



# Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)

**Information and Support Pack  
for Aboriginal Parents  
and Families**

## About this booklet

This booklet has been developed to help, support and educate parents and family members concerned with a loved one's drug usage. Through extensive consultation it was discovered that the Aboriginal community wanted an Aboriginal-specific booklet.

PDIS wishes to acknowledge the diversity and strength of Aboriginal groups and with this in mind this booklet acts as a guide only. For more information please refer to the contacts at the back of this booklet.

This booklet is designed for Aboriginal parents, grandparents and other family members.

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The terms **Aboriginal**; Aboriginal and **Torres Strait Islander**; and **Indigenous**; in describing the first Australians, are used interchangeably to maintain accuracy with respect to other preceding documents and initiatives, and the term Aboriginal, more broadly used here, should be taken to mean Aboriginal; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous peoples.

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# Important information for Aboriginal parents

Parents and families get worried when they find out their child is using drugs. They often think the worst and this is understandable.

Keep in mind there is **no** evidence that a young person experimenting with or using drugs occasionally will become dependent on that drug.

So it is important as a parent or family member that you raise the issue of drug use in a supportive and loving environment. It is equally valuable that you provide the young person with correct and relevant information and provide hope.

For further information and support call the **Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)** on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 for country callers.



## Impact on family and friends

As a parent, family member or friend you might feel very frustrated, upset or hurt by a loved one's drug use. You might not totally understand why they have a drug dependency and you might suggest that they just quit. However, this is not always an easy option. Withdrawal symptoms can be really unpleasant so most people avoid them at all costs.

It is important to remember that your feelings are normal and valid.

Common feelings you might have are:



## What can you do?

As a parent, family member or carer you play a vital role. Your relationship with your child is central. There are many things that you can do, here are some suggestions:

**Learn** as much as you can about the different types of drugs and the impacts they have on the mind and body. Talk to a doctor, health care worker or call the Parent Drug Information Service for more information (9442 5050 or toll free country 1800 653 203).



**Openly discuss drugs.** Sit down and have a yarn with your child about drugs. Talk about the good and not so good things about them. The key is to be honest and not to scare them too much.

**Be respectful** of your child's experiences and thoughts. If you show respect then they in return will respect you more for being supportive and non-judgemental. Two-way mutual respect and understanding is important.

**Be a good role model.** If you drink, show that you drink within safe limits. Always eat before you start drinking and have water or non-alcoholic drinks as well. Having alcohol-free days can be beneficial for you and your family.

**Choose the right time to talk.** Pick a time when you are both relaxed and can speak calmly.



**Listen.** Honest and open communication is the key to talking about drug use. Listen to your child, without putting them down or yelling. Showing that you are interested in their thoughts and experiences is important. This builds trust so they feel comfortable to talk or ask you questions.



**Family rules and responsibilities.** Reinforce family rules and responsibilities with your child. It is important that they know what is expected of them. They should also know the consequences of breaking these rules and responsibilities. Try to allow your child to be part of the decision making process around their responsibilities and the consequences for not following them.





**Look after yourself.** This is **THE** most valuable advice for you to remember. When you are stressed and anxious you tend to forget about yourself and put everyone else first. But it is really important to look after you – go for a walk, take a bath, go for a coffee/tea with friends, eat well, rest, spend time with your partner and other children. Remember that you are not alone.



**Get support for yourself.** There is lots of help available for you. The Parent Drug Information Service is a great place to start. They offer free, confidential counselling 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Call 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 for country callers (toll free).

Other support can include a close friend, family member, a doctor, a health care worker or a parent support group.

It is essential that you are supported and able to talk freely about your feelings and concerns. Help is always available.



# Facts For Parents

## What is a drug?

A drug is any substance (except food and water) which, when taken changes the way our bodies function. They can affect the way we think, feel and behave.



Drugs may be legal (e.g. alcohol, caffeine and tobacco) or illegal (e.g. gunja, ecstasy, speed and heroin).

## Why do people use drugs?

People use drugs for many different reasons.

Some of these include:

- To have fun
- To relax
- To forget their problems
- To relieve boredom or stress
- To socialise
- To experiment
- As a distraction or way to cope
- To celebrate or grieve
- To feel accepted or liked



# Types of drugs

There are **four main groups** of drugs that affect the brain and the rest of the body – depressants, stimulants, hallucinogens and other.

