

An illustration featuring a spiral-bound notebook with a green cover and a red margin line on the left. To the right of the notebook is a set of keys with a circular fob. A red pencil with a pink eraser and a sharpened lead tip is positioned diagonally across the bottom right. The background is a light tan color with a subtle grid pattern.

addaction family

Know what you're talking about

A FAMILY GUIDE TO DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

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ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

The aim of this booklet is to give information about drugs to parents or anyone else who might have responsibility for children.

Addaction is the UK's biggest specialist drug and alcohol treatment charity. We work with many different people who have widely differing views on drugs. Consequently, we try very hard to remain impartial on the "rights" and "wrongs" of drug use. But we do provide accurate facts about drugs that can help people to make informed choices.

As a parent or carer, it's important for you not to feel guilty if you discover that your child is experimenting with drugs. Whether we like it or not, we live in a drug-using society, and it's likely that they'll encounter drugs at some point. But talking openly with your child about the issue can help them to stay safe, and this booklet – while not making you an expert – will certainly help you to become better informed.

Many people get their information about drugs from newspapers, magazines or television, and while much of

the information is accurate, some facts can often be exaggerated and sensationalised. Others can be omitted altogether in order to tell a good story. The information in this booklet should help you to sort out the fact from the fiction.

Having said this, drug issues are extremely complex, and presenting the full picture is impossible in a booklet this size. We've made sure that all the information is as accurate as possible, but we can't accept responsibility for any omissions, or any alleged consequences of following our advice.

Please contact us at the address below if you have any comments, or to let us know whether the booklet has been useful.

Addaction is a charity, and any donations – large or small, cash or in kind – are always gratefully received.

SOME ADVICE FOR EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

If you're worried your child has taken drugs and needs your help, the most important thing is not to panic. Many situations will only need you to give reassurance and support, and keeping a cool head is essential.

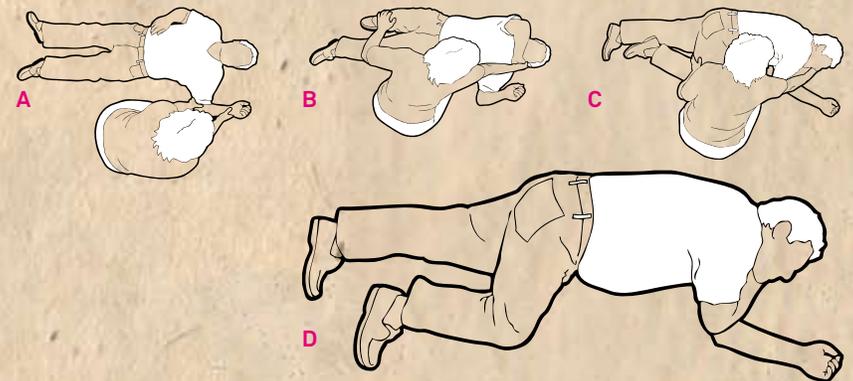
If your child looks agitated, anxious or tense...

- Calm them down by speaking quietly, and reassure them that everything is OK
- If you're surrounded by loud noises and bright lights, take them somewhere with a calmer atmosphere
- Get them to breathe slowly and deeply
- Rehydrate them by giving them small amounts of water – avoid coffee, tea or alcohol, which may make things worse

If your child is half asleep, or appears to be drunk...

- Don't be tempted to tuck them into bed lying on their back...as this would risk them choking on their own vomit. Instead get them to lie on a hard floor, put them into the recovery position, ensure their head is tilted back and their airway is open. In this position if they are sick the vomit will just drain away.
- If you're at all worried, call a doctor, or an ambulance if necessary
- If there's anything lying around which might be related to whatever they've taken, collect it up and give it to the doctor or paramedic team when they arrive

Recovery position



Learning first aid is easy. It only takes a few minutes to gain the skills that could make a difference. To find out more call 0844 871 8000 or visit redcross.org.uk/firstaid where you can see video clips of various first aid scenarios including how to treat an unconscious casualty.

