

Parents Info

What you should know about drugs

This section gives you information about what drugs are and why some people take them. For information about specific drugs, please see our **A-Z drugs pages**.

What is a drug?

It's something that changes the way you think or feel. But not all drugs lead to problems. It depends on who is using it and how it's used. Many people drink alcohol without becoming dependent – others can't control their drinking. It's the same for heroin – some people use it for years without causing themselves harm. But for many, many others it often causes misery and sometimes death.

Many teenagers experiment with drugs for a short time then stop. They haven't become "addicted" and for many young people, cannabis is just as acceptable as legal drugs, like alcohol and tobacco.

How many people use drugs?

About half of all 15 and 16 year olds have tried an illegal drug. Top of the list is cannabis, then speed and ecstasy. It's estimated that only one percent have tried heroin.

How easy is it to get drugs?

Most young people get drugs from their friends and even members of their families. Most "pushers" are young people themselves.

But don't forget some drugs can be bought over the counter – drugs like aerosols or glue and they can cause death with one use.

Why do young people use drugs?

Experimenting: Teenagers want to explore the world and look for excitement, or get the buzz from doing something dangerous.

Social Approval: Teenagers are easily influenced by their friends. If drugs are part of that social life, they may use them to "fit in" and rebel against their parents.

Fun and Relaxation: Young people see their parents using alcohol at social events. Many teenagers use other drugs – like ecstasy and speed- for the same reasons. Their drug use is closely linked with fashion and music. It helps them enjoy the club scene.

To Cope: This is more a worrying use of drugs – using them to block out bad experiences and escape reality. Reasons for this could be loneliness, family problems bullying.