

Drug and substance misuse

"At first I thought it was just a teenage thing. Paul started to come home late, a row always started and he'd storm off to his room. He was losing weight, looked terrible and I felt he was lying to us. He just wanted to be out all the time."

- Many parents worry that their children may be smoking, drinking or using drugs
- Prevention is better than cure - don't let your children see you smoke, drink or take drugs - your example is crucial
- Smoking, drinking and drug use is on the increase among young people
- 1 in 12 twelve year olds and 1 in 3 fourteen year olds have tried drugs
- 1,000 children under the age of 15 are admitted to hospital each year with severe alcoholic poisoning
- Deaths associated with butane lighter refills accounted for 56% of all 'sniffing' deaths in 1998 (Department of Health)

How would I know?

If you find out that your child has or may have taken drugs, it can be frightening because of the potential effects. This can be due to your lack of knowledge about drugs and not feeling confident about talking about them. Most young people who experiment with drugs do not go on to use them on a permanent basis. Therefore addiction, crime and death are not as usual as the stories in the media can lead us to believe.

It is vitally important, however, that children are aware of the risks of using drugs, alcohol and volatile substances (e.g. solvents). More young people experience problems through excessive drinking than through drug use.

Drug use among young people - how widespread is it?

Drugs are more widespread among children and young people than ever before.

Research shows that about one in 12 twelve year olds and 1 in 3 fourteen year olds have tried drugs. By the time they reach sixteen years of age, 2 in every 5 young people will have tried one type of drug or a mixture of drugs. These figures apply across all ethnic groups, whilst drug use is increasing amongst girls.

It is important to discuss drugs use early. Some parents/carers worry that doing this encourages their child to use drugs. Avoiding talking about drugs will not protect them. Children will be aware of drugs in some way before they leave primary school. It is likely that at this early stage, children will be more responsive to being told about the risks of drug use. Make sure you tell your children about the risks. Accurate information and support will help them decide what to do. It does not guarantee non-use but will increase the chance of an informed choice.

Why do young people use drugs, abuse substances or drink alcohol?

They are curious about them, they want to break the rules, to relax, to escape reality, to cope with difficult situations or feelings, because they enjoy them, because their friends do it.

How would I know?

There are many telltale signs, which include a young person who is panicky, tense or drowsy, complaining of sickness, has impaired concentration, lack of energy, depression, skin problems or aggression.

There may be a change in relationships with family and friends, a change in behaviour, or a change in performance at school.

Other signs can involve changes in a financial situation and personal possessions 'disappearing' and being sold.

Drug, alcohol and substance misuse by parents

Drug, alcohol and substance misuse by adults in the household can seriously affect the care and well-being of children. Advice can be obtained from The Young Peoples Specialist Substance Misuse Service (FLUX) 01225 759945.

WARNING SIGNS

In general terms if your child's appearance, behaviour or financial situation changes dramatically you should include drug and alcohol use in your list of "I wonder if..." questions.

ACTION

Observe and talk to your child if you are worried. In an emergency contact an ambulance immediately. If your child is not in immediate danger talk with them about their drug use at another time when they are not using.

WHAT TO SAY

Use every opportunity to discuss drug use, for example, when drugs are mentioned in a television programme. You can give accurate information regarding the risks of drug use at an early age.

PREVENTION

Ensure that you are informed about drug use and the effects of different types of drugs. There are many helpful guides available from the helplines listed.

CONTACTS

- Alateen (Al-anon for young people)
020 7403 0888
- Alcohol Concern
020 7928 7377
- National Drugs Helpline - Frank (Drugs Info and Support)
0800 77 66 00
- NHS Smoking Helpline
0800 169 0169
- Young Peoples Specialist Substance Misuse Service (FLUX)
01225 759945

*Check the Wiltshire ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.wiltshire.gov.uk*