their supervisor, that lack of support creates internal conflict. The officers know they need to do things differently, but the supervisor, who is one step removed, may be focused on other outcomes (i.e., drug

arrest and drug seizures). If an officer is evaluated on drug seizures and arrests and there is no value placed on identifying children, it is difficult to justify time spent on DEC efforts. Officers have been recognized by their agency for seizing kilos of cocaine or heroin and thousands of dollars, but have they been recognized for identifying and helping children living in these drug environments? Supervisors, who are not exposed to DEC either in the field or through DEC training, have a more difficult time acknowledging that identifying and helping children is law enforcement's responsibility. A critical step to sustainability is educating middle management about the DEC response.

Front-line managers not only are in a unique position to show support for DEC but are also critical advocates to support the DEC effort. The front-line manager can work directly with the line officers to ensure the DEC protocols are being followed. He or she is also able to follow up on the many challenges outlined in this guide and demonstrate to the executive level leaders the positive benefits of using the DEC approach. It is crucial to get agency management-level buy-in for DEC efforts. Perceived lack of



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commitment on the part of agency management and leaders to enhanced victim response will weaken progress toward the goal.

### Discussion Points

- Which agency leaders do we know would be supportive of DEC?
- Who can we bring to the meeting that will help communicate the DEC approach to the leadership?

### Limited training resources

To institute the DEC approach into a law enforcement agency, there must be consistent and ongoing training. Because of high turnover and job changes of personnel, it is also important to make the training available on a regular basis. Mandated training and fiscal concerns may impact an agency's ability to provide adequate training on their own, so for DEC training, law enforcement agencies may be able to partner with other disciplines and institutions to maximize the training potential for all involved. These institutions could include police academies, prosecutors' offices, child welfare trainers, and universities and colleges. At times, law enforcement agencies need a creative approach to providing ongoing training.

### Insufficient information about other discipline's roles and responsibilities

Lack of knowledge of other disciplines' challenges and responsibilities often results in limited access to information, specifically regarding drug endangered children. This lack of knowledge can cause frustration with other disciplines, which interferes with the development of good working relationships. When one discipline truly understands the roles and responsibilities of other disciplines, good communication and collaboration can begin.

### Difficulties in measuring success

Increasing awareness and the response to drug endangered children may very well lead to an increase in criminal charges for child abuse and neglect, which may in turn confuse standards of success. Because the reduction of the rate of crime has been traditionally used to measure effectiveness of law enforcement, agencies may need to reconsider and redefine performance standards around drug endangered children. One measure of success could be the increased number of children identified as drug endangered children during law enforcement investigations because of increased awareness, adherence to DEC protocols, and collaboration with other disciplines.

# Core Elements of the DEC Approach

The DEC approach only functions when all disciplines—including law enforcement—support a common vision, ongoing collaboration, and ongoing change.

## A common vision

A vision is what a community values and wants to focus on and achieve over time. For DEC efforts, this vision will be bigger than one discipline, will benefit the children, and will take a sustained effort. This vision is important for law enforcement and other disciplines as it will provide guidance, keep people on track and focused, and ultimately bring professionals and disciplines together in DEC efforts.

## Ongoing collaboration between disciplines

Collaboration is a key component of the DEC approach and needs to be ongoing. No single discipline can effectively or efficiently address drug endangered children on its own, especially over the long term. Instead, the expertise and resources of multiple disciplines combine to improve interventions for children. Successful collaboration requires a working knowledge of how practitioners of other disciplines think, function, and define success. Professionals must join together for the DEC effort to truly be effective. The professionals who can develop an effective DEC collaboration include law enforcement, child welfare, prosecutors, judges, victim witness advocates, medical personnel, educators, first responders, treatment providers, probation and corrections, prevention specialists, day care providers, and firefighters, among others.

National DEC defines collaboration as “The exchange of information, altering of activities, sharing of resources, and enhancement of the capacity of another for the mutual benefit of all and to achieve a common purpose.”<sup>12</sup> Collaboration can be simplified by saying “I make you stronger, you make me stronger.” Collaboration is often confused with networking, coordinating, or cooperating; these are all a portion of collaboration, but by themselves they do not necessarily make anyone involved stronger.

When a drug endangered child is identified by law enforcement, a multidisciplinary response can be initiated. A systematic response by disciplines can therefore lead to a better outcome for these children. In the DEC approach, the way to sustain the efforts in helping children is to develop long-lasting collaborative relationships, with children as the common denominator.

Collaboration benefits include the following:

- No reliance on grant funding for sustainability
- No reliance on individual champions for sustainability
- Builds broad community support
- Allows for comprehensive intervention to address the needs of children
- Increased knowledge, better decisions, and better outcomes for children
- Increased ability to share knowledge, information and evidence between disciplines and agencies

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12. Chris Huxham, ed., *Creating Collaborative Advantage* (London: Sage Productions, 1996).

### *No reliance on grant funding for sustainability*

Once the DEC approach is instituted within a law enforcement agency, it will become the way of doing business in the future. It does not require extra financial assistance or manpower resources to implement. DEC training should be the only cost, but that can often use agency training monies already in place. Other disciplines and agencies have similar opportunities to use existing training monies.



### *No reliance on individual champions for sustainability*

Again, once it has become the law enforcement agency's operating norm it will become part of the law enforcement job function for all officers, not just the initial champions.

### *Builds broad community support*

It is helpful to get other community members and providers involved in identifying children at risk. Community members can be trained on identifying these children and giving the correct information on the child abuse hotline to help open an investigation. Community members may also be helpful during an investigation in providing more information about the environment of the child's family and caregivers. With the proper community awareness and identification training, community members can be valuable resources and dedicated helpers for drug endangered children.

