

parents' action plan

All young people are at risk. But even though many experiment with illegal drugs, the majority still leave them alone. Alcohol and tobacco are the main drugs young people use.

Many will only experiment and not become regular users.

Much more harm is related to the use of alcohol and tobacco by all age groups.

No parent or carer can guarantee that their children will never use drugs. Young people make up their own minds and, in today's world, have access to all sorts of substances.

It is possible that your child may find that friends at school as young as five years old have direct or indirect experience of drug use. One child, aged five, wrote for a Hope UK research project that "Daddy hides his drugs under my bed".

The good news is that parents can reduce the possibility of drug and alcohol use.

There is no 'miracle' cure. Preventing drug-related harm is a long-term activity. It involves encouraging healthy choices and fostering good parent-child relationships.

So begin now. Use the advice in this **action plan** to get you started or reinforce what you do already. (There may also be general parenting skills courses in your area which might be helpful.)

Children and young people are less likely to develop drug problems as they grow older if they adopt positive drug-free lifestyles when they are young.

What to do if there is a problem

Don't panic. Make sure that your child's safety and wellbeing are taken care of first.

Try and discuss things at an appropriate time when everyone has calmed down. Find out the whole story, including the background to what happened.

Try to avoid situations where the risk is high. This may mean encouraging your child to avoid certain friends.

Seek help. There are people in the community who can help. For example, GP's, local alcohol and drug agencies, AA, Al-Anon or Alateen. Local telephone books will contain details or you could ask at a Citizens' Advice Bureau. Schools should also have a pastoral care system. Adfam and PADA offer confidential support and information (see rear cover).

If your help is rejected, don't be surprised and try not to be angry. Drug use is a part of youth culture and can be linked with strong friendship ties. Remember that young people make their own choices and take responsibility for themselves in doing so. Parents may have to stand by and be there to provide a caring safety net.

Help is at hand

Information and advice

Free leaflets can often be obtained from health promotion departments, GP's, libraries and local alcohol and drug agencies.

'Talk to Frank' has a telephone helpline and website.

Alcohol and Drug Awareness

Hope UK provides Educators who work interactively with children and young people as well as parents. Training is available for children's, youth, church and family workers.

Alcohol-free Drinks

Local supermarkets stock ever-increasing ranges of drinks and fruit juices. For information about how to use them imaginatively, contact:

Hope UK – 020 7928 0848 www.hopeuk.org
thirst for life – 020 7928 0848 www.thirstforlife.org
ARCADE – 0118 969 7758 www.amethyst.org.uk

Drug Proof Your Kids

Care for the Family 029 2081 0800 (www.careforthefamily.org.uk) provide general parenting support and run this scheme (www.dpyk.org.uk) in association with Hope UK. The DPYK course normally lasts for 6 two-hour sessions and is provided by trained presenters.

Hope UK is a drug education charity which relies on grants and donations.

Please help if you can.

Helpful links

Adfam
020 7553 7640
www.adfam.org.uk
Alcohol Concern
020 7264 0510
www.alcoholconcern.org.uk
DrugScope
020 7520 7550
www.drugscope.org.uk
Hope UK
020 7928 0848
www.hopeuk.org
National Drinkline
0800 917 8282
PADA
(Parents Against Drug Abuse)
08457 025867
www.pada.org.uk

Talk to Frank
0800 776600
www.talktofrank.com

Smoking Quitline
0800 002200
www.quit.org.uk

Hope
UK

25(f) Copperfield Street London SE1 0EN

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Registered with the Charity Commission No 1044475

Enabling young people to make drug-free choices



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You and your children are unique

The best way to talk about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs will vary from family to family. Talk to other parents and find out what has worked for them.

It is best to be prepared to start talking about these substances from an early age. Young children may ask questions because of what they see on television or hear from friends at school. A news item might offer the opportunity to ask about drug education at school. Primary schools should offer age-appropriate drug and alcohol education. All secondary schools provide this, usually as part of their Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE).

Parents may know more than their children, but could be less confident when talking about alcohol, tobacco or illegal drugs.



Preventing

alcohol and other drug-related harm...

Action to promote drug-free choices

Remember that what you **do** is more important than what you say. For example, you can be a positive influence if you don't drink and drive; avoid drinking or smoking in front of children; and often choose alcohol-free drinks.

Be there for your children

Always **be ready to listen** to your children, so they can talk about their thoughts, feelings and emotions. **Become informed**, so you can help them work through issues without reacting unhelpfully. Collect relevant leaflets (see rear cover for helpful web links).

Do things together

Try to **do things as a family** that your children will enjoy. As far as possible, **keep your promises**. Plan things as a family and try to ensure they happen.

Take time to enjoy yourselves without alcohol

Do your children see you socialising, relaxing or celebrating with alcohol-free drinks? **What role model are you** for your children?

Help your children develop decision-making skills

Find ways to help your children **develop the art of choosing** for themselves. Encourage them to learn from mistakes and help them develop the ability to know their own mind.



Build up self worth in your children

Encourage and help them develop their own interests and hobbies. Give them **positive encouragement** and praise. Try to **avoid negative language**.

Supervision is important

Establish rules and boundaries that are consistent (independent of your mood). It helps your children if you try to stick to routines and regular meals. Try to give children a calm start to the day and let them end the day in a positive way together with you. Give children peace and quiet for homework and help them when needed.

Don't forget you are not alone

You are in a partnership with other people such as school teachers and youth leaders. Ask about what is being taught in school. Find out if your children's, youth or faith group programmes cover alcohol and drugs.

What works best?

There are many different ways you can look at drug issues; not all will work for you and your children. Find out what works and use it. Don't give up or exaggerate the dangers. Scare tactics do not work in the long term.

What parents need to know

Although many people are familiar with the signs of alcohol or tobacco use, it is not easy to be certain about other drugs. Many symptoms could be caused by 'normal' adolescence, for example, changes in mood or attitudes could be related to school or friendship issues.

Recognising signs is a bit like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Signs of depression, withdrawal, general



Things to look out for:

- Changes in friends
 - Negative changes in schoolwork, missing school, or declining grades
 - Increased secrecy about possessions or activities
 - Use of incense, room deodorant, or perfume to hide smoke or chemical smells
 - Subtle changes in conversations with friends, eg more secretive, using "coded" language
 - Change in clothing choices: new fascination with clothes that highlight drug use
 - Increase in borrowing money
 - Evidence of drug paraphernalia such as pipes, rolling papers, etc.
 - Evidence of use of inhalant products (such as hairspray, nail polish, correction fluid, common household products); rags and paper bags are sometimes used as accessories
 - Bottles of eye drops, which may be used to mask bloodshot eyes or dilated pupils
 - New use of mouthwash or breath mints to cover up the smell of alcohol
 - Missing prescription drugs – especially painkillers, antidepressants and sleeping pills
- These changes often signal that something harmful is going on – possibly involving alcohol or drugs. Some of the signs also indicate there may be a deeper problem with depression, bullying, or self-harming.

...One of the biggest influences on children is what their parent or carer thinks of them. Make your child aware of how much you value and love them.