

# Information about drugs: what parents need to know

## Factsheet for parents and teachers

### About this factsheet

This is one in a series of factsheets for parents, teachers and young people entitled *Mental Health and Growing Up*. The aims of these factsheets are to provide practical, up-to-date information about mental health problems (emotional, behavioural and psychiatric disorders) that can affect children and young people. This factsheet offers practical advice for parents and teachers who are worried that a young person is misusing drugs or alcohol.



## Introduction

### Who uses drugs?

Many young people smoke, drink alcohol and may try drugs. They may do it for fun, because they are curious, or to be like their friends. Some are experimenting with the feeling of intoxication.

### 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.
- Serious infections, such as HIV and hepatitis, can be spread by sharing needles or 'equipment'.
- 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.

### How do you know if your child is using drugs?

Occasional use can be very difficult to detect. If someone 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, silver foil.

Remember, none of these guarantees that your child is using drugs.

## What can parents do?

### In general

- Pay attention to what your child is doing, including school work, friends and leisure time.
- Learn about the effects of alcohol and drugs (see [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)).
- Listen to what your child says about alcohol and drugs and talk about it with them.
- Encourage your child to be informed and responsible about drugs and alcohol.
- Talk to other parents, friends or teachers about drugs – the facts and your fears.

### If your child is using

#### Do...

- make sure of your facts ([www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com))
- stay calm.

#### Don't...

- give up on them
- get into long debates or arguments when they are drunk, stoned or high
- blame them – you may lose their confidence.

## Where to get help

You can talk in confidence to your general practitioner or practice nurse. They can give

## Sources of further information

- NHS Direct can provide help and advice on any aspect of drug and alcohol use: Tel. 0845 4647; [www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk).
- NHS Smoking Helpline 0800 169 0169; [www.givingupsmoking.co.uk](http://www.givingupsmoking.co.uk).
- Talk to Frank is a free confidential drugs information and advice line. Tel. 0800 776600; e-mail: [frank@talktofrank.com](mailto:frank@talktofrank.com); [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com).

### Or you may like to look at these websites:

[www.addaction.org.uk](http://www.addaction.org.uk)  
[www.alcoholconcern.org.uk](http://www.alcoholconcern.org.uk)  
[www.alcoholics-anonymous.org](http://www.alcoholics-anonymous.org)  
[www.al-anonuk.org.uk](http://www.al-anonuk.org.uk)  
[www.thesite.org/drugs](http://www.thesite.org/drugs)  
[www.wrecked.co.uk](http://www.wrecked.co.uk)

- The *Mental Health and Growing Up* series contains 36 factsheets on a range of common mental health problems, including discipline, behavioural problems and conduct disorder, and stimulant medication. To order the pack, contact Book Sales at the Royal College of Psychiatrists, 17 Belgrave Square, London SW1X 8PG; tel. 020 7235 2351, ext. 146; fax 020 7245 1231; e-mail: [booksales@rcpsych.ac.uk](mailto:booksales@rcpsych.ac.uk), or you can download them from [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk).

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.

## References

- Carr, A. (ed.) (2000) *What Works with Children and Adolescents? A Critical Review of Psychological Interventions with Children, Adolescents and their Families*. London: Brunner-Routledge.
- Rutter, M. & Taylor, E. (eds) (2002) *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry* (4th edn). London: Blackwell.
- Scott, A., Shaw, M. & Joughin, C. (2001) *Finding the Evidence: A Gateway to the Literature in Child and Adolescent Mental Health* (2nd edn). London: Gaskell.