The following are suggestions of additional disciplines to engage in the DEC approach:

- Victim service providers
- Advocacy organizations representing victim interests
- School systems, colleges, and universities
- Elected officials, including tribal council members
- Businesses
- Faith and cultural communities
- Media outlets
- Community residents
- Service clubs, e.g., Elks, Rotary, Kiwanis

### *Allows for comprehensive intervention to address the needs of children*

It seems self-evident that the sooner that drug endangered children are identified and the less time they spend in these traumatic and harmful environments, the higher the likelihood that the intervention and treatment strategies will be successful. When law enforcement officers can identify children earlier, the children are able to obtain specific and targeted services earlier. Law enforcement officers transferring and handing off necessary information and evidence to the appropriate disciplines when children are identified will increase the children's ability to obtain these specific and targeted services earlier.

### *Increased knowledge, better decisions, and better outcomes for children*

When there is an increase in knowledge obtained by any discipline, there will then be an increase in the ability to make better decisions. With better decisions on behalf of children, there will then in turn be better outcomes for children.

*Increased ability to share knowledge, information and evidence between disciplines*

The DEC approach allows law enforcement agents and practitioners of other disciplines to understand one another's needs and share information where there would otherwise be roadblocks. This inevitably means that everyone will have the necessary information to be able to make more informed decisions for drug endangered children and their families.

### Ongoing change

The third element of the DEC approach is ongoing change. If things are done in the same way without making changes, we cannot expect a different outcome. Change under the DEC approach will need to be with individuals, disciplines or agencies, and communities.



## Discussion Points

### What if we do not change?

- There will be delayed crisis intervention.
- Child abuse or neglect may continue.
- There could be no services provided or a delay in services.
- Child may suffer long-term effects from child abuse or neglect.
- Serious injury or fatality may occur to the child.
- Multigenerational cycles of abuse or neglect and substance abuse may continue.

Some examples where changes can be made quickly include the following:

- Identification of children, signs of children, substance abuse, and drug activity
- Mandatory reporting: knowing how and when to report
- Enhanced evidence and information collection and sharing

### Identification of children, substance abuse, and drug activity

The early identification of children in all aspects of police work and in criminal investigations is key to the DEC approach. Children need to be identified as early as possible not only so they can be removed from unsafe living environments but also so they can receive earlier interventions and earlier services. Law enforcement officers often see children in ways that other disciplines may not. When law enforcement can identify these children as being at risk or unsafe, this often will trigger a collaborative response for the safety of the children.

For example, in a non-DEC approach a patrol officer may pull a mother over and issue her a ticket for speeding and notice that she smells of marijuana. The officer may then arrest the mother on drug-related charges and not notice or inquire about the car seat in the back seat and where that child may be. In using the DEC approach, this officer would be trained in identifying the car seat as an indicator of a possible child at risk due to the mother's drug use. In the DEC approach, the child has a greater chance of being identified at the earliest point possible.

Likewise, law enforcement often can identify substance abuse and drug activity that may be impacting children. They are often involved with these families or come across situations involving drugs, so they can identify children at risk and provide help at an earlier point. It is important for law enforcement to be trained in drug identification or have drug recognition experts (DRE) to assist in identifying substance abuse as well.

## Mandatory reporting

Law enforcement agents are mandatory reporters and therefore are required by law to report suspected or known child abuse and neglect. But this can be a frustrating part of a law enforcement officer's job. Knowing why it is important to report, how to report, and what to report is critical for effective mandatory reporting.

Underreporting is a serious problem and can seriously affect the well-being of children. First, what is not reported cannot be investigated by child welfare agencies. Second, children may continue to be at risk or unsafe without intervention. And last, the lack of reporting reduces knowledge for future interventions with the family.

But what to report? Mandatory reporters, including law enforcement must be able to provide as much information as possible to child welfare authorities. Know "who,



what, when, where, and why" when reporting. Be able to describe in detail your observations or concerns; this is a place where the more details, the better.

For example, a law enforcement officer not using the DEC approach might call into the child welfare hotline to report that he was just in a dirty house where there were two children. An officer using the DEC approach might call into the hotline stating that he was on a call of a theft at a residence where he observed two children, ages 2 and 4, that appeared to be very dirty. The inside of the residence was cluttered with trash, boxes, and clothes. The house smelled of rotten garbage and there were many flies inside the residence.

The latter of the two stories provides more detail. It is important to paint a picture of the child's life for child welfare to intervene on behalf of the children.

It is recommended that law enforcement and other disciplines talk with their local or state child welfare agency for a list of the possible questions that are asked during the initial mandatory reporting call. This cooperation can help clarify the types of information child welfare needs to initiate an intervention.

### Evidence and information collection and sharing

It is difficult to understand how a parent or other caregiver could ever neglect or abuse a child and endanger their well-being with involvement with drugs. But whatever the reasons, it is the job of law enforcement to identify child endangerment and neglect or abuse of a child and to gather the supporting evidence and information. Because parental or caregiver drug trafficking and drug use puts children at significant risk of harm, when law enforcement agents

find children living in drug environments, these risks warrant an investigation and the gathering of evidence. It is law enforcement agents' charge to gather the necessary evidence of identifiable risks and potential harm to those children.

While it is the law enforcement agents' charge to gather necessary evidence and information, it is also their charge to share that evidence with appropriate disciplines. This can often include child welfare, probation, parole, civil courts, and medical professionals. It is important that the exchange of information go both directions; keep in mind that each discipline that encounters a child or family has one piece of the puzzle of the enhanced picture of a child's life. Remember that not one discipline can do this alone; we need to collaborate in the best interests of drug endangered children.



