



Drugs and Alcohol

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Some are experimenting with the feeling of intoxication.

Alcohol and Young People

Why do I need to know about young person using drugs or alcohol?

Many young people smoke, drink alcohol and may try drugs. It is important you are aware of this and do not ignore it as a time when they are just having fun or experimenting. It doesn't take much for the young people to soon lose control and to need help to recover from this problem.

How common is it?

By the age of 16, up to half of young people have tried an illegal drug. Young people are trying drugs earlier and more are drinking alcohol.

Young people are being hospitalised more and more frequently, and at a younger age, because of alcohol-related liver disease.

What drugs are they going to use?

The most commonly used, readily available and strongly addictive drugs are tobacco and alcohol. There are numerous others that can be addictive.

Alcohol and cannabis are sometimes seen as 'gateway' drugs that lead to the world of other drugs like cocaine and heroin. There is no research to prove this

Drugs are also classed as 'legal' and 'illegal'. The obviously illegal drugs include cannabis (hash), speed (amphetamines), ecstasy (E), cocaine and heroin.

Using 'legal' drugs (like cigarettes, alcohol, petrol, glue) does not mean they are safe or allowed to be misused. It just means they may be bought or sold for specific purposes and are limited to use by specific age groups.



Why do young people use drugs and alcohol?

Young people may try or use drugs or alcohol for various reasons. They may do it for fun, because they are curious, or to be like their friends. Some are experimenting with the feeling of intoxication. Sometimes they use it to cope with difficult situations or feelings of worry and low mood. A young person is more likely to try or use drugs or alcohol if they hang out or stay with friends or family who use them.

What can be the problems related to using drugs or alcohol?

Drugs and alcohol can have different effects on different people. In young people, especially the effects can be unpredictable and potentially dangerous. Even medications for sleep or painkillers can be addictive and harmful if not used the way they are prescribed by a doctor.

Drugs and alcohol can damage health. Sharing needles or equipment can cause serious infections, such as HIV and hepatitis. Accidents, arguments and fights are more likely after drinking and drug use. Young people are more likely to engage in unprotected sex when using drugs.

Using drugs can lead to serious mental illnesses such as psychosis and depression

Risks and Dangers

Using street drugs or alcohol might make you feel good, but they can damage your health. Here are some of the basic facts:

It is dangerous to mix drugs and alcohol. They each may increase the effects of the other substance, e.g. ecstasy and alcohol can lead to dehydration (overheating), and cause coma and death.

You cannot know for sure what is in the drug you buy. It might not contain what the dealer says. Some dealers might mix it with other substances or you may get a higher dose of a drug than you are used to, which can be fatal.

Sharing needles or 'equipment' can spread serious infections, such as HIV and hepatitis.

Accidents, arguments and fights are more likely after drinking and drug use.

Using drugs can lead to serious mental illness such as psychosis or depression, and to health problems and overdoses.



Are any drugs legal?

No drugs are legal.

You can get a criminal record for possessing drugs or giving some to your friends. For example having or using Cannabis can lead to 2 years in prison and/or an unlimited fine.

Supplying Cannabis, which includes passing a joint to someone, is punishable by up to 14 years in prison and an/or an unlimited fine.

Are any Drugs Safe?

All drugs carry risks, for example one person dies each week in the UK from using solvents such as aerosol sprays, glue and petrol fumes

For more information on the effects of different drugs go to www.talktofrank.com or look out for the drug information postcards in most youth clubs

Pay attention to what the child/young person is doing, including schoolwork, friends and leisure time.

Learn about the effects of alcohol and drugs (see www.talktofrank.com)

Listen to what the child/young person says about alcohol and drugs and talk about it with them.

Encourage the child/young person to be informed and responsible about drugs and alcohol.

Talk to the parents, friends or teachers about drugs - the facts and your fears.

If a Young Person is Using

Make sure of your facts (www.talktofrank.com)

Stay calm

Don't give up on them

Don't get into long debates or arguments when they are drunk, stoned or high

Don't blame them - you may lose their confidence.

When does it become an addiction or a problem?

It is very difficult to know when exactly using drugs or alcohol is more than just 'usual'.

Addiction becomes more obvious when the young person spends most of their time thinking about, looking for or using drugs. Drugs or alcohol then become the focus of the young person's life. They ignore their usual work, such as not doing their schoolwork, or stop doing their usual hobbies/sports such as dancing or football.



How do I know if there is a problem or addiction?

Occasional use can be very difficult to detect. If the young person is using on a regular basis, their behaviour often changes. Look for signs such as:

- unexplained moodiness
- behaviour that is 'out of character'
- loss of interest in school or friends
- unexplained loss of clothes or money
- unusual smells and items like silver foil, needle covers.
- Remember, the above changes can also mean other problems rather than using drugs.

What to do if I'm worried

If you suspect young person is using drugs, remember some general rules.

- Pay attention to what the child is doing, including schoolwork, friends and leisure time.
- Learn about the effects of alcohol and drugs (see websites listed below).
- Listen to what the child says about alcohol and drugs, and talk about it with them.
- Encourage the young person to be informed and responsible about drugs and alcohol.
- Talk to other parents, friends or teachers about drugs - the facts and your fears and SEEK HELP.
- If someone in the family or close friend is using drugs or alcohol, it is important that they seek help too. It may be hard to expect the young person to give up, especially if a parent is using it too.

My child is abusing drugs. What do I do?

- If your child is using drugs or alcohol, seek help.
- Do stay calm and make sure of facts.
- Don't give up on them, get into long debates or arguments when they are drunk, stoned or high.
- Don't be angry or blame them –they need your help and trust to make journey of recovery.



Where to get help

You can talk in confidence to a general practitioner or practice nurse. They can give information and advice on local support and treatment facilities. Other helpful agencies include:

- Voluntary counselling centres
- Teachers and school nurses
- Youth and community workers
- Drug and alcohol agencies
- Child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS)
- Social workers
- Police
- Talk to Frank is a free confidential drugs information and advice line.
Telephone: 0800 776600; email: frank@talktofrank.com

Where can I get help?

You can talk in confidence to a professional like your GP or practice nurse, a local drug project or your local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS) (see our factsheet on Who's Who in CAMHS). They can refer your child to relevant services, and will be able to offer you advice and support.

You may also be able to seek help through a school nurse, teacher or social worker. You can find this information from your local area telephone book or council website, or ask for the address from your health centre.

You may also look at the websites listed below. Most offer telephone advice and email contact.



Resources

Addaction - Specialist drug and alcohol treatment charity.

Alcohol Concern - National agency on alcohol misuse campaigning for effective alcohol policy and improved services for people whose lives are affected by alcohol-related problems.

Drink Sense - Provides counselling, information and support for people with alcohol-related problems, their carers and families, also has information for young people under the age of 25.

NHS Choices - Website with health information.

NHS Direct - Provide help and advice on any aspect of drug and alcohol use. Tel. 0845 4647.

NHS Smoking Helpline: Smoke free - Smokefree line: 0800 022 4 332.

Patient UK - Information on alcohol and drug misuse and s links to various useful books and websites.

Talk to Frank - Free confidential drugs information and advice line. Tel. 0800 776600.

WWW.KIPEDUCATION.COM