

# PARENT & FAMILY INFORMATION & SUPPORT PACK

FOR ANYONE CONCERNED ABOUT A LOVED ONE'S ALCOHOL  
OR DRUG USE



Confidential. Anonymous.  
Professional & Peer Support.  
Call us 24 hours a day.



If English is not your first language, you can get free translation support through Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS National).

Phone 13 14 50 and request support through the Parent & Family Drug Support Line (08) 9442 5050 or the Alcohol & Drug Support Line (08) 9442 5000.

TIS National is available 24/7, and all costs will be met by the Parent & Family Drug Support Line or the Alcohol & Drug Support Line.

Other agencies use TIS National to help them support you.

Thank you to the dedicated parent volunteers who contributed towards developing this resource.

The logo consists of the text 'PARENT & FAMILY DRUG SUPPORT LINE' in a bold, sans-serif font. The text is arranged in three lines: 'PARENT &' on the first line, 'FAMILY DRUG' on the second line, and 'SUPPORT LINE' on the third line. The text is white and is set against a dark teal background that is part of a larger teal banner at the bottom of the page.

This resource contains introductory information only.

If you would like to talk your situation over, call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line on (08) 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers, toll free land line only, all mobiles will be charged at provider rates).

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# When we talk about drugs we mean...

A drug is any substance that, when taken into the body, alters the way the body functions either physically or psychologically. As parents (please note that when we use the word parents in this resource, we are also referring to other adult family members, carers and guardians), you will be primarily concerned with psychoactive drugs. These drugs affect a person's central nervous system and alter their mood, thinking and behaviour. They can be grouped into four categories:

- Stimulants
- Depressants
- Hallucinogens
- Others

**Stimulants** - These types of drugs increase the activity in the central nervous system and arouse the body. For example, amphetamines (speed, meth, ice), coffee, cocaine and tobacco.

**Depressants** - These drugs slow down the central nervous system including heart rate and breathing. For example, heroin and alcohol.

**Hallucinogens** - These drugs affect the central nervous system by causing perceptual distortions and sometimes, hallucinations. For example, LSD (trips) and mushrooms.

**Other** - These drugs may have more than one effect. For example, cannabis can have both a depressant and hallucinogenic effect.

There is already a substantial amount of information about drugs available. If you would like information sent to you, or you would like to talk about it more, call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)**

## So why do people use drugs?

Many parents search for reasons as to why their children (whether adolescent or adult) are using drugs. Parents often refer to past issues that may have contributed to use and load themselves with guilt about what could have been done better to prevent drug use. The fact is there are many reasons why people might use alcohol and drugs, including:

Curiosity	Boredom
To be sociable	Escape from reality
Enjoyment	Experimentation
Independence	Avoiding painful situations

# Types of drug use...

You will often hear people describe drug use in different ways. These are some terms you may hear.

- **Experimental** When a person tries a drug out of curiosity once or twice.
- **Recreational** When a person uses a drug for enjoyment or to change their mood at a social occasion like a party.
- **Situational** When a person uses a drug to cope with a situation, for example, the use of amphetamines in order to maintain alertness for long distance drives.
- **Intensive** This type of use is commonly known as 'bingeing' and occurs when a person consumes large amounts of drugs over a short period of time, for example, binge drinking over a weekend or using amphetamines over 3 – 4 days. It can also refer to frequent use of large doses of drugs.
- **Dependent** After regular use, a person may become physically or psychologically dependent on a drug in order to feel normal.

Drug use does not necessarily occur in this order and there is no clear evidence that experimental or situational use always leads to intense use or dependency. However, any form of drug use can be potentially harmful. For example, one experimental encounter with drugs (including alcohol) may cause accidental overdose or poisoning, which may cause serious harm or even death.

Many parents and families often experience severe stress or concern over drug use by their children. This is understandable but it is important to remember that most young people do not develop problems as a result of experimental use. Having said that, a small percentage of young people may develop a high tolerance to alcohol and drugs and some may continue to use them and develop a dependency.

## Dependence

**Tolerance** is defined as occurring when a person who uses drugs needs more of that drug to get the same effect as when they were using a smaller amount.

**Dependence** occurs when a person's body adapts to the presence of the drug and when the drug becomes more central to the person's thoughts, actions and lifestyle.

# The importance of parents and families

There are many influences in children's lives, such as media, education, peers and so on, but parents and families play a key part in their lives. Your role as a parent and your relationship with your child is really important. Here are some tips on what may help you manage drug related matters in your family.

## In many cases children want and expect us to talk to them about drugs.

### **Be informed**

Learn as much as you can about the long and short-term effects of different types of drugs and how people use drugs. Talk it over with someone else such as a GP or call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line**.

### **Be credible**

It may be tempting to use scare tactics with your child but remember they have access to a lot of information from many sources. Try to be up to date with facts so you sound credible to them.