*Questions to ask when looking for evidence of the risks to children*

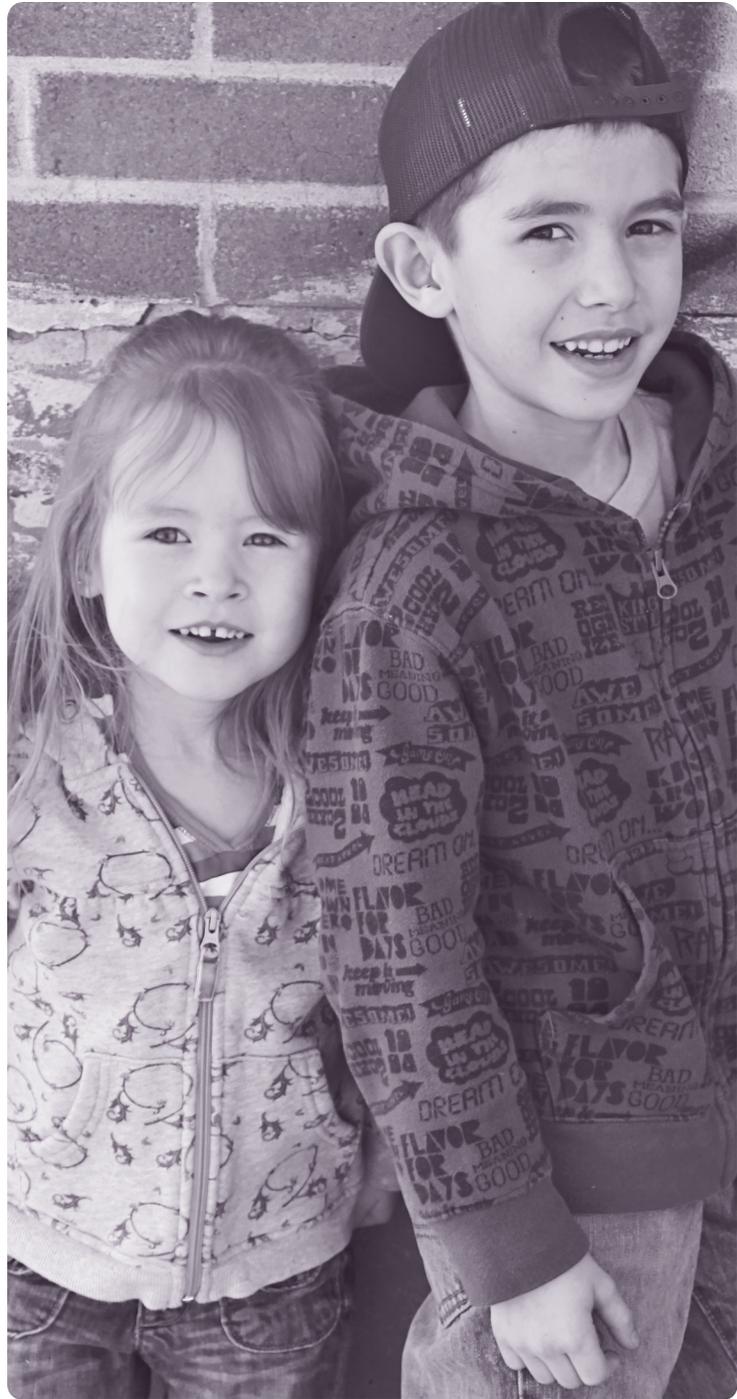
### **Which professionals can look for signs and evidence of risks to children?**

Every professional who comes in contact with children or their parents or caretakers has the opportunity to identify risks to children. These professions include the obvious: e.g., child welfare, law enforcement, medical, teachers and other educators, prevention and treatment professionals, and fire or emergency medical services personnel. But these professionals can also include the not so obvious: e.g., code enforcement, camp counselors, housing authorities, utility workers, and nurse-family partnerships.

None of these professionals are likely to observe all of the signs and evidence of risks to children, but each may have the opportunity to provide a critical piece of the picture that could result in an intervention for a child.

### **Why is it critical that professionals understand and identify risks to children?**

- To be able to report to appropriate agencies (e.g., child welfare or law enforcement)
- To allow for earlier identification, intervention, and services for drug endangered children
- To increase information and evidence for other professionals to help drug endangered children
- To enhance investigations and cases of all disciplines
- To enhance the capacity of each agency to better serve children
- To increase the likelihood of breaking the multigenerational cycles of abuse, neglect, and substance abuse



## What can professionals look for?

- Signs that the individual has or is responsible for children
- Indicators of increased risk of abuse or neglect
- Possible signs of actual abuse: physical, emotional, or sexual
- Possible signs of actual neglect

### *Signs of children living in the home*

<input type="checkbox"/> Child car seat or booster seat in car	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's drawings on refrigerator
<input type="checkbox"/> Toys in yard or driveway of residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Diapers or school papers in trash
<input type="checkbox"/> Pictures of child on cell phone or computer screen	<input type="checkbox"/> Child food items in trash (e.g. Graduate brand foods, Gerber containers, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Sidewalk chalk drawings at residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Children's items hanging in windows

### *Indicators of increased risk of abuse or neglect*

<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver's substance use or withdrawal	<input type="checkbox"/> Impaired or intoxicated caregiver
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased family stressors (e.g. loss of housing, employment, income; death in family; medical issues; birth of a child, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug users, dealers, drug cooks, parolees, probationers, sex offenders, or other unknown people in/around residence
<input type="checkbox"/> Harmful substances within the residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver has out of proportion anger/rage or has impulsive, erratic, or aggressive behaviors
<input type="checkbox"/> Chaotic environment	<input type="checkbox"/> Previously reported abuse or neglect
<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver has irrational thinking or other mental health issues	<input type="checkbox"/> Child has behavior problems or is difficult to manage
<input type="checkbox"/> Weapons/booby traps in residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence in the residence

