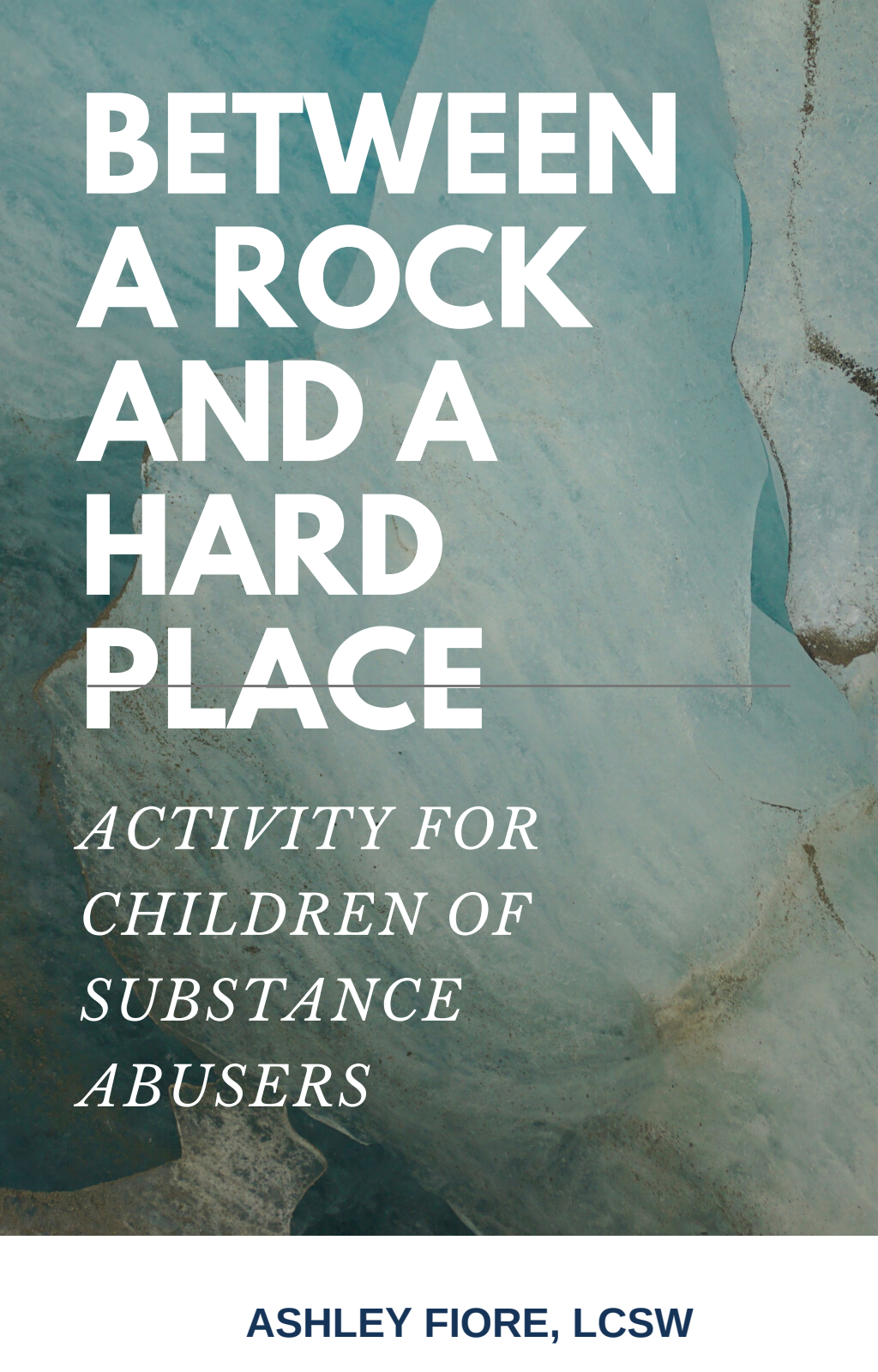


BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

*ACTIVITY FOR CHILDREN OF
SUBSTANCE ABUSERS*

- Appropriate for all ages, especially school age to adult
- This 13-page resource includes instructions and printable handouts to provide psychoeducation about dynamics of addiction in families, process how this impacts the entire family system, and interventions to support clients gaining a more balanced perspective about growing up with addiction.