WHAT ARE DRUGS?

It's a difficult question, but a basic definition would be a substance that changes the way that you think or feel.

This includes legally available drugs such as caffeine, alcohol and prescription medicines.

Taking drugs doesn't necessarily lead to problems. For example, while alcoholism is common, some people drink without ever becoming dependent. Smoking cigarettes represents a huge health risk, but some heavy smokers can live to an old age. Some people believe that taking cannabis has few risks, and even heroin – which often causes misery – can be used for years without causing harm.

But drugs can be dangerous. They can

cause physical or mental damage, and in some circumstances can lead to death. The social effects of drug use can be alarming, too: people who are dependent on drugs can lose interest in their families and other relationships, their studies or their work, and people often turn to crime in order to fund their habit. Alcohol and tobacco, while legally available to adults, can cause problems that are just as serious as any illegal drugs.

In short, a drug's effect depends on who is using it and how it's being used.

WHY DO PEOPLE USE DRUGS?

To cope

While some people take drugs with friends as part of a night out, it can also be a lonely, solitary experience that serves to blot out reality and help forget problems such as bullying, anxiety, family tensions or relationship issues. Drugs can provide a very short-lived boost to self-esteem that can become addictive. Increasingly, we also see young people succumbing to pressures to stay slim by using caffeine, tobacco and amphetamines.

For fun and relaxation

Just as drinking in a bar is a normal way for many adults to wind down, taking drugs at clubs, pubs or parties is perfectly normal behaviour for many people. Often, these people are familiar with the drugs in question, know their limits, and often have a well thought-out plan of what they will take and when. Many drugs are linked to fashion and music and are part of the culture surrounding these social scenes.

Experimenting

Many teenagers seek out excitement and thrills. With the increasing availability of drugs, young people will often be tempted to take them purely because they represent an unknown risk. But the majority will experiment for a short time before stopping altogether, without becoming addicted or suffering any serious harm.

For social approval

Among some groups of friends, there may be pressure to conform and take drugs – simply because everyone else is. For young adults who are in the process of carving out their own identity, taking

drugs can be not only something that helps them to fit in with new friends, but can also represent a rebellious gesture towards their family

Because some drugs are socially acceptable

Legally available drugs, such as caffeine, cigarettes and alcohol, are often portrayed in the media as being cool lifestyle choices, and many people simply start using them because they're depicted as a good way to wind down or to fit in. We're all affected by this to some extent, and younger people are particularly susceptible.

HOW EASY IS IT TO GET DRUGS?

Many young people will know someone who can get hold of drugs for them and who won't be some caricature of a shady drug pusher...

...It's more likely to be someone of their own age who is in the same social circle and goes to the same pubs and clubs. Most people who do drugs will also willingly do a favour for a friend and sell some of theirs. However, this is seen by the law as supplying drugs and is a far more serious offence than possession. Any young person who takes drugs should be made aware of this; purchasing drugs and then passing

them on – even if they're spending cash pooled by a group of friends – is a serious criminal offence.

Of course, some drugs are legally available, and not just tobacco and alcohol; aerosols, gases and solvents can be purchased on the high street, and while shopkeepers are supposed to refuse to sell these substances if they suspect they'll be used as drugs, many do so regardless.

Children may already have gained their first impressions of drugs by watching your own behaviour.



TALKING TO YOUR CHILD ABOUT DRUGS

If you haven't discussed drugs with your child before, don't worry that you're putting ideas into their heads; it's far better to give them straightforward, truthful information about drugs than allow them to be misinformed by their friends.

However, while those first discussions are important, children may already have gained their first impressions of drugs by watching your own behaviour. Your children may see you drinking alcohol, for example, and if so you should talk to them about it and explain what you do to keep yourself safe. If you smoke cigarettes, getting your children to help you give up can give them a powerful lesson about the dangers of addiction. Even if you use drugs yourself, or have done so in the past, an open and frank conversation with your children can prove invaluable.

