

the facts on drugs

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ActNow NSW GOVERNMENT AND YOU
Taking a stand against drugs

young people and drug use


what are some of the dangers of drug use?

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Drugs are a community issue. Talking openly and honestly about drugs with your family, particularly your children, is one step you can take to prevent drug problems.

At some time in our lives our families or friends may be touched by drugs or crimes linked to them.

The more you know, the easier it is to talk with your children about drugs. It may also help you recognise and prevent drug use early on and to start finding solutions.

This booklet gives you general information about drugs and alcohol, ideas about how to discuss the issue as a family, cope with situations that may arise and where to turn for help.

how to approach drug issues with your family

What are drugs?

Drugs are substances that can change how the mind and body works by altering mood and affecting thinking and reflexes. All drugs, whether legal or illegal, have the potential to cause harm.

Illegal drugs include cannabis (marijuana, pot, weed), ecstasy (pills, E, eccy), amphetamines (speed, ice), LSD (acid, trips), ketamine (Special K), GHB (liquid E, GBH, fantasy), cocaine and heroin.

It's important to remember that **legal drugs** like alcohol, tobacco, medications and caffeine (for instance 'energy drinks' and caffeine tablets) are potentially harmful. Tobacco, for instance, is a legal drug that it is very harmful with no safe level of use.

There are **restrictions** on legal drugs that can make their sale or use illegal. It is illegal to sell or supply alcohol to under-18s.

While **medicines** are designed to be beneficial, misusing them or giving them to other people can be very dangerous. It's important to be well informed about over-the-counter and prescription medicines, understand the side effects and know why it's important to take the right doses.

the facts on drugs

what are drugs > how dangerous are drugs > why do people use drugs

what can you do to help your children > what are the signs & symptoms of drug use > what to do in an emergency

young people and drug use

People of all ages and backgrounds take drugs for many reasons: to feel as though they fit into a group, to help them relax, to have fun, to cope with stress, boredom, sadness or changes in their life, or to try out the effects.

Most young people will not use illegal drugs, however some will experiment. It's important to remember that although experimentation may not be acceptable, and wherever possible prevented, it does not necessarily lead to the long-term use of drugs.

Drug problems are sometimes part of a much larger problem, like not fitting in at school, difficulties at home or not knowing how to approach people they're attracted to.

If you think your child is using drugs, it's important not to panic. Think about why your child may want to use drugs, talk with them about it and look for solutions. If you are worried, don't hesitate in getting professional help (see page 14 for contact details).

Cannabis is the most commonly used illicit drug in Australia. 28 per cent of 14 to 19 year olds have used cannabis at least once*.

*Source: 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

Where do young people learn about drugs?

Young people learn about drugs from many places, mostly from their friends and family, the media and at school.

Schools teach drug education as part of the subject Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE). School drug education focuses on tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and analgesics (painkillers), as these are the drugs research shows are most likely to be misused by young people.

Contact your child's school to find out more about drug education or go to www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yrk12focusareas/druged/prosupport.php

Parents have a strong influence on their children. Learn the facts about drugs and talk openly and honestly with your children. Also listen carefully to what they tell you. Be aware that the way you use drugs – such as medicines, cigarettes and alcohol – may have an influence on the decisions your children make about how and when to use drugs.

Other illicit drugs are less commonly used. 6 per cent of 14 to 19 years olds have used ecstasy and 6.5 percent of 14 to 19 years olds have used amphetamines at least once*.

*Source: 2004 National Drug Strategy Household Survey

what are some of the dangers of drug use?

Regardless of the drug, there are many potential problems related to drug use, for instance:

- health problems including heart and breathing problems
- physical harm from accidents
- reduced physical fitness and sports performance
- legal problems and involvement in crime
- problems with school and work
- family and relationship problems, and
- overdose.

Injecting drugs can also spread viruses, like Hepatitis B and C and HIV/AIDS.

The younger a person starts using drugs and/or alcohol the more likely they are to develop problems in the future.