ASHLEY FIORE, LCSW



BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

*ACTIVITY FOR
CHILDREN OF
SUBSTANCE
ABUSERS*

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OBJECTIVES

Growing up in a family struggling with addiction puts a lot of pressure on the child. This activity helps the therapist elicit from the child what that pressure feels like, normalizes ways children sometimes think, feel and act in that situation, and helps the therapist invite the client to find more helpful ways of dealing with this sense of powerlessness.



APPROPRIATE AGES

This intervention was designed for older elementary through high school students, but easily could be adapted for younger children or adults.

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MATERIALS

Scissors

Glue or glue stick

Markers

Printable handouts

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Show the client the image of the smaller rock stuck between the two big rocks. Explain that growing up in a family struggling with addiction puts a lot of pressure on the child. Think about the amount of pressure it requires to hold up the rock in the middle. This visual represents how a child in this situation can feel "caught between a rock and a hard place."
2. Print out the images of the larger rocks on separate pages, *The Rock* and *The Hard Place*. Print out the list of common responses kids have when they are in this situation. Cut these apart into strips and sort them into the appropriate categories prior to the session.
3. Explain to the client that the *Rock Impact* slips of paper are examples other kids have given of their experiences growing up with addiction. Elicit from the client how these responses make sense.

INSTRUCTIONS

4. Ask the client to paste any of these impacts that they have had on their *Rock* handout. Invite them to add additional responses they have had to their handout, which you can add to the impacts for other kids you treat in the future.

5. Explain to the client that the *Hard Place Attempts at Surviving* slips of paper are examples of how children often try to survive the challenge of living with parental substance abuse. Elicit from the client how these make sense.

6. Ask the client to paste any of these attempts at surviving that apply to them on their *Hard Place* handout. Invite the client to add additional responses they have had to their handout, which you can add to for other kids you treat in the future.

7. Then show the client the original picture of the child stuck between *The Rock* and *The Hard Place*. Note that the child didn't put himself here, but the child needs a hand hold or a ledge to stand on to climb out. Sometimes that takes the form of no longer keeping secrets, finding and accessing other helpful resources, or using coping skills for managing the stress.

* It can be helpful to elicit from the client examples of times they thought they might fall and how they coped. Times might include when a parent was on a

INSTRUCTIONS

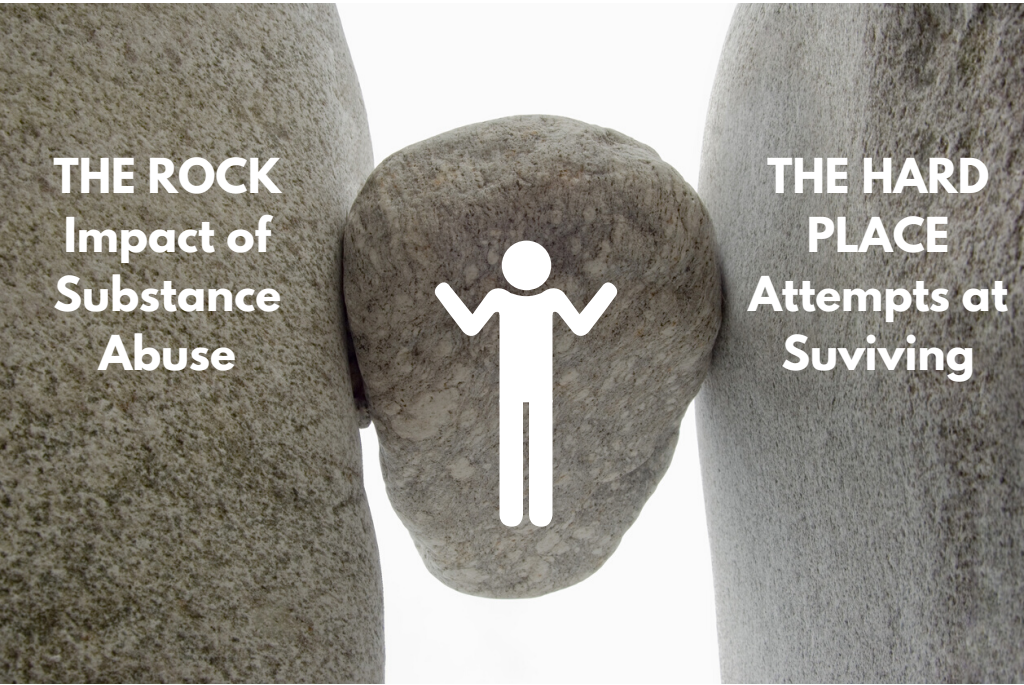
bender, when parents leave unexpectedly or make excuses for where they have been that don't make sense, when they are gone for a long time, driving drunk or high with the kid in the vehicle, times the child tried to fly under the radar when others in the community were asking too many questions or when DSS showed up unexpectedly, etc.