When they reach their teenage years, it can be impossible for you to monitor their behaviour 24 hours a day, and so it'll be hard to stop them from using drugs if they decide to take them. But you can set limits on what you find acceptable, and help them

take responsibility for themselves by listening to their views and offering advice on how to limit the harm that drugs can cause. For example, pointers regarding alcohol would include:

- don't drink too much or too quickly
- alternate with non-alcoholic drinks
- don't start drinking early in the day
- don't drink alcohol every day
- keep count of how many drinks you've had, especially at parties
- don't mix your drinks, or mix alcohol with other drugs – particularly depressants; they can react with each other in unpredictable ways
- drink in safe places where the risk of danger is low
- always plan a way of getting home safely

Remaining calm when dealing with the subject of drugs is key. Anger and anxiety on either side can stop you from communicating clearly, and it's only through open discussion that you'll be able to help your child deal with the issues surrounding drugs.

As we outlined at the beginning of this booklet, remaining calm when dealing with the subject of drugs is key. Anger and anxiety on either side can stop you from communicating clearly, and it's only through open discussion that you'll be able to help your child deal with the issues surrounding drugs. While we would never suggest how best to communicate with your own child – we know that parenting styles vary enormously – there are a few tips you could consider:

- give them your undivided attention when the subject of drugs comes up

- listen to their opinions on drugs, even if they're different to your own
- try not to be provoked by emotional language or swearing
- ask them questions that encourage them to talk openly about drugs
- encourage them to think of solutions to their problems
- be honest: don't exaggerate or underplay the risks of drugs.

Refer to the section at the end of this booklet that looks at each drug in turn, and pass on accurate information to them.

DRUGS AND THEIR EFFECTS

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Alcohol

Young people are more likely to try alcohol than any other drug. Many under-18's in the UK have bought alcohol in a pub or an off licence, despite it being illegal.

Effects

Most of us are familiar with the effects of alcohol: starting with feeling more relaxed and less inhibited, followed by a lack of co-ordination and slurring of words. The effects of alcohol vary greatly from person to person depending on their body weight, whether they ate before drinking, and their tolerance to alcohol.

Problems

Each year, many children and young people are admitted to hospital with acute alcohol poisoning. And because alcohol affects your capacity to think straight, it can lead to accidents, disagreements and fights.

Amphetamines

Often known as 'speed', amphetamines are often used at clubs and parties as an energy booster. They're usually bought as a whitish powder that can be snorted or swallowed, but can also be swallowed in tablet form, or be injected – which is more dangerous.

Effects

Amphetamines can make you feel energetic and excited. It also acts as an appetite suppressant, so some people use it to help them lose weight.

The law

It's an offence to give alcohol to a child under the age of five, although children of any age can go into family areas or restaurants in pubs, as long as they're accompanied by an adult. When children are 14 they can go into pubs without an adult, but they can't be served alcohol until they're 18. The only exception to this is children over 16, who can buy and drink beer or cider if it's with a meal. (These laws vary slightly across the UK.)

However, it's rare for children under 18 to be prosecuted for attempting to buy alcohol. The penalties are harsher for the vendors, so the onus is on them to demand proof of age. It's also an offence to be drunk and disorderly in public, or to drive while under the influence of alcohol.

Problems

After-effects can include mood swings, difficulty sleeping and low energy levels. In the long term, depression and paranoia can set in. If the drugs are injected there are associated risks of HIV and hepatitis.

The law

Amphetamines are available by prescription only, and most are controlled as class B drugs. If they are prepared for injection they become class A. Maximum penalties for possession of the class B variety are 5 years imprisonment plus a fine, while supplying carries 14 years imprisonment and a fine.

