

Talking with your child about drugs: 10 top tips



Evidence shows that talking about drugs with your children can protect them from harm. The **10 tips** in this guide will help get you started.

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Re-Solv supports the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)



Why do young people use drugs?

Some young people experiment with drugs because they're bored or because they want to find out what it feels like. Drugs make some people feel good – they enjoy the sense of altered perception or they feel more confident. For others, drugs provide a means of escape from stress or other problems in their lives. And for young people whose friends take drugs, it can be difficult not to feel it's the norm and something they should do too in order to 'fit in'.



Help & Information

Re-Solv

Re-Solv is here to help anyone whose life is affected by solvents and gases – including nitrous oxide. Call **01785 810762**, text **07496 959930** or find help online at re-solv.org.



Call the Know the Score Drugs Helpline on **0800 587 5879** for free, confidential drugs information and advice from 8am to 11pm, 7-days a week. You can also live chat at knowthescore.info.

FRANK

At talktofrank.com you can search for factual information about drugs and access confidential advice on 0300 123 6600, text 82111.



See Me is Scotland's programme to tackle mental health stigma and discrimination. Call **0141 5301111** or visit www.seemescotland.org.

YOUNGMINDS

National mental health charity, Young Minds, have a free parent helpline on **0808 802 5544**. You can also find guidance on how to access your local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) at youngminds.org.uk/CAMHS.

childline

ONLINE, ON THE PHONE, ANYTIME

Childline provides free, confidential advice for young people on **0800 1111** and at childline.org.uk.

What can I do? The 10 tips

- 1 The earlier you start talking, the better**
You want the conversation to be ongoing. From the age of 7, children will start learning in school about dealing with different types of risky situations. So it will help them if these kinds of issues are also discussed at home.
- 2 Don't assume that you've 'had the talk'**
An NHS survey showed that 75% of parents of 11-16 year olds thought they'd had a conversation about drugs with their child, but only 36% of 11-17 year olds said they remembered such a conversation.
- 3 Choose your moment**
Don't start a conversation when your child is running out of the door or going to bed. A family meal can be a good time, or perhaps a walk or drive where there's time to talk. Sometimes being side-by-side, rather than face-to-face, can feel less confrontational.
- 4 Use opportunities as they arise**
You could use adverts, news or soap stories to spark the topic. Or you could ask what your child has learned about drugs at school or college. Try not to start with questions about their behaviour, or what they have been up to when you're not around! You want them to talk honestly, not just to tell you what they think you want to hear.
- 5 Listen**
Ask open questions (rather than questions that lead to a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer) and listen to your child's answers. Listening can be the most helpful thing you do.
- 6 Provide the facts**
Make sure you've done your homework and have a reasonable basic knowledge about drugs (see the information overleaf).
- 7 Avoid scare tactics**
Evidence suggests scare tactics don't work. Teenagers may know more people who take drugs than you do, so they will judge what you say by what they have seen.



Instead, be frank about your own reasons why you'd rather they didn't take drugs. Good reasons not to take drugs might include:

- You want your child to avoid drugs. Your values and attitudes count with your child, even though s/he may not always show it.
- Drugs can be dangerous or lead people to do things they wouldn't otherwise choose to do.
- Many drugs are illegal and getting a criminal record will limit life choices.

Agree on rules and boundaries together, be consistent, and reward children for sticking to them.

8 Think about peer pressure

Help your child come up with ways to deal with situations where they may feel pressured into taking drugs. Most young people don't use drugs so make sure your child knows that it's not the norm to take drugs and that it's okay to say no.

Know your children's friends. You may find that other parents in your children's friendship group share your concerns, so you could agree together on rules around parties and supervision.

9 Don't panic

If your child has tried drugs, don't panic! They're not the first and they won't be the last. Try to stay calm and find a good time for discussion – not when they're high from using drugs. Try to show love and concern rather than anger.

10 Persevere!

It may not always be easy. If your child argues or becomes angry, don't worry. This is an ongoing discussion and you can always revisit the conversation at another, calmer time.



Remember!

Remember, this is all about helping your child stay safe. Sometimes a quick text message to show you're thinking of them can be the most effective reminder that you care.

Alcohol

The Facts

Alcoholic drinks, such as beer, wine and spirits are the most commonly used drugs in the UK. The scientific name for the alcohol in these drinks is ethanol or ethyl alcohol.

The UK Chief Medical Officers advise that drinking, even at 15 or older, can be hazardous to health. Not drinking is the healthiest option for young people.

Legal or illegal?

It is illegal to sell alcohol to under-18s or buy alcohol on behalf of someone under the age of 18 – unless you are buying a child over 16 beer, wine or cider during a meal together in licensed premises. It is not illegal for children aged 5-16 to drink alcohol at home or on other private premises.