And the more often and longer a person uses drugs, the more chance they have of becoming dependent (addicted).

Illegal drugs are often mixed with other substances so a person can never be sure what's in the drug, how strong it is or how it may affect them.

Mixing drugs with alcohol or another drug is very dangerous. One drug can make the negative effects of the other even worse. Most people who get sick or die from using drugs often have more than one drug in their body at the time.

When a person uses drugs, their reflexes and their ability to make clear decisions are affected. This means it's easier to have an accident (such as drowning, falling), or do something they later regret, such as having unsafe sex.

Drug use, alcohol and driving

Many people **mistakenly** believe that using cannabis or other drugs and driving is less risky than driving under the influence of alcohol.

Evidence indicates that both drugs and alcohol affect a driver's decision-making and ability to respond. Drugs and alcohol can change the way a person feels and increase confidence. A person may underestimate dangers and think they're driving well when they're not.

It's illegal to drive under the influence of drugs and/or over the legal alcohol limit.

In NSW the legal alcohol limit is:

- **0.05** for **fully licensed** drivers
- **0.00** for **L- and P-plate** drivers. New laws introduced in 2004 make it illegal for L- or P-plate drivers to drink **any** alcohol and drive.

If you drink heavily the night before, you could still be over the limit the next day.

It's also dangerous to be a passenger in a car when the driver is affected by drugs or alcohol.

About one in five fatal accidents involve alcohol.

What about drugs and mental health?

Research suggests the use of some drugs may contribute to, or trigger, mental health problems in some people. The most commonly reported mental illnesses linked to drug use are anxiety and depression. There are also some reports of psychotic illnesses (such as schizophrenia).

If you are concerned about drug use and mental health, please talk with a doctor about this issue.

how can I protect my children?

Parents can be a strong positive influence on their children. There is no way to guarantee that your children will never experiment with drugs but having a good relationship and talking openly can reduce the chances of them getting into trouble.

Be part of their lives

Spend time with them, take an interest in their interests, eat a meal together every day and do other things together often. Get to know your child's friends.

Be honest

Learn the facts about alcohol and other drugs, but don't pretend to know everything. Be prepared to say 'I don't know, but I will try to find out'. If you are honest with your children it will be easier for them to be honest with you.

Be a role model

Young people can get their opinions about drug use from you. If you drink alcohol or take medicines, do so within safe and sensible limits. Be prepared to discuss this honestly with your children.

Set clear boundaries

Talk with your kids to set rules about what sort of behaviour is okay, and what is not. Be consistent and make sure your teenager knows what will happen if they break the rules.

Listen to your children

Talk and listen to your children. Ask their opinion about things. Listen to them, and they are more likely to listen to you.

Be calm

It is important to be calm and rational when you talk about difficult things. Getting angry will make it harder to talk about difficult topics in future.

Keep on talking

Once you've talked about drugs or other difficult issues, it is important to talk about them again later. This makes it easier for your child to come to you if they have a problem.

“When we found out our son was smoking pot and taking ecstasy my husband and I used to argue about what to do. He wanted to force change by giving him an ultimatum to stop. He said I was too soft. We talked about it and realised we both had to compromise on how we wanted to deal with it, and support each other. It's been much easier now we know we can rely on each other's support.”

Focus on the positive

Reward your child's good behaviour and emphasise the things they do well. Make sure your son or daughter knows you love them and will always try to be on their side, even if you don't always agree with their behaviour.

Try to be united

If possible, try to make sure that you and your partner – or any other adults with influence on your child – are united in your approach to any problems that arise. Agree on your approach before you talk to your child and make sure your messages are the same.

Call the Parent Line for help

It can be very challenging for a parent to talk to their child about many issues, including drugs. For advice about how to talk to young people about drug use – or other parenting issues – call the **Parent Line toll-free on **13 20 55**.**

Experienced counsellors can talk with you over the phone, send you information and link you with other helpful services. Parent Line operates 9am to 4.30pm Monday to Saturday.

young people and alcohol use

Alcohol and tobacco are the drugs young people are most likely to come in contact with, especially as they get older and start going to parties.