Anabolic Steroids

Steroids go under a variety of brand names (including Nandrolone, Stanozolol and Dianabol) and can be prescribed by doctors for anaemia or thrombosis. However, we think of them more in terms of bodybuilding and improving athletic performance. They are usually taken in tablet form, but can also be injected.

Effects

Can boost levels of aggression, and can help you to recover quickly from strenuous exercise.

Cannabis

Cannabis is the most commonly-used illegal drug. It can either come in the form of resin, oil or herbs. There is also a powerful variety of cannabis which is commonly known as 'skunk'. Cannabis is most commonly rolled into a cigarette along with tobacco, but can also be brewed into a drink or put into food such as cakes and biscuits. Cannabis can also be smoked in a 'bong' – a pipe that cools cannabis smoke with water. 'Bongs' can be made from household items, such as plastic bottles.

Effects

Makes people feel relaxed, giggly and talkative, while stronger forms can lead to mild hallucinations.

Problems

It can lead to feelings of anxiety, paranoia and forgetfulness, and can also slow down reaction times and impair concentration, which in turn can lead to accidents,

Problems

They can stunt growth if taken by children, and can cause liver problems in people of any age. Regular use in women can cause increased body hair, a deepening of the voice and reduction in breast size – and these effects can be irreversible. Injecting the drug carries associated risks of HIV and hepatitis.

The law

Anabolic steroids are prescription only, and classified as class C drugs. It's not an offence to possess them for personal use, unless they are counterfeit (i.e. not prescribed by a doctor). It is an offence to supply them, however.

especially when driving. While there is no physical dependence, there can be a psychological dependence on cannabis. Furthermore, there is growing evidence to suggest a link between heavy use and mental health problems. The associated risks of smoking tobacco can also lead to lung damage and cannabis use can increase the user's heart rate.

The law

Many young people believe that possessing cannabis can be legal, but this is not the case. For a first offence of possession, a warning and confiscation are the most likely penalties. However, it's important to remember that if you are found guilty in court it does count as a criminal conviction, even if the penalty is just a small fine. This can bar people from future jobs, especially those in teaching. The maximum jail sentence for possession of cannabis is five years, with 14 years for supplying the drug.



Cocaine and Crack

Cocaine is bought as a white powder and is usually sniffed, but sometimes prepared for injection. Crack – a form of cocaine created by a process known as freebasing – is usually smoked, but again can be injected.

Effects

In the short term, it increases confidence, and gives you the urge to consume more of the drug to heighten its effects.

Problems

It's possible to become physically dependent on cocaine, and regular use can lead to weight loss, restlessness, anxiety and paranoia, along with depression and mood swings. The cost of sustaining the habit can lead to crime, while injecting carries associated risks of HIV and hepatitis.

The law

Cocaine and crack are both Class A drugs, and it's illegal to possess them or supply them to others. Maximum penalties for possession are 7 years imprisonment plus a fine, and life imprisonment plus a fine for supplying the drug.

Ecstasy

Popular on the clubbing scene, use of ecstasy is declining, but still widespread. It comes in tablet form, but these tablets rarely contain pure ecstasy, and generally contain a combination of drugs including LSD and amphetamines – in fact, some so-called ecstasy tablets contain none of the drug at all.

Effects

It's taken for its ability to boost energy levels. It can also give a feeling of being extremely happy and content, and being at one with people around you.

Problems

Some people can feel sick and experience stiff arms, legs and jaw after taking the drug. It's particularly dangerous for anyone with a heart condition, high blood pressure or those prone to epileptic fits. Drinking water or soft drinks after taking ecstasy is essential to rehydrate the body; the cause of the majority of deaths after taking the drug is dehydration and heat stroke. However, drinking too much fluid can also be dangerous. The long term effects are unclear, although some research has linked use of the drug to depression and cognitive deficits.

The law

Ecstasy is illegal to possess or to supply to others. Maximum penalties for possession are 7 years imprisonment plus a fine, and life imprisonment plus a fine for supplying.