Risks

Alcohol contributes to many health and crime related problems in the UK. For young people, the immediate risks are likely to be around binge drinking, putting themselves in risky situations where accidents might happen and doing things they wouldn't choose to do if sober.

Why might my child use it?

Alcohol is easily accessible and seen as socially acceptable. Young people may well find themselves under peer pressure to drink. Some alcopop brands in particular may appeal to a younger drinker.

Other Drugs

The drugs listed here are those most commonly used by young people. However young adults may experiment with stimulants such as cocaine ('coke') or so-called 'club-drugs' such as MDMA ('ecstasy' or 'E').

An increase has also been seen in the use of ketamine among 16-24 year-olds. For more information about these and all other drugs, visit the free national advice service, Know the Score at knowthescore.info.

Cannabis

The Facts

Also known as 'bud', 'skunk', 'hash', 'weed', 'pot' and more, cannabis is the most commonly used drug among 14-15 year-olds.

Made from parts of the cannabis plant, the main psychoactive ingredient in cannabis is tetrahydrocannabinol (THC).

Cannabis is purchased in three forms: dried leaves and buds (marijuana), pieces of resin varying from black to light brown in colour (hashish), or a thick, dark oil. Cannabis is smoked in roll-ups or pipes, but can also be eaten in food.

Legal or illegal?

Cannabis is a Class B drug. This means it is controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act and is illegal to sell, supply or possess. Possession of a Class B drug can carry a penalty of up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.

(Synthetic cannabinoids such as 'spice' should not be confused with cannabis. They are also Class B drugs but are highly dangerous with unknown long-term effects and are linked to many deaths.)

Risks

Smoking cannabis with nicotine carries all the same risks as smoking cigarettes. Cannabis may also cause short-term memory loss, reduced attention span, dizziness or fainting and mild to severe anxiety. There is a body of evidence suggesting that regular cannabis use increases the risk of developing psychotic illnesses, such as schizophrenia, particularly in adolescents.

Cannabis strains such as 'skunk' are far more potent than the cannabis available a few decades ago, with increased risks to mental health.

Why might my child use it?

Cannabis is a depressant which means that it induces feelings of relaxation, well-being and increased sensual awareness, including pain relief. A 2018 BBC report suggested that some young people believe cannabis to be "safer" than alcohol and prefer to use it for this reason.

Nitrous Oxide

The Facts

Over the past few years, nitrous oxide has become one of the most commonly used psychoactive substances among 16-24 year-olds.

Also known as 'nos', 'balloons' or 'laughing gas' nitrous oxide comes in small metal canisters (also known as 'whip-its') and is usually inhaled from balloons.

(The canisters cause an environmental problem as they tend to be discarded and are often seen littering public areas.)

Legal or illegal?

Nitrous oxide whip-its are legitimate products usually used by caterers for whipping cream. However, the use of nitrous oxide as a recreational drug is controlled under the 2016 Psychoactive Substances Act meaning that it is illegal to sell or supply but not illegal to possess for personal use.

Risks

Occasional recreational use of single nitrous oxide balloons is not associated with long-term harm other than the increased risk of accidents occurring while someone is 'high'.

Nitrous oxide depletes levels of B12 in the body and, over time, sustained use can result in nerve damage.

Deaths have been caused by prolonged, chronic use of nitrous oxide.

Why might my child use it?

The immediate but short-lived euphoric high caused by inhaling a nitrous oxide balloon has made them very popular at house parties, festivals and clubbing holiday destinations. Celebrities are often pictured in the media using nitrous balloons which may add to their attraction for young people.

Solvents

The Facts

'Solvent abuse' is the most common form of drug use among 11-13 year-olds. It is when the gases or fumes from products containing solvents or other volatile substances are inhaled to get 'high'.

The most commonly abused products are aerosols (where butane gas is the propellant), cigarette lighter refills and petrol.

(In the past solvent abuse was associated with glue-sniffing but everyday household glues no longer contain abuseable substances.)

Legal or illegal?

The majority of products associated with solvent abuse are legal. This is because they have legitimate uses – almost every home, for example, will contain aerosols.

However, under the 2016 Psychoactive Substances Act, it is illegal to sell psychoactive substances (which includes solvents) if the seller has reason to believe they will be used for the purposes of intoxication (i.e. to get 'high').

Risks

Solvent abuse kills more than 60 people a year in the UK, usually through 'sudden sniffing death syndrome' (SSDS) – a form of fatal heart attack.

If you think someone has been inhaling volatile substances, try to keep the situation as calm as possible. An adrenaline rush caused by physical activity or emotional stress is more likely to trigger an adverse reaction or death.

Why might my child use it?

The products involved in solvent abuse are everyday products, accessible in the home and inexpensive to buy. Solvent abuse can be easily hidden – the 'high' is short-lived and it is often a solitary activity. Solvent abuse can be a sign that something is wrong in another aspect of a person's life: stress, bullying, grief, etc.



Please let us know if you would like this information in another format.