## Depressants (downers)

These types of drugs slow you down. They can make you feel happy, calm and relaxed. But sometimes they can make you feel fearful, paranoid or aggressive. These drugs can be very dangerous as they can cause unconsciousness or vomiting, even death as a person in overdose can stop breathing.

Depressants include:

- Alcohol
- Benzodiazepines (benzos)
- Heroin
- Some painkillers
- Kava
- Inhalants
- Cannabis (gunja)



## Stimulants (uppers)

These types of drugs speed up the messages going to the brain. They can make you feel awake, happy and alert. They can also make you feel paranoid, scared, jealous and suspicious. These drugs can be dangerous.

Stimulants can include:

- Mild stimulants like coffee, tea, cola drink and nicotine in tobacco.
- Stronger stimulants include amphetamines (speed), ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine (ice, crystal meth) and cocaine.



## Hallucinogens (psychedelics)



These types of drugs can make you see, hear or feel things that aren't really there. The effects can be different each time. These drugs can be dangerous.

Hallucinogens include:

- Cannabis (gunja)
- LSD or acid
- magic mushrooms
- mescaline (cactus)
- PCP (phencyclidine)



## Other

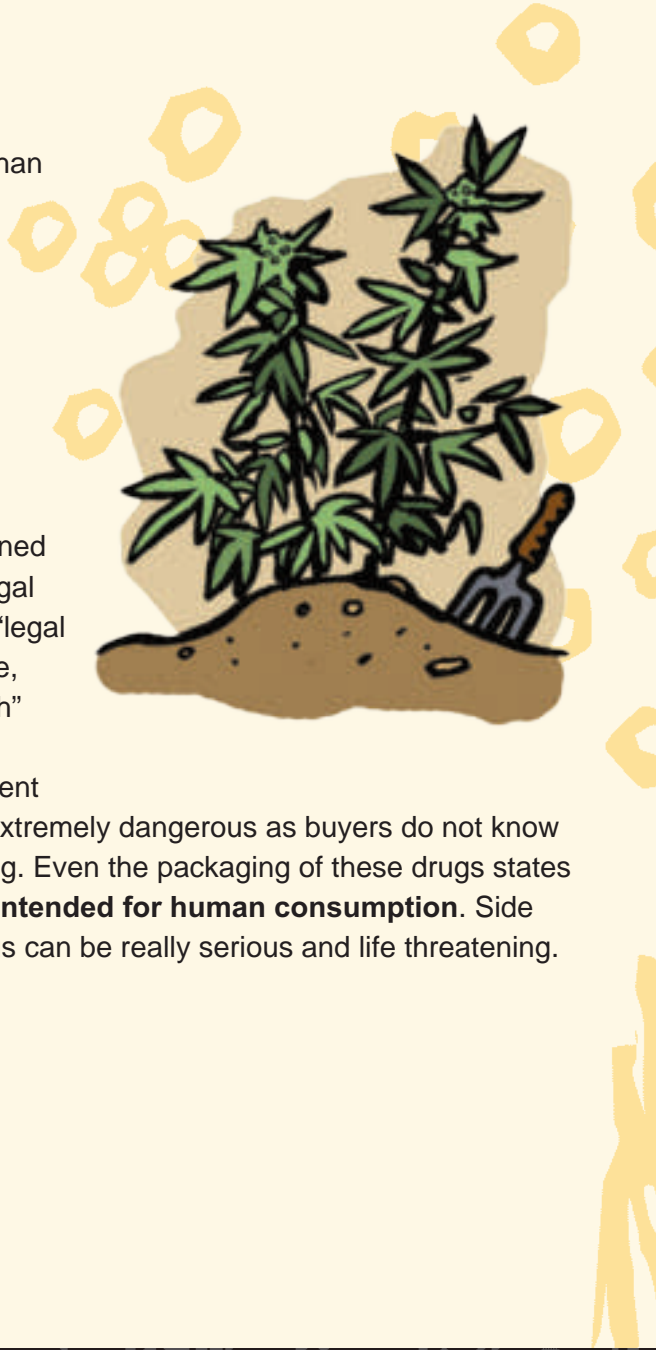
Some drugs belong to more than one drug group.

Gunja is a depressant and a hallucinogen.

Ecstasy is a stimulant and a hallucinogen.