Heroin

Heroin, along with other drugs known as opiates, derives from the opium poppy and usually come in the form of an off-white or brown powder. It can be smoked by placing the drug on foil and heating it – also known as “Chasing The Dragon” – or snorted, or prepared for injection.

Effects

Like morphine and other painkillers, heroin lessens physical and emotional pain, making people feel drowsily content and allowing them to forget their problems.

Problems

First time users are usually sick, while regular use can lead to dependence. Overdosing can lead to a coma or death. This is a real risk because street heroin is usually mixed or “cut” with substances like talc, making it difficult to know how powerful a dose is being taken. Withdrawal from heroin addiction can be extremely unpleasant. Injection carries associated risks of HIV and hepatitis.

The law

Heroin is illegal to possess or to supply to others. Maximum penalties for possession are 7 years imprisonment plus a fine, and life imprisonment plus a fine for supplying.

LSD

LSD usually comes on small squares of paper – often printed with small, simple designs – which are then swallowed. It can also be dropped onto sugar cubes, or come in tablet form. It takes between 30 and 40 minutes to have an effect, but a trip can last up to 12 hours. While it's perceived as a drug from the 1960s, it is still very much part of the drug scene in the UK.

Effects

Perception of shapes, colours and sounds can change. Time may appear to pass at different speeds. There's often a sense of experiencing great insights, and a heightened self-awareness.

Magic Mushrooms

Hallucinogenic 'magic' mushrooms grow wild during the autumn in many parts of the UK. The most common are the liberty cap and the fly agaric, although the latter is less popular as it can have unpleasant side-effects. They're usually eaten raw, but they can be dried and consumed later, cooked, or made into a tea.

Effects

The effects are similar to LSD, but usually milder – although it's difficult to predict how strong the effect of one dose will be.

Problems

If the user is already anxious, a "bad trip" can occur, where the hallucinations are unpleasant and frightening. The fact that the effects of LSD last a set amount of time and can't be immediately reversed means that these bad trips can be particularly scary. LSD makes it difficult to concentrate, so accidents can be a risk. There can also be short-lived "flashbacks" months later, where a trip is unexpectedly re-experienced.

The law

LSD is a class A drug under the Misuse of Drugs Act. It is not available for medical use and is illegal to possess or supply. Maximum penalties are 7 years imprisonment and a fine for possession and life imprisonment and a fine for supply.

Problems

There are the same risks of anxiety, paranoia and flashbacks as with LSD, but the greatest risk is eating the wrong kind of mushroom and being poisoned. Some, such as the Death Cap, can be fatal if consumed.

The law

Once legal to possess in an 'un-prepared form', mushrooms or any fungus containing psilocin have been classified as Class A drugs since 2005.

Poppers

Poppers is the term for a group of drugs known as nitrites, of which amyl nitrate is the best known. It's a clear yellow liquid which is inhaled; and is particularly popular amongst adult gay men. Poppers can be sold in sex shops, clubs and pubs.

Effects

The effects only last a few minutes, and consist of a "head rush", along with a quickened heartbeat as blood pressure is reduced.

Problems

They can make you feel sick and give you a headache. If you're engaged in vigorous physical activity, such as dancing, they

can make you lose consciousness. They can burn the skin, and drinking the liquid is extremely dangerous and can lead to death. Poppers are often used alongside other drugs; it's important to remember that any combination of drugs can have unpredictable effects.

The law

Most nitrites are not controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act, and possession and supply are not illegal. However, a recent decision by the Medicines Control Agency means that poppers could be classed as a medicine and thus come under the Medicines Act, because of their mood-altering effects.

Solvents

Between 70 and 100 people still die from sniffing solvents every year; these can include glues, paints, nail varnish removers, dry cleaning fluids, aerosols, petrol and cigarette lighter gas. They are either inhaled directly, from a rag soaked in the substance, or from inside a bag

Effects

Using solvents causes light-headedness and dizziness, and can be followed by sickness, drowsiness and headaches. The feeling is not dissimilar to being drunk, with a loss of co-ordination and disorientation common. Users can occasionally experience hallucinations. The effects usually last less than 45 minutes.

