

Supporting a young person who is using or misusing substances

In general, most young people, especially those under 16, trust their parent/carer and will respond to any information and support you offer. However, as teenagers get older the culture gap may widen and communication may be more difficult. This does not mean you shouldn't try. Before you do talk to your child about drugs, make sure you have accurate, up-to-date information about different types of drugs and make the time to have the conversation – don't try to do it as they are going out with their friends or they may become hostile and resistant. There are lots of websites to find this information, but we would recommend Talk to Frank for the most up to date and relevant information.

Talking about drugs

It's important to stay calm and open-minded. Getting too intense will put pressure on your child, so encourage a relaxed conversation, starting with questions about the 'bigger picture'. Try to find out how things are going outside of home, with their friends, at school, etc. Make sure to ask questions that won't result in one-word answers; this way, the conversation will be much more likely to flow. Listen to what your child says and try to ensure a two-way conversation.

If you're sure there's a problem and your child refuses to talk to you, try not to panic. Although there are many stories in the media about drugs leading to addiction, crime and death, it is important to remember that:

- for most young people illegal drug taking is not a part of normal life
- most people who do try drugs do not continue using them
- whilst most people who use heroin started on cannabis; not all cannabis users will become heroin addicts
- lots of young people use drugs on a recreational basis and it does not become a problem for them

There are serious risks involved in drug use but most of those who try illegal drugs do not usually suffer any long-term harm to their health.

Remember that there are different reasons why people take drugs. For your child, it may be as simple as 'to have fun'. The drugs might make your child feel relaxed, sociable and full of energy, and this may be a phase that they are going through. It's important to explain that some drugs are illegal and can affect their physical and mental health, and to let them know that while you may not approve, they can always talk to you about any worries they may have.

Alternatively, your child may be using drugs to escape pressure at school or at home, or because they are having difficulty in coping with stressful situations. Again, it's important to talk calmly and get to the root of any problems so that you can find a way to work through these problems together and help them manage these situations without drugs.

Research shows that where young people do develop a problem with drugs, the involvement and support of parents and families can make a big difference to the person's health and their ability to deal with their drug habit.

Alcohol

Evidence shows meaningful conversations about alcohol between parents and their children can help the child develop a sensible relationship with drink. When you talk to your child about alcohol you don't have to cover everything at once. You're more likely to have a greater impact on your child's decisions about drinking if you have a number of chats. Think of it as part of an on-going conversation. Remember, use what you feel comfortable with and adapt the advice to your own parenting style.

Signs and Symptoms (this is not an exhaustive list)

- Erratic or changes in behaviour and demeanour
- Irregular sleep patterns – staying up all night and sleeping all day. Or not sleeping at all
- Restlessness and fidgeting
- Slow or slurred speech
- Extreme hyperactivity and talking for long periods of time about nothing in particular
- Total inactivity – not wanting to move or do anything at all
- Changes in eating habits – not eating at all, or eating lots at once
- Lack of personal hygiene
- Enlarged or very small pupils (this varies depending on which drug is used)

It's important to note that this is not an exhaustive list and these are not always signs of drug or alcohol use and could just be normal teenage behaviour.

Paraphernalia – equipment used to take drugs

- Hand rolled cigarettes with filters made from rolled up card (cannabis or NPS)
- Rolled up banknotes, paper or straws used for snorting
- Folded or burnt tin foil and/or spoons, syringes and needles
- Empty deodorant/butane gas/aerosol cans
- Small pieces of cling fill made into small bags, folder paper made into small envelopes, or re-sealable bags – these can all be used to store drugs
- Pipes, plastic bottles or cans which have been converted into pipes by making holes in or having been cut in half. Usually combined with foil or plastic bags

Where to get help

- Support for young people;

Catch 22

Tel: 0800 5999591.

Hampshire wide service (not Portsmouth and Southampton), working with young people under the age of 18.

- Support for parents/carers or anyone affected by someone else's drug use;

Parent Support Link

Tel: 023 8039 9764 (24/7 support and information)