Young people are more likely to misuse alcohol than illegal drugs, in particular by drinking too much alcohol in a short period (binge drinking).

According to a recently released national survey* of school students 19% of 12-year-olds and 50% of 17-year-olds had consumed alcohol in the week prior to the survey. Of these, 44% of 17-year-olds had consumed alcohol at high levels (drinking seven or more drinks in one day for males and five or more drinks in one day for females).

Family members, including parents and older siblings, are the most common source of alcohol for young people. The three main places for students to drink are the family home, a friend's home or a party.

For advice about hosting teenage parties refer to the NSW Police website: www.police.nsw.gov.au/community_issues/safe_party_strategy

*Source: Australian secondary school students' use of alcohol in 2002

In NSW it is illegal to supply alcohol to anyone under the age of 18. This includes homes, halls and public places generally. The law also makes it illegal for minors to drink alcohol in licensed venues and unlicensed restaurants. Fines of up to \$5,500 apply for illegal supply of alcohol.

However, the law provides a defence to a prosecution if it is established that the minor's parent or guardian supplied the alcohol to their child or consented to the supply by others, except if the supply takes place on licensed premises.

how well informed are you?

Drug information

Most people are not well informed about illegal drugs. This information is designed to help you discuss drugs with your children. There are many types of illegal drugs however young people are most likely to try or come in contact with cannabis, ecstasy and amphetamines.

Cannabis

Common names: *Pot, marijuana, dope, grass, ganja, weed, yamdi.*

Appearance: Cannabis can be bought as dried flowers ('heads'), leaves, stalks and seeds. Cannabis is usually mixed with tobacco and smoked in cigarettes ('joints') or water pipes ('bongs'). Cannabis can also be baked in cakes or biscuits.

Some people report that using cannabis makes them feel relaxed and happy.

Effects: Reddened eyes, increased appetite, talk and laugh more than usual, dryness of the mouth, reduced coordination/concentration and sleepiness.

Potential consequences of regular use:

Mood swings, dependency, memory impairment, weight gain, reduced motivation and apathy, delusions, hallucinations, suspicion of others, depression and other mental health problems, especially for those with pre-existing conditions.

Potential longer term consequences:

Cannabis contains more of the cancer causing agents than are found in tobacco, so smoking cannabis puts people at increased risk of cancer of the lung, mouth, throat and tongue. Other potential longer term consequences include panic attacks, anxiety, reduced sex drive, depression and other mental health problems.

How do drugs affect people?

A drug's effect depends on things like:

- how much is taken
- a person's size, weight and overall health
- whether they've had it before
- where they are at the time (e.g. alone or with friends, at home or at a party), and
- the drug itself.

how well informed are you?

Drug information

Ecstasy

Common names: MDMA, pills, E, eccy.

Appearance: Usually sold as small tablets in a variety of colours and sizes. Often the tablets are pressed with a 'logo' on them.

When a person takes a small amount of ecstasy, the effects can start within an hour and last up to about six hours, particularly in those who have not taken the drug before. In some cases these effects may last for longer periods. Users report feeling 'a rush' followed, by a sense of calm and euphoria, increased confidence and energy.

Effects: Jaw clenching, teeth grinding, nausea, headaches, sweating, overheating, dehydration, muscle aches, anxiety, excitability, dilated pupils, loss

of appetite, moodiness, increased heart rate, death from heart failure (in rare cases).

Potential consequences of regular use: Weight loss, sleep problems, dehydration, irrational behaviour, anxiety, hallucinations, decreased emotional control, lethargy, depression, nerve cell damage.

People who make ecstasy often mix or 'cut' the substance with other things to make the drug go further. Some substances in the tablet or powder can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It can often be difficult to tell what the drug actually contains and how it's going to affect a person.