Problems

Disorientation leads to increased risk of accidents. As solvents can cause vomiting and fainting, there's also the chance of users choking on their own vomit. Some solvents put increased pressure on the heart, and in extreme cases can lead to heart failure. Long-term use has been associated with brain, kidney and liver damage.

The law

While possession of solvents and even their misuse is not illegal, it is an offence to supply solvents to someone under 18 if they have reasonable cause to believe that the substance, or its fumes, will be used as drugs. It's also an offence to supply butane lighter fuel to anyone under 18, regardless of the circumstances.

Tranquillisers

These are prescribed drugs (such as Valium) which end up on the streets either through theft or through over-prescription, with genuine users selling on their surplus tablets. As one in seven British adults take prescribed tranquillisers at some point during each year, there's a big potential for illegal use.

Effects

They are designed to relieve tension and anxiety. Higher doses can lead to drowsiness which in turn can cause accidents.

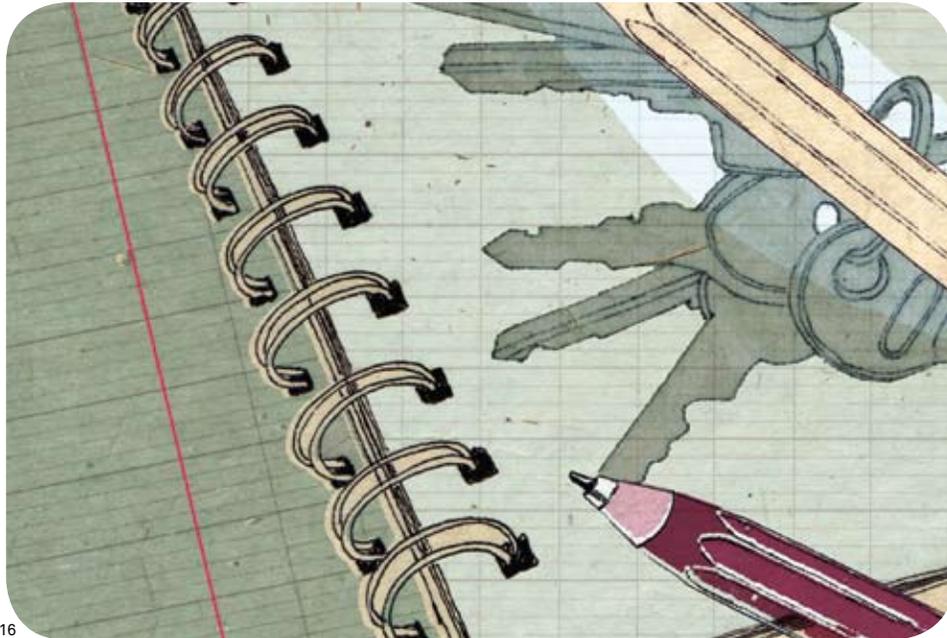
Problems

Regular use can lead to a dependence on tranquillisers, and also a greater tolerance

– i.e. a higher dose is needed to get the same effect. Sudden withdrawal can lead to anxiety, panic attacks, headaches and nausea. Large doses can lead to coma or death, especially when mixed with depressant drugs such as heroin or alcohol. Injecting can be very dangerous

The law

Tranquillisers are prescription only, and are controlled as class C drugs. Until recently, you could only be arrested for possession of Rohypnol and temazepam without a prescription, but this has now been extended to all minor tranquillisers if no prescription can be produced. Possession carries a maximum sentence of two years and an unlimited fine, while selling can bring fourteen years and a fine.



This publication is just one aspect of Addaction's work with young people and families. To find out more visit addaction.org.uk and if you're impressed support our £10m Campaign to make a difference.





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