

# Parental Drug Awareness Information



Children have drug and alcohol education at school as part of their PSHE or science lessons. Whilst this is an important part of the school curriculum, to be really effective we need children to learn at home too. This leaflet provides basic information on alcohol, cannabis and New Psychoactive Substances, the group of drugs usually called 'legal highs', along with general guidance for parents on how to talk about this sensitive subject with their child.

## Talking to your child about drugs

Whilst many parents say they feel comfortable talking about alcohol with their child, research suggests they feel less confident when it comes to conversations about drugs. Worries about getting it wrong, not saying the right thing and not knowing enough can make it easier to say nothing. However, talking about it early makes it more likely that your child will come to you if there is ever a problem. Find opportunities to:

- Show that their health, safety and wellbeing is the most important thing
- Listen to their feelings and opinions and share yours so they understand your views
- Agree rules and boundaries
- Use opportunities created by TV storylines and news articles to discuss the potential consequences of choices made about drugs and alcohol
- Find out more together, starting with the websites suggested in this leaflet.

Whilst understanding that every family is different, knowing the basic facts and understanding common risks associated with drugs misuse should help communication, enabling you to feel more confident about supporting your child to make healthy choices and stay safe.

## Why take drugs?

This is a question for which there is no single answer; people take drugs for lots of different reasons including curiosity, boredom, wanting to fit in with peers and friends and the perceived benefits of alcohol and different types of drugs.

**Stress Busters:** Some drugs, like cannabis, can make users feel relaxed. If your child is feeling stressed about school, has family worries or is having arguments with their friends, cannabis may seem a good way to escape from their fears and bond with others.

**Confidence Boosters:** Some drugs, including cocaine, ecstasy and legal highs that mirror these, can make users feel happier and more confident. If your child feels shy or awkward in social situations, then they may think that stimulant drugs will give them the confidence they need to have a good time.

**Dependency:** Some drugs, such as alcohol, nicotine, heroin and crack cocaine, are highly addictive. Even medications for sleep or prescription painkillers can be addictive and harmful if not used in the way they are prescribed by a doctor.

## What are the risks?

All drugs carry risks. In young people, who are not yet fully grown, the effects can be especially unpredictable and dangerous. The human brain begins to develop in the womb but is not fully formed until well into adulthood and early drug misuse can impact on growth and development.

As well as risks to physical and mental health, intoxication increases the risk of accidents, arguments and fights. Teenagers are also more likely to engage in unprotected sex, which can lead to early pregnancy and the risk of sexually transmitted infections. Any of these potential risks increase with more frequent drug use, mixing alcohol with drugs and by using a higher strength of a drug.

In addition to this the consequences of being caught and charged with drug offences could be a criminal record or custodial sentence, which can impact negatively on future life choices.

## What should I look for?

Occasional use can be very difficult to detect but if someone is using on a regular basis you may notice a change in behaviour. This could include:

- Losing interest in hobbies, sports or other favourite activities
- Losing interest in their appearance or personal hygiene
- Dramatic mood swings, excessive tiredness and a lack of appetite
- Sudden changes in established friendship groups
- Taking time off school
- Dilated pupils, red eyes, bad skin
- Spending, stealing or borrowing money, coupled with a refusal to explain how/why

However, many teenagers experience behavioral changes for reasons that have nothing to do with substance misuse, so it is really important to be mindful, without jumping to conclusions.

## What should I do?

Don't panic. If you think or know that your child has been using drugs, it's natural to feel worried or angry, but losing your temper, making threats or using scare tactics is unlikely to help. Try not to make accusations, which are likely to lead to a row, remain calm and listen, encouraging them to talk. Make sure they know you are there to support them. Never challenge your child if you think they are drunk or have been using drugs, this is likely to make things worse. Make sure they are safe of any immediate danger and wait until later to talk things through.

**If it is a medical emergency call 999 and try to give as much information as possible.**

## Where can I get help?

You can talk in confidence to your GP or a professional from A-DASH, which provides services for young people (under 18) in Hertfordshire with drug and alcohol problems.

