A TOXIC Combination:

Children and Methamphetamine

The manufacture of Methamphetamine (Meth) creates a very dangerous environment for all people involved including children, their families and home visitors who serve in their communities.

The Missouri Guidelines for Managing Children Found at Methamphetamine Laboratory Sites **is a project being implemented by the Missouri Juvenile Justice Association (MJJA) in partnership with the Institute of Public Policy, Truman School of Public Affairs, at the University of Missouri-Columbia. These recommended guidelines provide agencies and organizations with a foundational protocol that is in place to cautiously deal with a Meth environment and the safe removal of the involved children. These guidelines may be found at http://truman.missouri.edu/ipp/methlabs/documents/MOguidelines_sm.pdf.**

It is important to recognize red flags, commonalities and incidents that need documentation in order to identify potential Meth laboratories and children at risk. Educators, family advocates, social service case workers and parent educators may use the following information during home visits to increase awareness about unsafe environments:

Know the lingo.
Common references to Methamphetamine are Meth, speed and chalk. In its smoked form, it is referred to as ice, crystal, crank and glass.

Know that Meth is available in many forms.
Can be smoked, snorted, injected or orally ingested.

Know that Meth can be colored or flavored to represent candy.
Referred to as Strawberry Quick and may be flavored with chocolate, strawberry, cola and other flavors to disguise the bitter taste and appeal to younger users.

Document home visits.
If setting an appointment for the home visit is a challenge, it could be a sign that suspicious activities may be occurring in the home. Be sure to document all aspects of home visits, such as cancelled or missed appointments or feeling unwelcome upon arrival.

Observe the number of people and their activity within the home.
How many are entering? How many are leaving? Are they leaving with 'something'?

Listen for references to any suspicious behavior or use of slang.
It's a good 'cook'.

continued

Potential Signs of Meth Use

- Lack of eye contact or dilated pupils
- Sores on arms, neck or face from 'tweeking' or picking at the skin
- Repetitive behaviors that may seem obsessive-compulsive
- Lack of sleep…Meth users may stay awake for 2-3 days

Meth houses can be camouflaged to be located anywhere…in urban areas, rural areas and/or in upscale, modest and poor neighborhoods.

If the home educator is suspicious prior to entry, he or she should alert a co-worker or supervisor of his or her status, the location of the home visit, any observations, and a contact number before entering the home. If the home educator suspects the presents of a Meth lab, he or she should immediately leave the home and contact the proper authorities.

Home visitors provide a valuable service and need the necessary tools and information to help keep children and themselves safe from Meth production.

Children's Trust Fund

Missouri's Foundation For Child Abuse Prevention

www.ctf4kids.org

Notice unauthorized rooms.
Are there any rooms in the home that are 'off limits', or that you are not permitted to enter?

Observe odors in the home.
The mixture of chemicals can release fumes and vapors that can be extremely toxic and have odd smells. The person(s) or area could resemble the smell of urine.

Recognize the presence of toxic chemicals.
Toxic chemicals in the air may cause eyes to itch, burn or redden. Odors may cause coughing or sneezing.

Notice Lighting.
Lighting may be dim to camouflage activity.

Observe tables for razors or needles in ash trays.
These items are used to consume and administer Meth or other drugs.

Observe behaviors.
Notice parent and child behaviors such as having difficulty sitting up, sustaining eye contact, or being excessively tired, nervous or fidgety.

Observe oral health of parents and children.
The use of Meth can cause the enamel on teeth to erode, which may lead to decay and gum disease.

Notice level of privacy.
Privacy is a priority in Meth homes. Windows and doors may be covered with heavy coverings. People may be 'hanging out' or guarding the front and/or back entry ways of the home.

Be aware of surroundings.
The home may have a collection of empty cans, jars or gas cans either inside or outside the residence. Look for empty boxes of over-the-counter drug medications that may be in the trash or randomly discarded.

Resources

National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) online facts: NIDA InfoFacts—Methamphetamine; www.nida.nih.gov/infofacts/methamphetamine.html

"Strawberry Quick" reprinted from Join Together Online at www.jointogether.org

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Children and Meth simply don't mix—no matter how you cook it.