

TALKING ABOUT DRUGS

RISKS OF ABUSING DRUGS

People who abuse drugs risk harming their physical and mental health, relationships with others, performance at school or work, and more.

Different kinds of drugs have different risks, but many risks are common to all.

SHORT-TERM EFFECTS OF DRUGS

Drugs do not have the same effects on everyone. People could have a bad reaction for a number of reasons.

- > Instead of making a person feel calm and relaxed, the drug might make them feel anxious, depressed, nauseated or paranoid.
- > The drug could interact badly with something else a person may take, such as:
 - » over-the-counter medication,
 - » prescription medication,
 - » alcohol, or
 - » other illegal drugs.
- > A person might overdose.

Even if none of these things happen, people can never know if their next experience will be harmful.

THE DRUG IS NOT WHAT IT SEEMS

Even when people know the person who sold or gave them the drug, they cannot be sure what is in it. Perhaps it was the drug they wanted and paid for. Or perhaps it was something else entirely.

- > The marijuana people smoke may be much stronger than they thought. It may also be contaminated with pesticides, or mould.
- > Sellers may mix the real drug with things like cornstarch, soaps, or other drugs such as methamphetamine. For example, many “ecstasy” pills sold may contain little or no MDMA.
- > Sometimes drugs are mixed with other potent drugs (for example, heroin mixed with fentanyl), a lethal combination that can result in death.



DRUGS IN AN UNFAMILIAR SETTING

When people use a drug, especially for the first time, they may not know what to do if something goes wrong. They might find themselves in a situation they cannot control and be unable to:

- > find someone to help them,
- > get home, or
- > reach medical help if they need it.

THINKING YOU CAN MANAGE DRUG ABUSE

Many people, when they start to take drugs, believe they can control the effects. They think they can keep their use at a safe level, so the drug does not affect their life. But the harmful effects of regular drug use can often build up slowly over time. Sometimes it may take months or years for some of the harmful effects to appear.



LONG-TERM EFFECTS OF DRUGS

Over time, the negative effects of drugs may come to outweigh any perceived positive effects. People under the influence of drugs usually make poor decisions and engage in risky behaviour; so many parts of their lives might suffer.

- > **School**—using drugs can affect people's ability to study, to concentrate in class, and to keep up with assignments.
- > **Work**—if people cannot focus because of their drug use, they might lose their job. Worse, they could endanger or hurt themselves or others at work.
- > **Relationships**—drugs can make people emotional and unreasonable, particularly if others criticize their drug use.

- > **Money**—using drugs can be expensive. People might struggle to pay bills or buy the things they need.
- > **Mood**—people may feel good while they take drugs, but they feel worse when the effects wear off.
- > **Sex**—using drugs might make people forget to practice safe sex. The result of unprotected sex could be a sexually transmitted infection or an unwanted pregnancy.
- > **Legal Problems**—illegal sale or possession of drugs can dramatically affect a young person's future. If charged and convicted, they will have a criminal record that may present problems in the future with potential employers or when travelling out of the country.

Drugs might also influence people's lives in other ways they might not expect. The risks include harm to their physical health.

- > Heavy use of some drugs not only affects the brain, it can also damage major organs such as the liver, kidneys, and lungs.
- > If people inject drugs they may be at serious risk of acquiring a blood-borne virus. Sharing needles or having unprotected sexual activity can spread diseases like hepatitis C and even HIV.
- > Driving impaired by a drug puts people at higher risk of having an accident and getting hurt or hurting someone else.
- > There are many dangerous and unpredictable effects associated with abusing drugs, including addiction, overdose and death.

Mental health may also be affected if people use drugs. Some drugs can trigger psychosis, a mental disorder where people lose touch with reality. People who have a personal or family history of psychosis are especially at risk.

When people are addicted to a drug they:

- > feel they cannot function without it,
- > spend most of their time finding and using the drug,
- > need more and more of the drug to get the same effect, and
- > use the drug (or other drugs) to cope with, or to avoid, withdrawal effects.