



Drugs and Alcohol

About Drugs, alcohol and young people

Substance misuse is one of the most common and yet preventable risks to a young person's health and development. All drugs have the potential to cause harm, some can be addictive and using drugs in combination with each other can increase risk.

Alcohol and tobacco are strongly addictive and commonly used amongst teenagers and young adults. Illegal drugs include cannabis, cocaine, ecstasy and heroin. Teenagers are likely to experiment, test boundaries and take risks. Smoking, drinking and trying drugs is one of the most common ways in which young people do this.

Drugs

Cannabis (marijuana/pot/dope/weed/grass/spliff) is the illegal drug most used by young people but there is also a long (and ever-changing) list of pills, powders, liquids and other substances that are taken into the body using a variety of different methods, with a variety of different effects. The penalties for possession, use and dealing can be harsh so young people are usually careful to cover their tracks. Parents are also unlikely to be familiar with the language, not to mention the law, and the signs of misuse to look out for. It's helpful to find out as much as you can.

Drugs have well-known generic names, such as cannabis, ecstasy, amphetamines, cocaine, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, but all of these are also known by a huge variety of other slang names (see links to lists of these at the back of this resource). Parents might overhear some of these in their children's conversations with friends.

Drug paraphernalia - equipment or material that can be used or modified for preparing and taking into the body 'recreational' drugs - includes tin foil and spoons (for heating), pipes and bongs (for smoking), rolled up banknotes (for snorting), and syringes (for injecting). Parents might come across some of these items at home.

Drugs can act as stimulants, depressants or hallucinogens, or a combination of these. They can make you feel more energised, confident, relaxed, 'spaced out', speeded up, slowed down and bring on a distorted perception of reality. They can be very harmful to both body and mind, especially in still-developing young people, affecting heart rate, organ function, temperature control, mood and mental health.

Alcohol

Many of the adults in a child's life drink alcohol regularly and there is often a ready supply of it in the home. Despite minimum age restrictions in shops and bars, young people often find ways of getting hold of alcohol and drinking with friends. This often involves drinking as much and as fast as they can. The average age that a young person first drinks alcohol is 13 years. There are a lot of risks particularly associated with under-age drinking: damage to liver and brain functions, mental health problems, physical problems such as headaches, poor sleep, weight fluctuations, aggression and violence, under age sex and subsequent STDs and teenage pregnancy, accidents, vulnerability and alcohol poisoning.

Addiction to alcohol and drugs

The following guidance about addiction is from the Royal College of Psychiatrists:

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 can help? What to do next

These are some things that may really make a difference:

1. Be a responsible role model. You will influence your child's attitudes about alcohol and drugs well before they have their first experience with them.
2. Talk openly and honestly about alcohol whenever your children start asking you questions about it – the reasons why you enjoy it (sociability, relaxation), the drawbacks (hangovers, sickness, bad skin) as well as the dangers and risks alcohol poses.
3. Make conversations about alcohol, drugs and safe choices part of the day-to-day rather than a one-off 'big talk'.
4. Help your child learn to make safe and healthy decisions.
5. Be clear about the connections between drink and drugs, and their capacity to boost confidence and self-esteem. Help your daughter/son to strengthen their sense of wellbeing in healthier ways – exercise, sport, music, friends, encouragement etc.
6. Find out all you can about the law and the health and safety risks associated with under-age drinking.
7. Find out all you can about illegal drugs, their names, their effects, where people get hold of them so that you can be well informed.
8. If you think your child may be using alcohol or drugs to help them cope with worries or mental health problems, go to your GP, ask for help.

Finding support

All resources listed on this sheet are for information only. While every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, YoungMinds cannot accept responsibility for changes to details made by other organisations.