8. Generate a list of possible solutions the client could use to extricate themselves from the situation. Check any that might work and individualize the list.

9. Finally, help the client learn what they have gained from this difficult experience. The therapist needs to help the client come to a more balanced understanding of their experiences. What positive meaning can they make? Examples follow below:

You developed some superpowers: it's how can read people so well, you're independent and know how to take care of yourself , you make good decisions in stressful situations, you developed a growth mindset - in some ways you were already starting to make your own safety belt (climbing rack) but sometimes you need someone to belay you to keep it really safe. Helping the client identify these superpowers helps them use these assets when they need them and not overly rely on them when they don't.

CHILDREN OF SUBSTANCE ABUSERS



Consider the amount of pressure it requires to hold up the rock in the middle. This is a visual of the pressure children feel when their parents suffer from addiction. As a result, kids in this situation can feel "caught between a rock and a hard place."

ASHLEY FIORE, LCSW

THE ROCK

Impact of Substance Abuse



THE HARD PLACE

Attempts at Surviving



THE ROCK

Impact of Substance Abuse on Kid

- feel sad
- feel angry
- feel worried
- get yelled at
- parents argue/fight
- don't get to school
- don't participate in activities
- can't be the kid; have to be the responsible one
- have to take care of my siblings
- drinking/drug use continues
- drive in unsafe situations after parent used
- family gets separated
- go to foster care or have to live with other family

THE ROCK

Impact of Substance Abuse on Kid

- feel disappointed
- feel hopeless
- feel _____ and _____
- get hurt
- It's not safe
- parent arrested
- grades drop
- poor attendance
- money worries
- housing problems
- other parent is irritable or less available
- _____
- _____
- _____

THE HARD PLACE

Attempts at Surviving

- pretend it's not still an issue
- minimize impact or think "it's not that bad"
- try to be the hero of the family
- act out to distract myself or get help but keep the focus on my behavior, not theirs
- keep the problem a secret
- keep friends away so they don't see how bad it is
- pretend I don't care by laughing it off
- don't tell other family members, teachers or social services because I might not be able to see my parent if they know the truth

THE HARD PLACE

Attempts at Surviving

- try to appease parent or cover up for them
- act rude and grumpy to others
- problems trusting others
- withdraw
- give up/don't try
- blow in the car starter for them so we can get places and they won't get mad at me
- hide their alcohol or drugs or get rid of them
- try using the alcohol or drugs myself
- tell myself "it's ok, it's just this once"

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SOLUTIONS

How to Find a Hand Hold and Climb Out

- Open up to family, friends, and/or a trusted adult about what's going on
- Try other coping skills like deep breathing, 4321 grounding, Progressive Muscle Relaxation
- Try a support group for kids whose parents have substance use disorders like Alateen or the Student Assistance Program; You're not the only one in this situation!
- Avoid being around your parent when they have been using
- Invest in other relationships or activities/interests that are good for you

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