*Possible signs of actual abuse (physical, emotional, or sexual)*

<input type="checkbox"/> Unexplained injuries to the child	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence in the residence
<input type="checkbox"/> Cuts, welts, bruises, burns or other marks on the child (e.g. belt marks, linear marks, bruising on or behind ears, black eyes, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/> Caregiver swears at, insults, puts down, or talks negative to child or about child
<input type="checkbox"/> Child seems fearful of caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/> Evidence of abuse to pets or other animals
<input type="checkbox"/> Child has knowledge beyond their age of sexual activity or acts out sexually	<input type="checkbox"/> Unusual markings on the child that are not easily explained

*Possible signs of actual neglect*

<input type="checkbox"/> Impaired/intoxicated caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/> Unsafe living environment
<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate caregiver	<input type="checkbox"/> Drug buys occurring with child present
<input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate or no supervision	<input type="checkbox"/> Air quality issues in the residence
<input type="checkbox"/> Controlled substance in residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Exposed/uncovered/hazardous wiring
<input type="checkbox"/> Controlled substance or other unsafe items accessible to child (Children often find ways to reach things that adults think are out of reach)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child commits crime to support the caregiver's drug use or to support the family due to caregiver's drug use
<input type="checkbox"/> Lack of basic necessities (e.g. food, clothing, shelter)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child is "parentified" – child takes on parental role (e.g. 4 year old feeding or changing infant)
<input type="checkbox"/> Signs or threats of violence (e.g. holes in walls or doors, broken furniture or other items)	<input type="checkbox"/> Child witnesses or is present during caregiver's criminal behavior (e.g. theft, robbery, assault)
<input type="checkbox"/> Spoiled or moldy food	<input type="checkbox"/> Child is dirty
<input type="checkbox"/> Child does not react to presence of professionals in residence or when asked questions	<input type="checkbox"/> Residence is injurious (e.g. very cluttered, garbage overflowing, dirty dishes scattered)
<input type="checkbox"/> Child has untreated illness or injury	<input type="checkbox"/> Health risks in residence (e.g. rodents, roaches, insects, feces/urine, soiled sheets/bed, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational delays	<input type="checkbox"/> Child ingests illegal or harmful substance
<input type="checkbox"/> Utilities not working	<input type="checkbox"/> Domestic violence in the residence
<input type="checkbox"/> Chemical or cooking elements from drug lab in the residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Child imitates inappropriate and/or negative adult behavior

## What other types of evidence should professionals consider when observing children?

- Evidence of sexual abuse: child makes an outcry or has disclosed; child has injuries to genitals; child has knowledge above their age about sex or sexual activity; etc.
- Evidence of emotional problems
- Evidence of behavioral problems
- Evidence of cognitive problems

### *Examples of emotional problems of the child*

<input type="checkbox"/> Attachment disorder	<input type="checkbox"/> Acting out
<input type="checkbox"/> Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)	<input type="checkbox"/> Attaching to strangers too easily
<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Mistrust or fear of others
<input type="checkbox"/> Depression	<input type="checkbox"/> Withdrawal
<input type="checkbox"/> Complex emotions (e.g. guilt, shame, embarrassment)	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep disorders (e.g. nightmares, restlessness, insomnia)
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficult time understanding or sharing their emotions (e.g. love, anger, guilt, sadness)	<input type="checkbox"/> Low threshold of stimulation (e.g. overwhelmed with normal light or noise levels)

### *Examples of behavioral problems of the child*

<input type="checkbox"/> Interpersonal problems	<input type="checkbox"/> Impulsive
<input type="checkbox"/> Child seriously misbehaves (e.g. belligerent, destructive, threatening, physically cruel, deceitful, disobedient, dishonest, aggressive)	<input type="checkbox"/> Inappropriate sexual behaviors or sexually acts out

### *Examples of cognitive problems of the child*

<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty talking and listening	<input type="checkbox"/> Trouble learning from mistakes
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty paying attention	<input type="checkbox"/> Trouble picking up social cues (e.g. unable to read others' emotions)
<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty remembering	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor communication skills
<input type="checkbox"/> Trouble reading	<input type="checkbox"/> Educational delays
<input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupied or tired	<input type="checkbox"/> Poor school achievement

# Building and Participating in a Local DEC Alliance

National DEC has developed a road map and toolkit to assist communities in building a local DEC alliance; these will assist in walking professionals through the process and providing worksheets and tools along the way.