<p>YoungMinds</p> <p>Starting a conversation with your child www.youngminds.org.uk/starting-a-conversation-with-your-child Ideas to help parents create a relaxed space in which to talk by taking 20 minutes to do an activity with their child. You can find fun activity ideas, conversation starters and advice.</p> <p>Parents Lounge www.youngminds.org.uk/find-help/for-parents/parents-lounge Our Parents Helpline experts answer questions on having difficult conversations with your child.</p>	<p>We Are With You www.wearewithyou.org.uk Online advice and information about drugs, alcohol and mental health.</p> <p>Their webchat service provides support to anyone who needs drug or alcohol advice (access via the homepage).</p> <p>Local services available for young people, adults and families. You can search for services near you at www.wearewithyou.org.uk/services</p>
<p>Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk Local AA Meetings take place across the UK to help people share their experiences with other alcoholics and provide support with recovery.</p> <p>AA also provides a helpline and email service for anyone who needs help with a drinking problem.</p> <p>Freephone helpline: 0800 9177 650 Email: help@aamail.org</p> <p>Find your local Meeting at www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk/AA-Meetings/Find-a-Meeting</p>	<p>Narcotics Anonymous (NA) www.ukna.org At local NA Meetings, recovering addicts meet regularly to provide support and help each other stay clean.</p> <p>NA also provides a helpline for anyone who needs support and advice about drug addiction - both addicts and their friends and family.</p> <p>Helpline (open 10am-midnight, 7 days a week): 0300 999 1212</p> <p>Find your local Meeting at www.ukna.org/meetings/search</p>
<p>Al-Anon Family Groups www.al-anonuk.org.uk Support for anyone whose life is, or has been, affected by someone else's drinking. Local Al-Anon Meetings provide a space to share experiences and get support. You can search for Meetings near you at www.al-anonuk.org.uk/find-a-meeting</p> <p>Helpline (open daily from 10am-10pm): 0800 0086 811</p> <p>Email: helpline@al-anonuk.org.uk</p>	<p>Alateen www.al-anonuk.org.uk/alateen Support for teenagers who have a relative or friend who is an alcoholic. Local Meetings are for 12-17 year olds to meet, share their experiences and get support.</p> <p>To find Alateen Meetings near you, call 020 7593 2070.</p>
<p>Nacoa (National Association for Children of Alcoholics) www.nacoa.org.uk Provides information, advice and support for anyone affected by a parent's drinking.</p> <p>Helpline: 0800 358 3456 Email: helpline@Nacoa.org.uk</p>	<p>Drinkline A helpline for people who are concerned about their own drinking or someone else's. Open Monday-Friday from 9am-8pm, and at weekends from 11am-4pm.</p> <p>Freephone: 0300 123 1110</p>

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Talk to Frank

www.talktofrank.com

A website providing information and advice about drugs for both young people and parents. You can also access confidential advice via their helpline service.

Phone (open 24/7): 0300 123 6600

Text: 82111

Email: frank@talktofrank.com

Webchat (open 7 days a week from 2-6pm):

www.talktofrank.com/livechat

Information for parents: www.talktofrank.com/worried-about-a-child

Adfam

www.adfam.org.uk

Online information and advice for families affected by drugs and alcohol.

The Mix

www.themix.org.uk

If you're under 25 you can talk to The Mix about anything that's troubling you over the phone, email or webchat. You can also use their phone or online counselling service.

Helpline open daily 4-11pm: 0808 808 4994

Email: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/email-us

Webchat open daily 4-11pm: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team

Counselling service: www.themix.org.uk/get-support/speak-to-our-team/the-mix-counselling-service

Childline

www.childline.org.uk

If you're under 19 you can confidentially call, chat online or email about any problem big or small.

24/7 helpline: 0800 1111

Chat 1:1 with an online counsellor: www.childline.org.uk/get-support/1-2-1-counsellor-chat

Email: Sign up on the website, so you can send your message without needing to use your name or email address, at www.childline.org.uk/registration

Youth Access

www.youthaccess.org.uk

Offers information about advice and counselling services in the UK for young people aged 12-25 years.

Youth Wellbeing Directory

www.annafreud.org/on-my-mind/youth-wellbeing

Lists local services for young people's mental health and wellbeing.

MindEd

www.minded.org.uk

MindEd for families is a website where you can hear about other parents' experiences and find clear, helpful guidance on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.

YoungMinds Crisis Messenger

Provides free, 24/7 text support for young people experiencing a mental health crisis.

Text YM to 85258

Texts are free from EE, O2, Vodafone, 3, Virgin Mobile, BT Mobile, GiffGaff, Tesco Mobile and Telecom Plus.