

Drug and alcohol misuse

"At first I thought it was just a teenage thing. Paul started to come home late. A row always started and he'd storm off to his room. He was losing weight, looked terrible and I felt he was lying to us. He just wanted to be out all the time"

- Many parents worry that their child may use alcohol or drugs
- Make sure you know about drugs and alcohol and their possible effects
- Talk to your children about drugs and alcohol from a young age
- Middlesbrough and Redcar & Cleveland schools teach drug and alcohol education in Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)
- FRANK offers advice or information to young people and their parents or carers on alcohol and drugs
- Some parents use drugs and alcohol themselves and need to seek help - contact the Addictive Behaviours Service

how would I know?

Finding out that your child has been using alcohol or drugs, can be frightening - possibly due to your own lack of knowledge or lack of confidence about discussing the issues. It is natural for young people to experiment but many will only try a substance once. Most young people don't go on to have a problem - addiction, crime and death are not as common as the media make us think. More young people have problems with alcohol than with drugs.

It is vitally important that children are aware of the risks of alcohol, drugs and solvents and can make informed choices.

Drug and Alcohol use among young people - how widespread is it?

Research shows that by the age of 16 years, two in every five young people will have tried at least one type of drug. In 2002, 18% of 11-15 year olds drank alcohol at least once a week. In 2000 around 40% of 13-14 year olds were 'drunk or stoned' when they first experienced sexual intercourse.

It is important to discuss alcohol and drugs early - this will not encourage children to use alcohol or drugs - avoiding talking about it will not protect them.

When talking to young people it is important to:

- Talk about attitudes and values in relation to drug and alcohol use - this means exploring your own views about what is acceptable.
- Tell them about the risks involved - accurate information and support will help them to decide what to do.
- Discuss drugs in the wider context of their use as medicines and legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco.

Why do people use alcohol and drugs?

Curiosity, wanting to break the rules, relaxing, escaping reality, coping with difficult situations or feelings, because they enjoy the effects or their friends do it.

How would I know?

Signs possibly linked with using alcohol or drugs are:

- Seeming panicky, tense or drowsy
- Complaining of sickness, lack of energy, skin problems, lacking concentration or seeming depressed
- Changes in relationships with family and friends, behaviour and/or performance at school/work; financial situation or personal possessions 'disappearing' or being sold.

WARNING SIGNS

In general terms if your child's appearance, behaviour or financial situation changes dramatically you should include drug and alcohol use in your list of "I wonder if..." questions.

Remember that in young people these signs are easy to misinterpret and are often simply 'typical' adolescent behaviour. So don't jump to conclusions - try to make sure that your child feels able to talk openly with you - this is their best protection.

Drug and alcohol use by parents

Problematic use of alcohol/drugs by parents/ carers can seriously affect the care and wellbeing of their children. It is estimated that 2-3% of all children under 16 years of age is affected in this way. Many parents need specialist support and treatment to enable them to continue to care for their children properly.

ACTION

Observe and talk to your child if you are worried. In an emergency contact an ambulance immediately. If your child is not in immediate danger, talk with them about their substance use at another time when they are not using.

WHAT TO SAY

Use every opportunity to discuss alcohol and drug use, for example, when drugs are mentioned in a television programme. You can give accurate information regarding the risks of substance use at an early age.

PREVENTION

Ensure that you are informed about alcohol and drug use and the effects of different types of drugs. There are many helpful guides available from the helplines listed below.

CONTACTS

- *FRANK (information and advice on drugs)
0800 77 66 00*
- *Eclipse Middlesbrough Young Person's Service (alcohol & drugs)
01642 354112*
- *Lifeline Middlesbrough (adults, drugs)
01642 225479*
- *On Track Redcar and Cleveland (adults alcohol and drugs)
01642 516716*
- *Addictive Behaviours Service Middlesbrough (adults, alcohol & drugs)
01642 516351*
- *Make a Change (young people, alcohol & drugs)
01642 317293*
- *Albert Centre (adults, alcohol & drugs)
01642 221484*

*Check the South Tees ACPC website for the latest phone numbers:
www.redcar-cleveland.gov.uk*