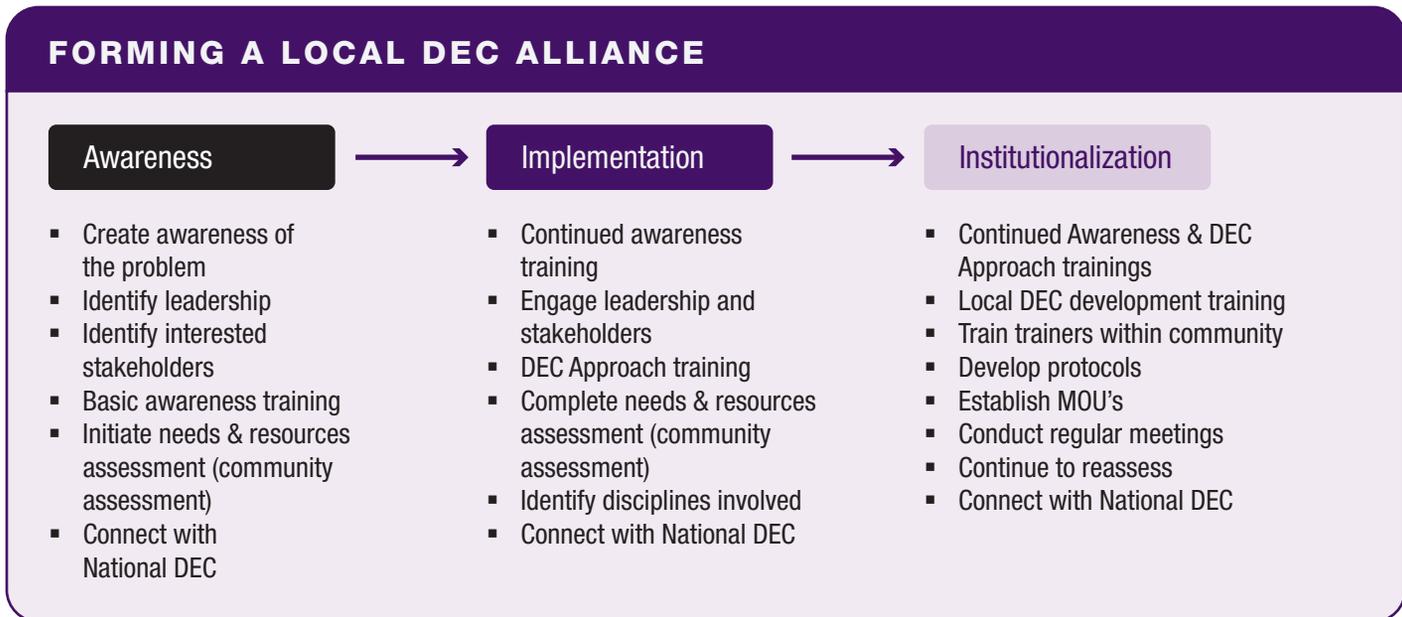
Forming a local DEC alliance comprises three stages, although the stages will not be linear; you will find that you may be doing a little in each stage at one time. The three stages are Awareness, Implementation, and Institutionalization, and each has some steps that are listed in figure 1. You can find more out about these steps and tools on the National DEC website at [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

## Awareness

The awareness phase resembles a startup; it is the nuts and bolts and will be your foundation moving forward. This phase is an opportunity to get to know your community, your partners, and other disciplines and to start forming ideas. This is also the phase where education and knowledge will be key.

National DEC has created the Identifying Key People and Disciplines Worksheet along with the Community Assessment Worksheet to assist you in this phase. These will provide you with insight about yourself, others, and your community. Both worksheets can be found on the National DEC website at [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

Figure 1. Forming a local DEC alliance



The mobilization, implementation, and sustainability of the DEC response model at the local, tribal, state, and national or federal levels, as well as within organizations, require public awareness and support. To maximize effectiveness, a DEC alliance should help develop public awareness about drug endangered children, about the DEC approach, and about the DEC alliance. This awareness could be achieved through presentations, trainings, publications, and brochures.

National DEC has developed a Core DEC Awareness training curriculum that effectively highlights the risks faced by drug endangered children and delineates a collaborative intervention response model. A 90-minute version of this training is available on National DEC's website. The website also contains information about other online versions of our Core DEC Awareness training and other resources about the risks faced by children and the effectiveness of the collaborative response. These resources are available for you to download at [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

Creating public awareness through the delivery of DEC training and the dissemination of publications, brochures, and promising practices is a critical step in developing sustainable DEC efforts.

## Implementation

The implementation phase will be a continuation of some of the awareness features along with more in-depth training and discussions. The DEC Approach Implementation Training will get disciplines talking about frustrations and sharing with others along with talking about solutions within their community.

This phase of the DEC training will delve deeper into the Identification of Key People and Disciplines Worksheet and Community Assessment Worksheet. It will also be the time for law enforcement and others to implement some of the changes they learn about in the training and begin using the worksheets and tools that will assist them in the field.

## Discussion Points

- Are we ready to establish a local DEC alliance?
- Are all community DEC stakeholders identified?
- Who else can we involve?
- Minimally, who do we need at the table to be successful?
- Who do we want at the table after we are established?
- How and when do we bring other disciplines into the DEC alliance?
- Have we established roles for stakeholders in the DEC alliance?

## Institutionalization

You will know when you are in the institutionalization phase as the DEC approach will feel more like everyday practice. This phase will continue the training and knowledge from the two prior phases, but it will add the Local DEC Development Training, the Train-the-Trainer Training, and the start of the development of protocols, memoranda of understanding (MOU), and bylaws. National DEC has developed a Protocol Development Worksheet along with example protocols, MOUs, and bylaws from across the nation to assist in this process.

## Protocols, MOUs, and bylaws

The members of the local DEC alliance will establish the protocols, MOUs, and bylaws. Having the practitioners who will make use of these resources develop them will give the documents credibility and the practitioners ownership of their DEC efforts.

Protocols will include detailed information regarding the DEC alliance mission or purpose statement, goals, and procedures. These will likely be detailed explanations of each discipline's part in the DEC alliance.

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- **Mission or purpose statement.** A mission or purpose statement spells out in general terms what the alliance hopes to accomplish over time.
- **Goals.** These would be specific to each discipline and would outline what each discipline is supposed to be doing to support the mission or purpose statement. The goals should be measurable, achievable, and shared.
- **Procedures.** These would be a description of how each discipline will handle drug endangered children, so every discipline understands their roles and responsibilities.

MOUs will establish formalized partnerships with other disciplines. This will assist in making sure that no one is dropping the ball as well as assist in keeping efforts going.

Bylaws will include specific information regarding rules that the DEC alliance will follow. These will include membership, members, voting rights, meetings, and other regulatory requirements. Bylaws will provide structure within the alliance.

