

Rory: A story and resource pack for professionals working with children of primary school age, looking at neglect because of alcohol misuse

Alcohol Focus Scotland, Glasgow, 2007.
£129 or £85 without the MP4 player

Helping children understand the harm and neglect arising from alcohol misuse is not easy. *Rory* is a multimedia pack that provides a resource for practitioners to do this. Whilst not specifically designed for residential child care, could it be used as a resource?

Rory is a happy dog who is neglected because his owner drinks too much. He experiences a cycle of neglect, guilt, shame and promises that are soon broken. He feels increasingly unhappy, alone and responsible for his owner's problems. The dog next door, Felix, empathises with *Rory*, helping him to see he is not alone and situations can change.

The pack is multi media and comes with sufficient material for use with 10 to 20 young people. It contains a story book entitled *Rory*, a *Rory* glove puppet, a press-out kennel, three games, an MP4 player and a guide for practitioners. It is designed to be presenter-led. Training on its use is available at additional cost.

The core of the pack is the story book *Rory*. Two versions are available, one for general use and one for children with learning difficulties or younger children. It is presented in picture book form. It is attractively illustrated, uses simple language and is excellently presented. There are three messages. First, children are not alone if there is a family problem of alcohol misuse. Secondly, talking to a responsible adult helps and, thirdly, there is hope. At the end of the story children are asked to relate the story to personal experience.

The MP4 player tells the story in animated form, allowing children to take *Rory* away and share it with others. The other materials are used to engage children in activities and reinforce key messages. *Rory* says very little about alcohol and a lot about neglect and how children respond. It invites identification with the feelings of the characters in the story but without making judgements. This gets an underlying message of resilience through to both children and professionals.

Simple stories about complex problems are difficult to balance. Generally *Rory* does this well. The message of hope could be overstated where alcohol misuse is just one of many problems in a family. Conversely, *Rory* could result in children over-reacting and seeing problems in normal social situations. This

illustrates the importance of training and/or preparation for presenters.

Story telling is increasingly being seen as a valid method of intervention with older children who have difficulties engaging emotionally because of damaging earlier experiences. *Rory* has a reading age of eight to nine years old, but given that some teenagers in residential care may struggle with more complex material, I felt that it would still be appropriate and understandable, particularly if sitting and talking is not their thing. It is not a ‘leave it lying and they’ll look at it’ pack. It is something that would be best used after careful planning and preparation.

Rory is well worth a look, excellently presented and could in the right circumstances be a valuable resource. For more information on the pack, contact barry.mcginness@alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk. *Rory* can be viewed on www.alcohol-focus-scotland.org.uk/leaflets_publications/rory_storybook/.

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