## Synthetic Drugs

Some drugs have been designed to imitate and mimic other illegal drugs. People may call them “legal gunja” (also known as incense, Kronik or Spice) or “legal meth” (bath salts). These drugs are heavily laced with many different chemicals. These drugs are extremely dangerous as buyers do not know what chemicals they are taking. Even the packaging of these drugs states that these **products are not intended for human consumption**. Side effects from taking these drugs can be really serious and life threatening.



## Effects of Drugs

A person's experience of taking a drug will be affected by the following factors:

**The individual person:** their mood, physical size, gender, personality, expectation of the drug experience, whether the person has eaten and whether other drugs have been taken.

**The drug:** the amount used, how it is used and the strength and purity of the drug.

**The environment:** whether the person is using it with friends, on their own, in a social setting or at home, at work, before or whilst driving.





Drugs and alcohol can have an impact on our spirit, mind and body. The following model shows this impact.

## Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model

ABORIGINAL INNER SPIRIT MODEL



©Joe Roe

*Our inner spirit is the centre of our being and emotion.*

*When our spirit feels strong our mind feels strong.*

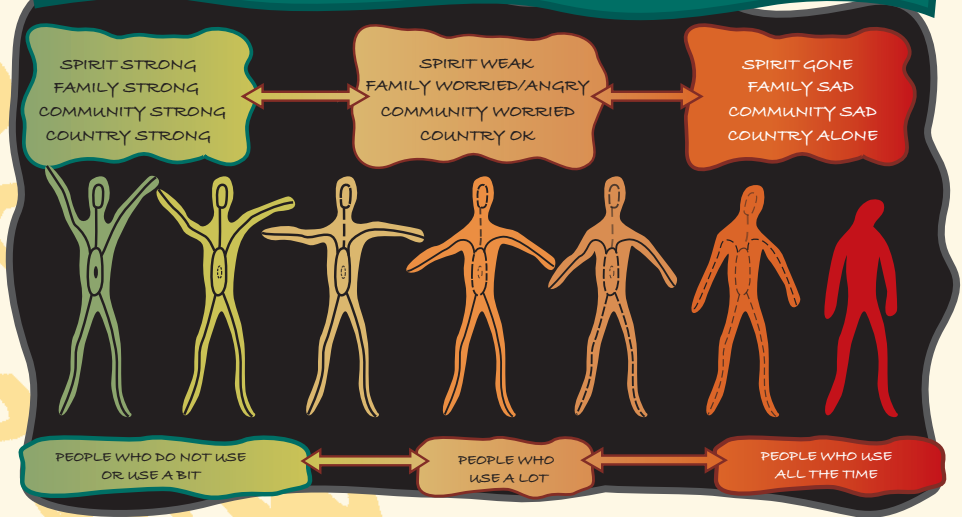
*When our spirit feels tangled our mind feels tangled.*

*Strong inner spirit is what keeps people healthy and keeps them connected together.*

*Strong inner spirit keeps our family strong, our community strong and our country alive.*

# How alcohol and other drugs can affect our inner spirit

*Alcohol and other drugs can weaken your spirit and your connections with family, community and country*



Our way of being healthy is to look after ourselves by making good choices, and to care for our family, community and culture. Alcohol and other drugs can tangle and weaken our spirit and mind. This can affect our emotional, social, spiritual and physical wellbeing. This can weaken our connection to family, community, culture and country.

When we use alcohol and other drugs in harmful ways our spirit becomes weaker and our thinking gets tangled. But if we stop or reduce our use, our spirit can grow strong and our thinking becomes clear again.

## Mixing Drugs

Mixing or taking more than one type of drug can be extremely dangerous. It increases the chances of people experiencing bad side effects and other health complications. Some of these can include heart palpitations, heart attack or even overdose.

Mixing grog with heroin can slow both your heart and breathing rates so much that you can stop breathing. Mixing speed with ecstasy can make your heart beat faster; you can overheat, get dehydrated and possibly die. Mixing grog with gunja can make you really spin out; you may vomit or pass out.



# Types of drug use

- **Trying it out (experimental use)**

When a person tries a drug a couple of times because they are curious.

- **Hanging out with family or friends (recreational use)**

When a person uses a drug for enjoyment at a social occasion like a party or gathering.

- **Using to celebrate or grieve (situational use)**

When a person uses a drug to cope with a situation. For example, drinking lots of grog after a funeral or at a footy/sports carnival.

