

## Kids suffer as parents 'tweak'

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They are the silent victims.

Children whose parents use or manufacture methamphetamine are being exposed to a poisonous substance that authorities say has the potential to adversely affect them now and in the future.

"What we've seen, we know that one-third of the houses where meth is manufactured have children there," said Cheyenne Albro with the Pennyryle Narcotics Task Force. "We've developed concerns about the effects on children."

Those concerns are over the dangerous chemicals in meth -- but also involve much more.

"Children in drug-endangered environments are more likely to die violent deaths and to suffer physical, emotional or sexual abuse," said Holly Hopper, chair of the Kentucky Alliance for Drug Endangered Children.

"A 3-year-old who goes up to someone who's tweaking doesn't look like a (toddler) who needs a hug," she said. "They see someone who's out to get them or a demon."

"We've seen some horrific (child) death cases in Kentucky -- some are meth related," she said.

"Meth triggers aggression," Albro said. "To abuse a child is a release for them (meth users). It feels good to them."

Another type of abuse -- neglect -- is also an issue.

"Parents spend so much time going on meth runs that they aren't feeding or clothing their children," Albro said. "People on meth runs are gone for days; they are up for days and hallucinate."

And people high on meth aren't the only dangers to children.

"When meth is being manufactured and when people smoke meth, some of the meth will become airborne and adhere itself to couches, curtains and carpeting," Albro said.

"Children touch those things" and can be contaminated.

Children from homes where meth is being made often will test positive for having meth in their systems, if the test is administered within 72 hours, Albro said.

Children exposed to chemicals that go into making meth can suffer serious burns.

Those chemicals can also have an affect on children's cognitive functions.

"We know those chemicals cause attention deficit disorders," Albro said.

"Kids' bodies aren't completely formed," he said. "So meth has a worse effect on them than on the adults."

Meth's effects on children isn't just a problem in other counties for other people. It's a problem here.

"We're finding more kids in meth labs," according to Henderson County Sheriff's Deputy Bill Mills.

"We busted two meth labs in the Bluff City area. They had three big jars of ether on the stove ... two babies were asleep on the floor on a pallet" just feet away from the cooking meth, he said.

The children were 18-months and 3-years old, he said. "We could smell the chemicals from outside."

Albro said that since the meth craze began, law enforcement has been concentrating on training law enforcement and busting the dealers, the cooks and the users.

"We were worried about the safety of the public as a whole," he said.

Then, Albro said, he had a poignant conversation with Congressman Ed Whitfield.

Albro said Whitfield consistently gets grant money for the Pennyriple Narcotics Task Force to fight the war on meth.

"We were discussing what we'd done with (the money) and what we would do with it," he said.

"Congressman Whitfield asked me what it was doing to our children. He asked me what were we doing about that," Albro said.

"It gave me a sick feeling" to realize not much had been done, Albro added. "They are the silent victims. They are our most precious resource."

This conversation prompted Albro and the Pennyriple Narcotics Task Force to start Kentucky Interactive Drug Suppression, or Operation KIDS. This campaign is based on the Kentucky Alliance for Drug Endangered Children.

"We get social services, law enforcement, the whole community" involved, he said. "It's to get these kids what they need -- support, shelter, protection and health treatment."

Hopper, the chair of the Kentucky Alliance for Drug Endangered Children, said her agency and campaigns like Operation KIDS have been organized to "better educate the community so people can identify children living in drug-endangered homes."

The goal is to have community-based teams.

Albro explained that every county would be in charge of its own coalition. Those interested would come together to be trained, but then members of the coalition would develop their own protocols for handling these situations.

"I have great concerns about what these children are going through on a daily basis," he said.

In law enforcement, "we become calloused to the adults. The children reach in and tear your heart out."

For more information about starting a local coalition, people can contact Albro at 270-885-0031. People can also contact Hopper at 859-257-2968.