## Discussion Points

- **Do we have an agreement about the objectives of our DEC effort?**
- **Do we understand the individual roles and combined objectives of the stakeholders, community members and providers, and other professionals?**

## Other things to think about

### *Communication*

Each member of the DEC alliance must openly acknowledge each discipline's individual mission, refrain from being controlling or egocentric, share resources, and agree upon doable common goals. Open communication among alliance members is a must in keeping the alliance running smoothly. When conflicts arise, resolution needs to be sought out quickly.

## Discussion Points

- **How do we establish a communication framework?** DEC efforts should establish formal and informal communication mechanisms. The local service providers need to be able to discuss and evaluate DEC efforts, and there is often a need to share information with the state DEC alliance.
- **Are we communicating to reduce conflict?** An effective communication structure is necessary to prevent conflict from overshadowing the benefits to a collaborative DEC alliance.
- **Are we sharing our DEC success stories to build momentum?** One of the keys to establishing and maintaining a DEC effort is the ability to celebrate the small victories along the way. Stakeholders will likely begin to learn more about children and families and the full scope of tools to address their complex problems. Whenever a DEC intervention results in positive outcomes for children or their families, everyone can become excited and use these experiences to fuel the DEC approach.

## Policy support

At some point in the establishment of a DEC alliance, individual agencies should consider formally adopting policies to reinforce DEC objectives. The policy support becomes important when looking at funding the DEC alliance and it will also help institutionalize the DEC approaches throughout the state.

### Discussion Points

- Do our stakeholders have individual agency DEC policies?
- Do we collectively have protocols to support our DEC efforts? Memorandum of Understanding agreements can also be helpful in establishing the structure for multidisciplinary collaboration.
- Do we have public policy (laws) that support our DEC objectives? Laws that both acknowledge criminal conduct and child maltreatment for DEC situations can help considerably with removing barriers between service providers.

## Steps for starting a DEC alliance

The following section will go through some common elements and questions to help you build your own DEC alliance.

Stakeholders suggested for starting a DEC alliance include the following:

- Law enforcement
- Child welfare
- Criminal Prosecutors Office
- Civil Prosecutors Office
- Medical (doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses, etc.)

Bring only a few disciplines to the table to start, and then slowly add in more disciplines as the alliance evolves.

Examples of other disciplines to bring to the alliance include the following:

- Probation/parole
- Judicial/courts
- Victim service advocates
- Fire and EMS
- Service providers
- Schools/educators
- Substance abuse, mental health, and other treatment providers

Questions to ask prior to the initial meeting include the following:

- Who do we bring to the table?
- How do we mend broken fences?
- How do we help them understand/believe?
- How do we make this work?
- How do we make a DEC response everyone's responsibility?
- How long will this take?
- How do we build working relationships?

Work for the initial meeting includes the following:

- Each discipline makes two lists of five items each. One list explains why that discipline wants to be involved in the DEC alliance. The other list explains what that discipline can provide to the DEC alliance. See table 1.
- At the initial meeting, these lists need to be displayed and discussed in detail.
- The initial meeting should also address or come close to addressing what every member would like to see addressed by this DEC alliance.

**Table 1. Sample table**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Why my discipline wants to be involved in DEC alliance</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>What my discipline can provide to DEC alliance</b></p>
<p>Example: Better collaboration with other agencies</p>	<p>Example: Law enforcement has internal data base</p>
<p>First steps following the initial meeting include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop protocols, MOUs, and bylaws—keep them realistic and simple—don’t make them work against the alliance.</li> <li>● Stress open and honest communication always. If a member cannot agree to communicate honestly and give and receive constructive feedback, an alternate person may need to be sought out.</li> </ul> <p>The protocols are a living document and should be reviewed often and updated as needed. When the alliance is reviewing and assessing if updates are needed, it is a good time to ask the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Are the current protocols working?</li> <li>● Are the current protocols realistic?</li> <li>● Do we need to adjust any of the protocols?</li> </ul> <p>Common elements for change to keep in mind include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Recognition of an unacceptable situation.</b> All alliance members understand and believe that “Children + drugs = risk.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Alliance members should have similar understandings of definitions, goals, vision, etc.</b> These will be reviewed along with protocols as needed.</li> <li>● <b>Shared vision for a desired outcome.</b> All alliance members understand the outcome is safe children through identification, evidence collection, and collaboration.</li> <li>● <b>Strong leadership.</b> All alliance members are strong leaders in all aspects. They are leaders in their communities and within their disciplines and therefore strong leaders within the alliance.</li> <li>● <b>Guided activities of many.</b> All alliance members understand that collaboration is a key component of the DEC alliance and the DEC approach.</li> <li>● <b>Never give up.</b> Alliance members understand that there will be challenges along the way and are dedicated to solving problems and working through difficult times.</li> </ul>

# Sustaining a Local DEC Alliance

## Why is sustainability important?

While working on all the components of starting a local DEC alliance, getting things up and running, and formalizing productive working relationships through protocols and MOUs, it is also important to be thinking about how to sustain the collaborative effort being established. We've all been involved with multidisciplinary teams, partnerships, team meetings, and other joint efforts that started off with great energy and enthusiasm but, with the passing of time, became stagnant and just another meeting or task on our overloaded to-do list. But the Collaborative DEC Approach is not a phase or a fad or something that is completed in a certain period. We know that there will always be children at risk because of their caregiver's substance misuse and one of the goals of the DEC mission is to continue to figure out how to be as effective as possible in helping identify these children and their families and to provide the support and services they need. A local DEC alliance should be designed to be sustainable and designed to challenge local practitioners on an ongoing basis to enhance their collaborative efforts.

## How do we ensure sustainability?

The protocols and MOUs discussed here are a key component of an effective local DEC alliance, but they should be drafted with sustainability in mind. They should include provisions that provide continuity when some of the key players leave their positions or retire—that's not a time to have to start over from scratch. They should include provisions that consider that the agencies involved may reorganize or have new managers or directors. And they should require regular assessment and re-assessment based on careful case reviews with the practitioners involved.