Amphetamines

Common names: Speed, goey, whizz, ice, crystal, meth, shabu.

Appearance: Speed usually comes in the form of white or yellow powder, and people either sniff it through the nose ('snort' it) or inject it. It can also be swallowed, in the form of tablets or capsules. Recently a more pure, crystalline form of amphetamine has become more widely available in Australia. This can often look like small ice crystals or shards of glass. This is usually inhaled by smoking.

People who sell speed often mix or 'cut' the powder with other things that look the same, to make the drug go further. Some mixed-in substances can have unpleasant or harmful effects. It is difficult to tell what the drug actually contains.

Speed is a stimulant. It keeps people awake and reportedly makes them feel energised and excited.

Effects: Feelings of self confidence, increased pulse rate, teeth grinding, excitability, sweating, dry mouth and lips, dilated pupils, decreased appetite, mood swings and insomnia.

Potential consequences of regular use: Weight loss, headaches, sleep problems, paranoia, panic attacks, anxiety, nervousness, decreased emotional control, depression, violent and aggressive behaviour, dependency, nerve cell damage, death from heart failure.

Where can I learn more about drugs?

Call the **Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)** on telephone **(02) 9361 8000** (within Sydney) or toll-free on **1800 422 599**.

ADIS is a confidential 24-hour phone service. Qualified counsellors are trained to help you work through problems, offer advice and information or tell you about specific alcohol and drug services in your area that may be able to help.

Visit your local public library. The **Drug Information @ Your Local Library (di@yll)**, managed by the Health Information Service at the State Library of NSW, provides a broad range of up-to-date accredited information about drugs and alcohol.

You can:

- visit the website <http://diayll.sl.nsw.gov.au>
- visit your local public library for a range of books and pamphlets
- ask library staff for assistance.

Or, the following websites: www.druginfo.nsw.gov.au and www.alcoholinfo.nsw.gov.au

These websites are managed by the NSW Government and include information about drugs and alcohol and services to help.

what if someone I care about is using drugs?

Discovering that a child or family member has tried or is using drugs can be very upsetting. Families, especially parents, often blame themselves. They ask questions like 'Is it my fault?' or 'Where did I go wrong?'

If your child, friend or relative is using drugs, it is important not to look for someone to blame - especially yourself. Instead, get some information and support. There is no shame in talking about drug use in your family.

Don't be afraid to ask for help: drug problems are difficult to deal with on your own. There are many places that help both the person using drugs and their family or friends.

If you think you or another family member has a drug problem, the first step is to talk to a counsellor or health worker. This person will give you private, confidential advice and refer you to a drug service that is right for you.

Places that can help you

Help for families and people using drugs

■ Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)

(02) 9361 8000 (within Sydney) or toll-free on 1800 422 599

A confidential 24-hour phone service. Qualified counsellors are trained to help you work through problems, offer advice and information or tell you about specific alcohol and drug services in your area that may be able to help.

■ Family Drug Support

(02) 9818 6166 or 1300 368 186

A 24-hour information, help and referral service especially for families, which also has self-help groups for family members of drug users across NSW. More details available on their web site, www.fds.org.au.

■ Kids Help Line

Toll-free 1800 55 1800

A 24-hour counselling and support line especially for children and young people. More details available on their web site, www.kidshelp.com.au. An email counselling service is also offered.

■ Talk to a doctor.

- Check the front of your local telephone book for **alcohol or drug counselling or treatment services**.

■ Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA)

– check your local telephone book for a group near you.

“ My son started using drugs a few years ago. For a long time I didn't ask anyone for help. I was even too scared to ask my doctor for help. Eventually, when my son's problem got even worse, I rang a telephone line for help. They told me about support meetings and, very scared, I went along. The people there understood so clearly, I wish I'd gone earlier. Getting help and support is far more important to me than what anyone else thinks. ”

For private advice and information about alcohol and other drug issues call the **NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service** on (02) 9361 8000 (within Sydney) or 1800 422 599 from outside Sydney. This is a 24-hour service.

