**What are recreational drugs?**

Recreational drugs are substances young people may take:

* to give themselves a “high” or pleasurable experience
* to help them feel better about themselves or if they are finding life difficult
* because friends are using or because of peer pressure or because they want to “fit in”
* Curiosity or to see what it’s really like.

These can include tobacco (nicotine), substances such as cannabis, heroin, cocaine and other manufactured drugs such as ecstasy and some prescribed medicines.

Recreational drugs can be:

* legal – such as nicotine
* illegal – this means it’s against the law to possess or supply them to other people - most recreational drugs are illegal
* controlled – these are drugs used in medicine, it is legal to take controlled drugs but only if your doctor has prescribed these for you; if your GP or a specialist has not then it is illegal to possess, share or distribute controlled drugs to anyone.

There are a number of substances known as ‘legal highs’ which are now illegal

There are many other drugs not mentioned, however these are the ones that are most commonly used. There are many others – For up to date information about drugs, their effects and consequences please go to the following website for information on the A-Z of Drugs

**FRANK – for friendly confidential drugs advice**

**Website: – www.talktofrank.com**

**Helpline number: 0300 123 6600**

**SMS: 82111**

**Helpline email: frank@talktofrank.com**

**Are you worried about your Child and Drugs?**

Most young people, especially teenagers under 14, trust their parents and will respond to any information and support you can offer.  However, as teenagers get older the culture gap may widen and communication may be more difficult; however this doesn’t mean that as parents we shouldn’t still try to speak to them.  Before you do talk to your child about drugs, make sure you have accurate, up-to-date information about the different types of drugs (visit **www.talktofrank.com** [A-Z of drugs](http://www.talktofrank.com/drugs-a-z) or [FAQs](http://www.talktofrank.com/faqs)) and make the time to have a conversation (look at “how to start a difficult conversation” on the Uberheroes website [www.uberheroes.co.uk](http://www.uberheroes.co.uk) ) as this will offer ideas as to how you can prepare for the chat you want to have with your child.

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. Your questions should start with Why, What Where, When, Who, How or Which as this will usually offer some information that you can use to create you next question, don’t assume anything as this will stunt any conversation but listen intently to what your child is saying, as this will help you to have a two-way conversation.

If you’re sure there’s a problem and your child refuses to talk to you, don’t 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 don’t continue using them.

There are serious risks involved in drug use but most of those who try illegal drugs don’t usually suffer any long-term health problems.

Remember that there are different reasons why people take drugs. For your child, it may be as simple as, ‘to see if their missing out on having 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.

Drugs services, counselling services, and self-help groups offer support to your child at any stage, whether or not they are ready to change their behaviour.

Help is also available to you as a parent or carer. Websites such as Adfam, Community for Recovery and Family Lives provide advice for parents and carers. Netmums is a parenting website which provides opportunities for Mums and Dads to chat with other parents when you have questions or are facing a challenge.

**How can recreational drugs affect mental health?**

All drugs have some effect on your mental health and wellbeing as they’ll affect the way you think, feel and behave these effects may:

* be pleasant or unpleasant
* be short-lived or longer-lasting
* be similar to those you experience as part of a mental ill health problem
* go away once the drug has worn off
* continue once the drug has worn off

For some people, taking drugs will lead to long-term mental health problems, such as anxiety, stress, depression or more serious conditions such as schizophrenia or psychosis

You may already have a physical or mental health diagnosis, and feel that using illegal drugs helps you to cope, they don’t. They are only masking the problem and will eventually stop helping as your body stops responding, this can escalate into using stronger drugs as an alternative way to cope!

**How drugs may affect your child**

It is difficult to know how anyone will react to a drug. Your child may react differently to the same drug at different times or in different situations.

This may differ depending on:

* the type of drug
* whether the drug has been mixed with other substances, and what these other substances are
* the amount you take
* the environment or social situation in which you take it
* how often you take it
* your previous experience of it
* what you want and expect to happen
* your mental state at the time

If there is a history of poor mental health, they may be more likely to experience negative effects with illegal drugs.

