

How to talk to
your child about

THE DANGERS OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL USE

Many young people go to festivals, gigs and house parties. As your child starts to get older and gains a little more freedom, you may be worried about them becoming exposed to drugs or alcohol.

You may not know why your child would want to try drugs or alcohol. Some young people do so because of peer pressure, out of curiosity or in reaction to feelings such as anxiety or stress.

These behaviours come with serious risks and consequences. As young people can be vulnerable at this transitional stage of life, it is important to give them a wealth of information so that they can then make informed choices.



A wide variety of DRUG AND ALCOHOL TYPES

There are a number of drugs and alcoholic drinks that a young person can be exposed to...

Drugs may include:

Cannabis (also known as 'weed' or 'marijuana') – this is one of the most widely abused drugs in the UK. Cannabis is usually smoked but it can also be cooked or baked in food

Ecstasy (also known as 'MDMA', or a 'club drug') – ecstasy is a stimulant that usually comes in pill form. The tablets can be brightly coloured or have small logos on them, which can make them look like sweets

Cocaine and crack cocaine (also known as 'coke' or 'crack') – cocaine is usually snorted as a powder whereas crack cocaine (the crystallised form of cocaine), is heated and smoked

Amphetamine (also known as 'speed') – this is a powerful stimulant that comes as a powder and usually looks like small crystals. Amphetamine can be smoked, snorted, injected, or dabbed onto the gums

Ketamine (also known as 'ket') – ket was originally created for pain relief during human and animal operations and can be highly addictive

New psychoactive and illicit substances (also known as 'legal highs') – new psychoactive substances are dangerous drugs usually made up of unknown chemicals. Illicit substances are easy to get hold of and can cause psychoactive effects when abused. One of the most common new psychoactive and illicit substances is a drug known as 'spice'

Prescription drugs such as painkillers (e.g. co-codamol), benzodiazepines (e.g. Valium) or stimulants (e.g. Ritalin) – these medications are usually prescribed by a doctor for a real medical reason (in both adults and young people), before they go on to be abused

Alcoholic drinks may include:

Spirits such as vodka, Sambuca, tequila, gin and rum

Wine (including champagne, prosecco and cava)

Beer (including lager and ales)

Ciders

Alcopops such as WKD and Smirnoff Ice

Young people may take a number of different drugs and drink lots of different types of alcohol at the same time, or may mix drugs and alcohol together – all of which can be extremely dangerous.



DISCUSSING DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

with your children

As a parent, you should talk openly and honestly with your child about the dangers of drug use and excessive drinking. Without this, your child may get incomplete or inaccurate information from their peers or other unreliable sources, meaning they won't be prepared to make sensible decisions. In addition, your own attitude towards alcohol and drugs is likely to influence their opinions and behaviour, so it's useful to set boundaries and expectations early on.

If the thought of sitting down with your child and talking about drugs and alcohol seems quite daunting, here are tips for how to discuss this issue:



Start the conversation early

Research shows that the earlier you talk to your child about the dangers of drug and alcohol use, the less likely they are to develop problems later on in life. Start having these conversations even before they become exposed to drugs or alcohol, which may be in the early years of secondary school. This means that they will know the facts before getting inaccurate information from their peers.

You may be concerned that the discussion could lead to your child becoming intrigued by drugs and alcohol, but there isn't any evidence to support this.

Keep them engaged

You may also be worried that the discussion could become uncomfortable, or may seem like a 'lecture' during which your child will lose interest. To make the discussions more comfortable, easier, and useful, make sure that you don't talk at your child; instead, talk with them. Make it clear that alcohol and drug use is a health issue, and your main concern is for their safety and wellbeing. Also invite your child to contribute to the discussion, and listen carefully to their opinions and views.

Set clear boundaries and expectations

Make it clear what is, and is not, acceptable in your family, explaining why you hold these views, and have a consistent message about the consequences if rules are broken. It is also crucial that you don't 'blur the boundaries', for example, by letting them have a sip of an alcoholic drink if you have set a strict 'no drinking' rule. If your child lives with another parent or caregiver for some of the time, these rules should be decided upon by all parents and caregivers, and be consistent between households.

Practise what you preach

Ensure that you act as a role model to your children and practise what you preach. Avoid taking drugs or drinking excessively if you don't want your child to. If you need to take tablets or prescription medication, do this in private and not in front of your child, and keep all medication in a safe and secure place.

Build trust and be open

It is important to build a two-way trusting relationship between you and your child. Invite them to ask questions on alcohol, drugs and the rules you have set, and answer them openly and honestly. Let your child know that you trust them and give them responsibility and ownership over their own actions. Also, let them know that if they ever did find themselves having problems, they should always come and speak to you, instead of struggling alone and potentially making things worse.

Talk about peer pressure and being able to say "no"

For young people growing up, their friends can be amongst the most influential people in their lives. This is why your child may need reminding that if they feel pressured into drinking or taking drugs by their peer group, then these people aren't acting like real friends. Let your child know that everyone has the right to say "no".

Parents and caregivers are often the most important role models in a child's life and play a crucial role in preventing drug or alcohol misuse. By starting the conversation at an early age, setting consistent expectations and boundaries, communicating a sense of trust, and practising what they preach, parents can make sure that their children are wary of the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.



Find out more

For further information on Young People's Services and alcohol and drug dependency, please visit the Priory website at www.priorygroup.com

