

DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN IN INDIAN COUNTRY

A Law Enforcement & Child Welfare Resource Toolkit — National Native Justice Institute | www.nativejustice.us

■ DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN IN TRIBAL COMMUNITIES

Drug endangered children (DEC) are among the most vulnerable victims in tribal communities — children living in environments where adult substance use creates immediate safety threats, long-term developmental harm, and generational trauma. In Indian Country, where methamphetamine, opioids, and alcohol addiction rates are elevated, drug endangered children are encountered on domestic violence calls, welfare checks, drug arrest scenes, and housing inspections with alarming frequency.

☹️ Children found in environments with meth, fentanyl, or other controlled substances are at immediate risk of chemical exposure, overdose, and physical harm.

🏠 Drug-affected homes often lack food, heat, functioning utilities, and adult supervision — children may have been living in crisis conditions for months or years.

⚠️ First responders who fail to properly identify, document, and report drug endangered children miss a critical intervention opportunity that may not recur.

🧠 Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) from drug-endangered home environments are directly linked to lifelong health, behavioral, and justice system involvement outcomes.

■ IDENTIFYING DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN

Physical & Environmental Indicators

- Presence of drug paraphernalia accessible to children: syringes, pipes, burnt spoons, baggies, or pill bottles within children's reach.
- Chemical odors (ammonia, solvents, or burnt chemical smell) in the home that indicate drug manufacturing or heavy use.
- Inadequate food, clothing, heat, or hygiene indicating neglect associated with parental substance use.
- Children who appear sedated, hyperactive, physically ill, or show signs of chemical exposure (red eyes, nausea, skin irritation).

Behavioral & Developmental Indicators

- Children who appear parentified — taking adult responsibilities for younger siblings, managing household logistics.
- Extreme anxiety, hypervigilance, or difficulty regulating emotions consistent with traumatic home environments.
- School absenteeism, delays in speech or developmental milestones, or reports of school staff concern.

■ RESPONSE PROTOCOL FOR DRUG ENDANGERED CHILDREN

- **Prioritize Child Safety Immediately** – Remove children from immediate chemical or physical danger before conducting any further investigation. Document every safety action taken.
- **Conduct a Medical Evaluation** – Any child potentially exposed to drug chemicals, meth manufacturing, or found unconscious must receive immediate medical evaluation.
- **Notify Child Protective Services & Tribal Social Services** – Make a mandatory report to tribal social services and/or state CPS immediately upon identifying a drug endangered child.
- **Document the Environment Thoroughly** – Photograph the home environment, accessible paraphernalia, and living conditions. This documentation is critical for both child welfare and criminal proceedings.
- **Identify All Children in the Home** – Conduct a thorough accounting of all children in the home including any not immediately visible. Check every room.
- **Interview Children Appropriately** – Children should be interviewed by a trained forensic interviewer whenever possible. First responder contacts should be limited to safety assessment, not forensic investigation.

RESOURCES, GRANTS & SUPPORT

Funding, Training, and Support Resources — Tribal Drug Endangered Children Programs | www.nativejustice.us

FEDERAL GRANT RESOURCES

Child Welfare & Protection

- **ICWA – Indian Child Welfare Act Resources** – Federal protections for Native children in child welfare proceedings. nicwa.org
- **OJJDP Drug Endangered Children Program** – National DEC program resources and training for tribal communities. ojjdp.gov
- **Children’s Bureau – Title IV-B Grants** – Funds child welfare services including drug endangered child programs. acf.hhs.gov/cb

Substance Use & Family Services

- **SAMHSA Tribal Opioid Response (TOR) Grant** – Supports tribal substance use programs affecting families and children. samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac
- **SAMHSA Tribal Behavioral Health Grants** – Funds family and child-focused behavioral health programs. samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac
- **Head Start & Early Head Start for Tribal Programs** – Federal early childhood programs serving drug-affected families. acf.hhs.gov/ohs

STATE & ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **State Homeland Security Grants (SHSGP)** – Tribal law enforcement may be eligible for state-administered FEMA homeland security funding.
- **Tribal Law & Order Act (TLOA) Resources** – Expanded tribal criminal authority and DOJ technical assistance for implementation.
- **Grants.gov Tribal Search Tool** – Search all federal grants available to tribal entities. grants.gov (filter: Tribal Government eligibility)

HELPFUL TIPS FOR TRIBAL PROGRAMS & LEADERS

Establish a DEC Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) A formal MDT including law enforcement, child welfare, tribal social services, medical, and behavioral health ensures coordinated response and reduces trauma from multiple interviews.	Train All Officers to Identify DEC Every patrol officer will encounter drug endangered children. Training on identification, documentation, and mandatory reporting is essential for all officers.
Create a First Responder DEC Protocol A written DEC response protocol defines officer responsibilities, reporting requirements, and inter-agency notification procedures at the point of first contact.	Build Relationships with Tribal Child Welfare Pre-established relationships between tribal law enforcement and social services enable faster, better-coordinated responses when children are at risk.

KEY WEBLINKS

National Native Justice Institute	www.nativejustice.us
OJJDP Drug Endangered Children	ojjdp.gov
NICWA – Indian Child Welfare	nicwa.org
SAMHSA Tribal Programs	samhsa.gov/tribal-ttac
BIA Law Enforcement Services	bia.gov/bia/ojs
Grants.gov (Tribal Search)	grants.gov

PARTNER WITH NNJI — WE ARE READY TO SUPPORT YOUR COMMUNITY

TAKE ACTION TODAY — Contact NNJI at www.nativejustice.us to schedule training, consultation, or access resources.

Strengthening Tribal Justice — One Community at a Time