This expectation and preparation for change, along with the commitment to regular self-assessment, evaluation of impacts, and improvements to practice, build into the alliance the values and attitudes necessary to sustain long-term efforts.

## What else can help sustainability?

### *Local DEC alliance steering committee*

A steering committee for a local DEC alliance made up of different disciplines and agencies helps guarantee that the focus of the work of the alliance is less about individual champions and more about the mission of helping drug endangered children. A diverse steering committee will bring different perspectives, approaches, challenges, and solutions out into the open. And the members of a steering committee with a shared vision and common goals will hold each other accountable for identifying practical solutions and producing results.

### *Partnership with state DEC alliance*

For local alliances in states that have a state alliance, a strong partnership with the state alliance can greatly assist sustainability of the local alliance. The state alliance can provide information about lessons learned and best practices from other local alliances to help overcome challenges and leverage opportunities. With the state alliance connected to National DEC, the experience of local alliances from across the country can be used to enhance the efforts of your local alliance. The state alliance, in partnership with National DEC, can provide resources, opportunities for training, and access to a national network of like-minded practitioners. State alliances often have steering

committees of their own, and volunteering to serve on the state steering committee can reap huge benefits with networking and problem solving. If the state alliance convenes an annual conference, there may be opportunities to showcase the work of the local alliance and build further interest and support. This sharing of experience can create statewide connections and a friendly professional competition to build effective local alliances.

### *Laws and policies that support the collaborative DEC approach*

The efforts of dedicated and passionate professionals can do much to create, build, and sustain a local DEC alliance. Collaboration requires a willingness to consider new ways of doing things and changes in working relationships and collaboration by itself doesn't cost money. Practitioners in the field have a wealth of practical insights about what isn't working well and often many ideas about how to improve things. With a bit of support from managers

and directors, much can be accomplished through a local DEC alliance. These efforts can be enforced and institutionalized by supportive laws and policies related to the work of the DEC alliance. Policies highlighting collaboration, evaluations of efforts, and self-assessment can help firmly establish the enduring nature of the DEC alliance and ensure sustainability.

### *Is sustainability about building empires?*

Sustainability isn't about creating big structures or bureaucracies. Sustainability simply reinforces the DEC approach—a common vision, ongoing collaboration, and ongoing change. The common vision of 100 percent healthy, happy, and safe children will never become outdated. Collaboration that is constantly evaluated and self-assessed will always be a key part of the solution to achieve the common vision. And ongoing change will be essential to ensure the DEC efforts are effective over time in response to new challenges and circumstances.

# Additional Resources Available from National DEC

The National DEC website has a wealth of information about the issue of drug endangered children, the DEC approach, and local DEC alliance development. The following resources can be found at [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

## National DEC's core DEC online trainings

90-minute Community DEC Awareness Training Videos (National DEC Four-Module Tribal Core DEC – OJJDP On-Line University <https://www.nationaldec.org/awareness>)

National DEC Six Module Video Online DEC Training – Miami Police Department Training Center <https://www.awsmproductions.com/Miami-Police-Training-Center/Training-Courses/Miami-Core-DEC-Training/>

## National DEC publications

Drug Endangered Children Guide for Law Enforcement: Key Insights for Partnering with Child Welfare, Medical Providers, Treatment Providers, Prosecutors, and Civil Attorneys: <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P293>

Promising Practices for Helping Drug Endangered Children – Paths to a Common Vision <https://cops.usdoj.gov/RIC/ric.php?page=detail&id=COPS-P294>

Roadmap for Building a Local DEC Alliance <https://www.nationaldec.org/road>

Online resource center downloadable reports, articles, protocols, and other resources

National DEC online resource center (<https://www.nationaldec.org/>)

Here are a few examples of the types of resources available, which can be accessed by entering the title or key words of the publication in the “A to Z Resources” search box:

- “Child abuse reported to the police”
- “Consequences of illicit drug use in America”
- “Drug Endangered Children Act”
- “Hazards of grow houses”
- “Is meth next door?”
- “Marijuana legalization: The issues”
- “Multidisciplinary protocol for the investigation of child abuse”
- “National Methamphetamine Initiative survey: The status of the methamphetamine threat and impact on Indian lands: An analysis”
- “New unregulated psychoactive substances marketed as ‘bath salts’”
- “One-pot meth alert”
- “Protecting the abused & neglected child: A guide for recognizing & reporting child abuse & neglect”
- “Situation Report: Synthetic cathinones (bath salts): An emerging domestic threat”
- “Understanding the scope of drug endangered children victims: A need for data collection within law enforcement and child protective services”

- “What you can do about child abuse”
- “SAMHSA Opioid Overdose Prevention Toolkit”
- “Epidemic: Responding to America’s Prescription Drug Abuse Crisis”

## DEC and substance abuse–related downloadable webinars

National DEC provides DEC-related professional development webinars for practitioners from all over the country. These webinars are currently available for subsequent viewing on National DEC’s website:

National DEC Webinars: <https://www.nationaldec.org/>

Here are a few examples of the webinars available:

- Defending Childhood Initiative: Addressing Childhood Exposure to Violence
- An Overview of Bath Salts and Other Synthetic Drugs from Law Enforcement and Medical Perspectives
- Breaking Through Barriers: Connecticut’s Collaborative Response to Children and Families
- National Medical Guideline for Children Removed from Meth Labs
- Tribal Law Enforcement and DEC

- Drug Identification
- Skin Findings in Child Physical Abuse
- Health Risks Associated with Indoor Marijuana Grow Operations and the Impact on Children

## Social media information

Because people look at and gather information from different platforms, National DEC recognizes the need for providing information on different platforms. Along with National DEC’s other resources, National DEC also provides an abundance of information and resources around drug endangered children and substance abuse on social media. Daily posts about training events, conferences, and webinars as well as stories about the impact of substance abuse on children, families, and communities are also available by following National DEC on social media:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NationalDEC4Kids/>

Twitter: @NationalDEC

LinkedIn: National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children <https://www.linkedin.com/company/27197259/>

# About National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children

The **National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children (National DEC)** exists to make a difference in the lives of drug endangered children, whom we define as “children who are at risk of suffering physical or emotional harm because of illegal drug use, possession, manufacturing, cultivation, or distribution. They may also be children whose caretaker’s substance misuse interferes with the caretaker’s ability to parent and provide a safe and nurturing environment.”