### ADASH

[www.hpft.nhs.uk](http://www.hpft.nhs.uk)

Type 'A-DASH' into the search engine to find information about available support. Alternatively:

Email: [A-DASH@hpft.nhs.uk](mailto:A-DASH@hpft.nhs.uk) or [A-DASH@nhs.net](mailto:A-DASH@nhs.net)

Telephone: **01992 531971**

To find out more information about drugs and alcohol, try these websites:

### Alcohol Concern

[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk) - National agency for alcohol misuse and alcohol-related problems

### NHS Direct

<http://www.nhs.uk/pages/home.aspx> - Provides help and advice on any aspect of drug and alcohol use, call **111**

### Talk To Frank

[www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com) - Free confidential drugs information and advice line, call **0300 123 6600**

## Alcohol, Cannabis and New Psychoactive Substances (legal highs)

### Alcohol

#### Category: Depressant

Alcohol is a drug controlled by age in the UK. It is sold via licensed outlets such as supermarkets, off licenses, pubs and bars and you must be over 18 to legally buy or drink it.

The police, PCSO's and some designated street wardens have the power to confiscate alcohol from anyone under the age of 18. It is also illegal to sell alcohol to under 18's or buy it for them. In some designated areas of the UK it is illegal for anyone to drink alcohol in a public place.

#### The effects and risks

Alcohol is all around us, so children can grow up thinking that it is normal to drink or that it is part of being an adult. Challenge this by talking about the negative aspects as well as the social side, discussing the reasons why some people abstain from alcohol and by role-modeling responsible drinking.

The Department of Health safe drinking guidelines are for healthy adults. There are no recommended safe levels for children and young adults. The effect of alcohol depends on the strength of the drink, previous food intake, other substances used and the user's general build and metabolism.

Alcohol is a highly addictive drug. People can describe feeling happier, while others become less happy; others may become aggressive. Alcohol can also cause nausea, vomiting, excessive urination, impaired memory and judgement, meaning that people can do things they later regret. Heavy drinking can result in alcohol poisoning, which can be fatal.

### Cannabis

#### Category: Depressant, Hallucinogen, Stimulant

Cannabis is the scientific name for the hemp plant. There are many different kinds of cannabis, including stronger varieties usually called 'skunk'. The leaves and flowers of each kind produce varying mind-altering and medicinal effects when smoked or consumed.

#### The effects and risks

Cannabis is often rolled and smoked with tobacco, which increases the health risks and can lead to nicotine addiction. Users report feeling relaxed and may have a sharper sense of colours and sounds. Some experience strong food cravings, often called the 'munchies'. Cannabis can impair the ability to think and learn; users feeling tired, de-motivated and lethargic. Some people become increasingly anxious and paranoid and this contributes to concerns about the impact cannabis can have on mental health, especially with long term use.

Cannabis is a class B drug, which means that the penalties are up to 5 years imprisonment for possession and 14 years for possession with intent to supply.

### Legal highs

#### Category: Depressant, Hallucinogen, Stimulant

Legal highs are substances that mimic the effects of illegal drugs such as cocaine, ecstasy or cannabis. Despite mimicking the effects of illegal drugs, they're chemically and structurally different enough to avoid being officially classified as illegal substances. Whilst they're not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act this does not mean that they are safe.

#### The effects and risks

Little or no research has been done into the effects of legal highs, especially their long-term effects. Some drugs sold as legal highs have been found to contain a controlled substance meaning they aren't legal to possess at all. In response the Government has introduced new powers that can place a temporary ban on any potentially harmful substance until a decision is made on whether it should be permanently controlled.

This means that the status of some substances currently considered legal is likely to change. To keep informed go to [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

Even legal substances, e.g. petrol and glue, and common household aerosols, can be very harmful if abused. Over the counter medicines, e.g. painkillers, and prescription drugs, e.g. sleeping tablets, can be addictive and dangerous if they are not used in the correct way.

