



Introduction

Risk is not Destiny

Welcome to the *SACCounty Healthy Beginnings Parents' and Professionals' Toolkit!*

This toolkit is for parents – biological, adoptive, foster – in whatever shape or form your family exists. The common thread for all of you, however, is that you are raising a child who has been affected by exposure to alcohol and drugs during pregnancy or suffered trauma early in life. And this toolkit is for healthcare and social services professionals who work with children and families affected by prenatal substance exposure.

Maternal use of alcohol or drugs during pregnancy, a child's suffering early trauma such as abuse and neglect, or even relatively commonplace events such as divorce in the family or death of a loved one can place the child at risk for developmental, learning, behavioral, and mental health difficulties; factors in the family and community environment can lessen that vulnerability or can make things worse. Two key questions then emerge: *How do we recognize families at risk and move them toward choosing treatment?* and *How do we build resiliency in our children by promoting healthy and strong family relationships?* These questions recognize the essential nature of the parent/child relationship that stands at the center of our understanding of risk and resiliency.

In developing this toolkit, we have tried to address the most common questions and concerns that parents have about their children who are affected by exposure to alcohol or drugs during pregnancy. These children often are referred to as "high-risk," but we want to look beyond the label of "risk" to a path for intervention and treatment. Importantly, we want to provide parents with "in the moment" information that can help them look beyond the behaviors they see to understand the basis of that behavior. Ultimately, we hope to facilitate a dialogue among parents in Sacramento County who care for this special population of children, professionals from a variety of disciplines who provide assessment and treatment services for families, and policy makers whose decisions affect the ultimate path of the children's lives. We want to bring everyone to an understanding that labels of risk do not necessarily predict potential; *risk is not destiny.*