- **Using a lot in a short time (intensive use)**

Also known as 'bingeing' and occurs when a person uses a lot over a short amount of time with the aim of getting drunk or intoxicated. For example, binge drinking or taking large amounts of drugs over a weekend.

- **Using every day (dependent use)**

After regular use, a person may become physically or psychologically dependent on a drug in order to feel normal.



# What does it mean when someone is dependent on a drug?

Being **dependent** on a drug means the person feels they need that drug to function normally or to feel normal. They believe they have to use the drug to do certain things or feel a certain way. Being dependent on a drug can vary from mild urges to out of control use.

When someone is dependent their body has changed. If they suddenly stop taking the drug they will experience **withdrawal** symptoms. These unpleasant symptoms can include feeling really sad or angry, or physical symptoms like vomiting, fits or cramps. Sudden withdrawal can sometimes be life threatening.

An example of withdrawal is if someone drank every day for a week, then stopped, they might feel agitated or get the sweats and shaky. They can feel really sick.

When someone is dependent on a drug they may begin to behave in unexpected ways – this can be very difficult for their family and community to deal with.



# What does it mean when someone is tolerant to a drug?

People who become dependent on a drug may become **tolerant** to that drug. This means they need to use more and more of the drug to get the same effect or avoid withdrawal symptoms.

For example, a person who used to get drunk after 3 beers now takes 12 beers to get drunk.

Being tolerant towards a certain type of drug sometimes leads to people experimenting with other drugs or mixing more than one drug to get a quicker high. This can be extremely dangerous and hazardous to their health and wellbeing.



# Psychosis

Sometimes a person might become out of touch with reality. For example, they might start hearing voices that aren't there or thinking people are "out to get them". This is known as psychosis.

Symptoms of psychosis may include:

- increased paranoia
- aggression
- delusional behaviour (believing things that are not reality)
- hallucinations (seeing things that are not reality)
- fear
- lack of motivation
- unable to perform their usual tasks at home, work or school



Drug induced psychosis is usually short term (hours or days) and stops once the person stops using the drug. However, in some cases it can take much longer, up to 6 months or more.

When psychosis occurs it is very distressing to the drug user, their family and the community.



# Drug induced psychosis and treatment

In an extreme situation consider the following:

## **Give your child quiet space.**

This may help them to calm down.

## **Keep yourself and your family safe.**

Leave the house or surroundings if in danger.

## **Call the Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) on 1300 555 788**

(or MHERL RURAL if you live in a country area on 1800 676 822) if anyone is at risk of self-harm or placing others at risk.

**Get help from a doctor or health worker you trust.** A family doctor, or someone you usually see, who may know about your situation will be in a better position to assist.

**Take your child to the Emergency Department of a hospital.** You might have to wait but it is usually safer to wait in hospital than at home.

**Call the police on 9222 1111 or 131 444 if your child is threatening violence or being violent.**



# Overdose

In an emergency situation where you think someone has overdosed it is very important that you **do not** leave them alone.

## 1. Call an ambulance straight away by dialling 000.

Don't be scared about calling an ambulance. The police won't come unless there is violence, serious injury or death.



## 2. Place the person in the recovery position (on their left side) and make sure they can breathe by tilting their head back to clear the airway.



## 3. Stay with the person until the ambulance arrives and provide any information that might help.

# Alcohol and other drugs affect the whole community



Drug use can cause problems for the whole community. Everyone in the community is affected when alcohol and other drugs are used at hazardous and harmful levels. Even people who don't use at all are affected.



When someone is using alcohol and other drugs at hazardous or harmful levels it impacts on the individual drug user; their family and their community.





## The 7 Ls Model

When someone is using drugs and alcohol it impacts on every aspect of their lives. The 7 Ls Model demonstrates how each area can be impacted.

**Land** – culture and country

**Aboriginal Law** – social and cultural obligations

**Liver** – health

**Lover** – family and community relationships

**Livelihood** – money and work

**Legal** – Western law

**Loss** – Grief and loss



But it doesn't have to be like this. We can take better care of ourselves, our families and our communities by making healthier choices about alcohol and other drugs.