If they have previously had no mental health problems, they may still develop symptoms of a mental health problem from using these drugs.

**Regular use**

If drugs are used a lot, or they become dependent on them, this can have a negative impact on their day-to-day lives. For example, it could lead to problems with:

* money
* education and employment
* relationships
* issues with parents
* low self-esteem
* finding it hard to maintain commitments, including appointments related to their drug use or mental health
* crime – either in possessing an illegal substance or to finance a habit, leading to a criminal record
* imprisonment

If they take drugs, remember:

• They don’t always know what is in them

• It can be difficult to predict how they will react

• They could contain additional harmful substances

• They may not contain any of the substance they are expecting

• Even if they have taken something before, it could have different ingredients or be a different dose.

This is more likely to be the case with illegal highs as most of these are synthetic substances created in a lab and not made from natural ingredients.

You need to identify why your teenager is doing drugs in the first place…

is it because they’re curious,

is it because they are going with the flow of the crowd they’re in

is it because they want to piss you off

is it because they want to rebel

is it to suppress negative emotions

Our focus as parents should be on the emotional reason/s as to why our teenagers are using drugs and not just the fact that drugs are being taken. We need to be talking about the challenges that they’re facing as we know many teenagers get into trouble with drugs simply because they’re having a hard time understanding life and feel that they don’t know where else to turn. As parents we need to focus on the drugs being a symptom of the issues, not the root cause, therefore we need to also treat the cause of the problem not just their effects.

**How can family & friends help?**

If there are severe problems, the reality may be that you’re limited as to the support you can give and influencing them on the benefits of encouraging them to change, that being said there are some things you can do that can be helpful.

**Encourage them to seek help**

This can be difficult, particularly if they or you on their behalf are seeking help for the first time.

or

They may be worried about being judged for their drug use, or concerned about what will happen if the drugs they use are illegal.

You can:

* reassure them that it is OK to seek help
* help them decide where to go for support

**Support them to use the available services**

You can:

* help them by explaining what services are available locally
* go with them if they would like you to (especially for the first visit or visits)
* encourage and support them to make the most of the services they are using

If the support offered is not helpful, or they are reluctant to attend, you may be asked to attend meetings with their support workers and doctors to help both you and them provide the most suitable care.

**Encourage them to carry on with treatment**

If your child is taking part in a drug treatment programme or receiving a talking treatment, you may be able to encourage them to:

* stick with their treatment plan
* attend all of their appointments
* meet any of the targets agreed

**Spend positive time with them**

It can greatly help your child if you:

* be there for them
* be honest with them
* listen to them when they want to talk – or being quiet with them
* spend time together, doing things they enjoy

**Remember to look after yourself**

When we are worried about our families we can very easily forget that it is hard to try to support someone whose problems are associated with their use of recreational drugs and that you are not there as a solution but as supporter and encourager.

You may find it helpful to discuss any feelings or concerns you may have with someone you trust, such as a counsellor, or with a support group or your local GP

**The law in relation to Drugs**

Most drugs come under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, which makes it illegal to possess certain drugs and to supply them to others. They are classified as class A, B or C, depending on the presumed risk of harm they may cause.

New synthetic versions of existing drugs (previously called ‘legal highs’) come under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016. These are chemicals made to mimic the effects of existing illegal drugs, for example cannabis or cocaine. The Psychoactive Substances Act, which came into effect in May 2016, makes it illegal to produce or supply these types of substances, or to possess them with the intention of supplying them.

The way street drugs are legally classified does not reflect how harmful they are to your mental ill health. Legal, illegal and controlled drugs can all have a negative impact, whichever Act of Parliament they come under and whatever class they are given.

For further advice and help go to the following sites:

#### DrugWise

[drugwise.org.uk](http://www.drugwise.org.uk/)  
Information about drugs.

#### Families Anonymous

0845 1200 660 (helpline)  
[famanon.org.uk](http://www.famanon.org.uk/)  
Self-help groups for families and friends of people with a drug problem.

#### Frank

0300 123 6600  
[talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com/)Comprehensive information about recreational drugs, and free 24-hour helpline.