National DEC has created three tiers of training, activities, and facilitation—(1) Core DEC Awareness, (2) DEC Approach, and (3) Local DEC Development—which assist professionals working in a variety of disciplines—including law enforcement, judiciary, child welfare, prosecution, medical, treatment, prevention, education, probation, parole, corrections, EMS, fire, and many more—in changing the trajectory of the lives of drug endangered children. National DEC believes that all the professionals who can identify a child at risk of abuse and neglect because of drug activity should be trained in understanding what to look for, how to document the risks, and how to work collaboratively.

National DEC has established a national infrastructure that includes affiliated state DEC alliances and numerous tribal and local DEC alliances. Thousands of practitioners have received DEC training in their communities and hundreds of tribal and nontribal professionals around the nation from various disciplines are trained as National DEC certified trainers in Core DEC Awareness and the DEC Approach. These professionals provide training to many others to help expand the DEC mission. National DEC also maintains working partnerships with federal agencies, as well as tribal, local, national, and international organizations.

National DEC’s work includes the following:

- Providing technical assistance to local, tribal, and state DEC efforts both nationally and internationally
- Developing and delivering in person training for professionals across disciplines to increase their expertise and enhance their work with drug endangered children
- Developing various training methods such as online, video, and phone application trainings to increase outreach to more professionals
- Developing and disseminating resources and tools that assist in addressing the needs of drug endangered children
- Increasing public awareness about the risks faced by drug endangered children
- An online resource center that includes hundreds of downloadable publications, protocols, and templates
- Professional webinars, a monthly newsletter, and daily social media updates
- An annual conference attended by hundreds of federal, state, tribal, local law enforcement and other professionals
- A growing number of national partners who support our training program and spread the DEC mission

All National DEC’s resources, webinars, technical assistance, and training can be accessed through the National DEC website: [www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org).

Information about training events, conferences, webinars as well as stories about the impact of substance abuse on children, families, and communities is also available by following National DEC on social media:

- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/NationalDEC4Kids/>
- Twitter: [@NationalDEC](https://twitter.com/NationalDEC)
- LinkedIn: National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children <https://www.linkedin.com/company/27197259/>

## About the COPS Office

The **Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office)** is the component of the U.S. Department of Justice responsible for advancing the practice of community policing by the nation's state, local, territorial, and tribal law enforcement agencies through information and grant resources.

Community policing begins with a commitment to building trust and mutual respect between police and communities. It supports public safety by encouraging all stakeholders to work together to address our nation's crime challenges. When police and communities collaborate, they more effectively address underlying issues, change negative behavioral patterns, and allocate resources.

Rather than simply responding to crime, community policing focuses on preventing it through strategic problem-solving approaches based on collaboration. The COPS Office awards grants to hire community policing officers and support the development and testing of innovative policing strategies. COPS Office funding also provides training and technical assistance to community members and local government leaders, as well as all levels of law enforcement.

Since 1994, the COPS Office has invested more than \$14 billion to add community policing officers to the nation's streets, enhance crime fighting technology, support crime prevention

initiatives, and provide training and technical assistance to help advance community policing. Other achievements include the following:

- To date, the COPS Office has funded the hiring of approximately 130,000 additional officers by more than 13,000 of the nation's 18,000 law enforcement agencies in both small and large jurisdictions.
- Nearly 700,000 law enforcement personnel, community members, and government leaders have been trained through COPS Office-funded training organizations.
- To date, the COPS Office has distributed more than eight million topic-specific publications, training curricula, white papers, and resource CDs and flash drives.
- The COPS Office also sponsors conferences, round tables, and other forums focused on issues critical to law enforcement.

COPS Office information resources, covering a wide range of community policing topics such as school and campus safety, violent crime, and officer safety and wellness, can be downloaded via the COPS Office's home page, [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov). This website is also the grant application portal, providing access to online application forms.



**IT IS ESTIMATED THAT MORE THAN 9 MILLION CHILDREN LIVE IN HOMES WHERE A PARENT OR OTHER ADULT USES ILLEGAL DRUGS.**

This exposure leaves them vulnerable to abuse and neglect. Identifying and responding to these drug endangered children needs to be a central part of law enforcement's mission to serve and protect. The *Drug Endangered Children Guide for Law Enforcement* offers law enforcement professionals practical information on how to develop an effective collaborative response to this complicated issue and make a positive impact on the lives of drug endangered children.



**COPS**

*Community Oriented Policing Services*  
U.S. Department of Justice

Office of Community Oriented Policing Services  
145 N Street NE  
Washington, DC 20530

To obtain details on COPS Office programs,  
call the COPS Office Response Center at 800-421-6770.

Visit the COPS Office online at [www.cops.usdoj.gov](http://www.cops.usdoj.gov).



**NATIONAL ALLIANCE**  
FOR DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN

Rescue. Defend. Shelter. Support.

National Alliance for Drug Endangered Children  
9101 Harlan Street, Suite 245  
Westminster, CO 80031

[www.nationaldec.org](http://www.nationaldec.org)