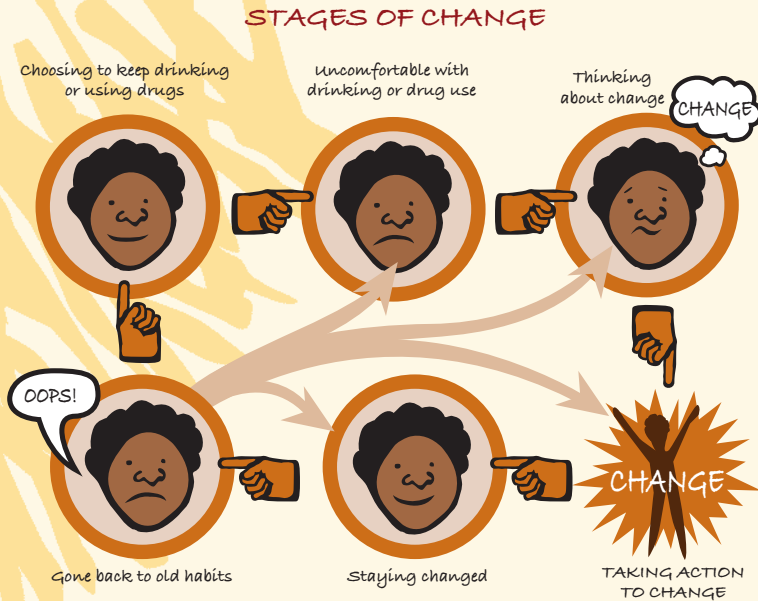


# Stages of Change

It is useful for parents and other family members to be aware of the various stages of change that a person trying to stop using drugs and alcohol will go through.

If you want to help your child to make better choices or changes you can ask them what sort of help and support they need. Each stage of change requires different things. Having relapse prevention strategies in place for each stage is essential. Some strategies can include having support from family and friends, being aware of triggers (events, different environments and influential people), having coping strategies in place and using pharmacotherapy (replacement drug therapy).

## Stages of Change Model





The Stages of Change Model shows the steps involved in behavioural change. It shows:

- People can be in different stages for different lengths of time.
- People may move back and forward between the stages many times before they are ready to move onto the next stage or reach their goals regarding their drug and alcohol use.
- It is important to remember that **relapse is common and normal**. People rarely change their behaviour on their first attempt. So relapse prevention strategies are very important.

## **What help is available for my child?**

There are many forms of help available to your child and at times it can seem hard to choose the best place for them to go. There is a variety of programs to select from, such as drug and alcohol counselling, in-patient detoxification, home detoxification, residential rehabilitation, GP support and family counselling.

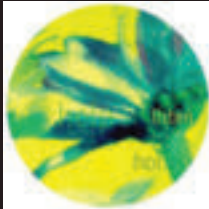
**It is important to remember that treatment agencies will only admit your child if he/she wants to get help for their drug use.**

## Contact Information

Important contact numbers for further information and support.

Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS)	9442 5050
*Country toll-free	1800 653 203
Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)	9442 5000
*Country toll-free	1800 198 024
Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service (AADS)	9221 1411
Drug and Alcohol Youth Services (DAYS)	9222 6300
	1300 651 329
Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service	9421 3888
Yorgum Aboriginal Family Counselling Services	9218 9477
* Country toll-free	1800 469 371
Aboriginal Drug and Alcohol Program and Aboriginal Family Support Service	6330 5400
Aboriginal Family Respite Service (Uniting Care West)	9206 6200
Aboriginal Parent Support Service	9377 7922
Lifeline (24 hour Telephone Crisis Support)	13 11 14
Crisis Care	9223 1111
* Country free call	1800 199 008
Local Drug Action Groups Inc. (LDAG)	9370 0346

\*Calls from mobiles may attract a higher fee.



**Parent Drug  
Information Service**

**Produced by the Parent Drug Information Service  
(08) 9442 5050  
1800 653 203 (country toll free)**



**Government of Western Australia  
Drug and Alcohol Office**

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Barry McGuire (Mullark) born in Kelleberrin, which is located in the Balladong Nungar Boodja. His artist name was given to him by his family, it was his Grandfather's name and he paints to keep the name alive.

The Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model (Ngarlu Assessment Model) was developed by Joseph 'Nipper' Roe, who belonged to the Karajarri and Yawuru people.

Illustrations by Patrick Bayly, Workplace Design.

Co-written and edited by Sumi Paull with support and contributions from past and present PDIS coordinators and West Australian parents.

All information in this kit is correct at time of printing. Contact PDIS or ADIS to find the nearest and most appropriate service for you.