If you need an interpreter please ring the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS)** on 131 450 and ask to be connected to the **NSW Alcohol and Drug Information Service**.

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Arabic

للحصول على مشورة ومعلومات على انفراد عن مسائل الكحول والمخدرات اتصل بخدمة معلومات الكحول والمخدرات في نيو ساوث ويلز (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) على الرقم 8000 9361 (02) (داخل سيدني) أو 1800 422 599 من خارج سيدني. هذه الخدمة على مدار الساعة.

إذا احتجت لمتروجم شفهي يُرجى الاتصال بخدمة الترجمة الخطية والشفوية (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS) على الرقم 131 450 وطلب وصل مكالمتك بخدمة معلومات الكحول والمخدرات في نيو ساوث ويلز.

Chinese

NSW戒酒戒毒服務中心 (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) 能為您單獨提供有關戒酒和戒毒的信息和指導。請致電 (02) 9361 8000 (悉尼地區) 或1800 422 599 (悉尼以外地區) 獲得全天24小時的服務。

如果您需要傳譯員，請致電翻譯及傳譯服務處 (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS)，電話131 450，讓他們為您接通 NSW戒酒戒毒服務中心。

Greek

Για προσωπικές συμβουλές και πληροφορίες σχετικά με αλκοόλ και άλλα θέματα ναρκωτικών καλέστε την Υπηρεσία Πληροφοριών Αλκοόλ & Ναρκωτικών Νέας Νοτίου Ουαλίας (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) στο (02) 9361 8000 (εντός του Σίδνεϊ) ή 1800 422 599 από περιοχές εκτός του Σίδνεϊ. Αυτή είναι μια 24ωρη υπηρεσία.

Αν χρειάζεστε διερμηνέα, παρακαλείσθε να τηλεφωνήσετε στη Μεταφραστική και Διερμηνευτική Υπηρεσία (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS) στο 131 450 και να ζητήσετε να συνδεθείτε με την Υπηρεσία Πληροφοριών Αλκοόλ & Ναρκωτικών Νέας Νοτίου Ουαλίας.

the facts on drugs

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Italian

Per informazioni e consigli riservati in merito a problematiche legate all'alcol e altre droghe, chiamate il Servizio Informazioni su Alcol e Droga del NSW (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) al numero (02) 9361 8000 (per chi chiama da Sydney) o 1800 422 599 per chi chiama da fuori Sydney. Si tratta di un servizio 24 ore su 24. Se vi serve un interprete, chiamate il Servizio traduzioni e interpreti (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS) al numero 131 450 e chiedete di essere messi in contatto con il Servizio Informazioni su Alcol e Droga del NSW.

Spanish

Para obtener asesoramiento e información privados sobre temas relacionados con el alcohol y otras drogas, llame al Servicio de Información sobre Alcohol y Drogas de Nueva Gales del Sur (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) al (02) 9361 8000 (en Sydney) o al 1800 422 599 desde lugares fuera de Sydney. El servicio atiende las 24 horas.

Si necesita un intérprete, llame al Servicio de Traducción e Interpretación (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS) al 131 450 y pida que lo conecten con el Servicio de Información sobre Alcohol y Drogas de Nueva Gales del Sur.

Vietnamese

Muốn được hướng dẫn kín đáo và biết chi tiết về vấn đề rượu và các ma túy khác, xin gọi Dịch Vụ Thông Tin về Rượu & Ma Túy NSW (NSW Alcohol & Drug Information Service) điện thoại số (02) 9361 8000 (ở Sydney) hay 1800 422 599 ở ngoài Sydney. Dịch vụ này hoạt động 24/24.

Nếu cần thông dịch viên, xin điện thoại Dịch Vụ Thông Phiên Dịch (Translating and Interpreting Service - TIS) số 131 450 và nhờ gọi cho Dịch Vụ Thông Tin về Rượu và Ma Túy NSW.