### **Discuss drug issues & information**

Ask your children for their opinions on drugs; why people may use them and what the good and bad aspects are about them. Help them develop the necessary skills to talk through difficult decisions and dilemmas and encourage them to weigh up the pros and cons before taking action over any decision.

### **Be honest**

Let them know when you do not have an answer, or talk about some of the dilemmas you have faced with drug taking. For example, if you smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol regularly, talk with them about your drug use and the issues for you. Honesty will encourage your child to respect you and treat you the same way.

### **Be firm & fair**

Ensure you have rules and consequences and are consistent (refer to the books and material listed in this resource). If your children know your limits and know you mean business, you are a step ahead when it comes to the more difficult moments (like parties, sex, concerts and festivals, alcohol and going out). Try to negotiate these rules to ensure that your children have ownership of the process but you still have some control.

### **Model responsible behaviour**

If you drink, set a good example e.g. have alcohol free days, drink within safe limits, don't drink and drive etc. Drinking can also be about enjoyment and they need to know this is possible.

### **Be interested**

Get to know your children's friends and activities. Understand their group and find out what they like doing together. Talk with them and expect it to be difficult at times (because they don't want you to know everything).

### **Meet other parents**

Get to know the parents of your children's friends. It helps with everything including monitoring, understanding their lives and providing the unspoken message that you care.

# The importance of parents and families

- Children want you to talk to them about drugs
- Be informed
- Be credible
- Be firm but fair
- Remind yourself that children need rules and boundaries
- Be honest
- Model responsible behaviour
- Be interested in your children's friends
- Get to know other parents
- Monitor their behaviour
- Have both parents (if possible) involved in decision making.

## **Monitor behaviour**

If your children are old enough to go out – find out where they are going, who they are going with, and what time they are expected home. It's OK to have clear expectations, and it's OK to take your time on making decisions.

## **Collaborate in decision making**

Where possible, both parents need to discuss any rules that are set and apply them consistently. Back each other up. Invite your children to take part in decision making. If the rules are broken, insist firmly but fairly on the consequences agreed.

## **Involve them in family & community activities**

Young people benefit from contributing to the family and to the community. Provide your child with the responsibility of certain jobs or roles for example, washing the dishes, putting out the rubbish, cleaning their rooms etc.

## **Listen**

The key to communication is to make time for your children. If you listen and avoid talking down to them, they will be more inclined to approach you when they need help. Talking openly and frankly about things that are important to them will help them to feel more connected to you.

## **Establish & maintain links**

Monitor your children's progress and discuss school performance with their teachers. Involve your child in this. Stay in contact with the school.

## **Encourage healthy friendships**

Be positive about your child's supportive friends. Avoid being negative about other friends – it may only push them to resist your views.

## **Encourage empathy for others**

Help your children to develop empathy. In your discussions, ask them what effect their behaviour might have on others, e.g. "If you decided to try smoking, how do you think we would feel?"

## **Support self expression**

Help your children to develop a language for expressing themselves. This is best achieved by encouraging conversations from a young age. If difficult issues arise or your children make 'mistakes', take some time and ask them about their experience, the good and not so good and what they might do differently next time. This is when you need to be patient and be aware of your own reactions. The main aim of this is to help your child develop the skills to weigh up the pros and cons before making decisions.

## **Be assertive**

Teach them to solve problems in a timely and appropriate fashion using assertiveness and negotiation. This will encourage them to take responsibility for their own actions (good or bad).

# Could my child be using drugs?

**Remember that adolescents go through enormous changes and some difficulties are to be expected.**

Parents and carers should always be aware of changes that may indicate that a child is having a problem. If you notice a change of friends, money missing, a drop in grades, withdrawal from the family, drug paraphernalia, suspicious activity, deterioration in health, changes in eating and sleeping patterns or household goods missing, there may be a problem. It may be one or a combination of these things. If your intuition says there is something wrong, then trust it.

If you feel that your child is using, or if you know they have tried drugs, there are a number of ways in which you can respond. Many parents are angry, distressed, unsure and frightened when faced with such a crisis.

It is normal for these feelings to overwhelm you. Consider calming down before doing anything. Many parents have regretted their actions by being angry or confronting.

**Remember** – there are many different ways young people use drugs. They might simply experiment and then not continue to use.

## Before taking any action:

- **Call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)** and talk it through with a counsellor or another parent. Talk about it with a trusted friend, your partner, a relative or your GP.
- Get your facts before you talk about it. It's helpful to look at exactly what your concerns are, what evidence you have of drug use, what outcome you want and who you will involve.
- Choose the best time to talk before approaching your child. That means waiting for them to sober up, turning the TV off, involving both parents or guardians (if you can) and when you have their full attention.
- Expect your child to not tell you everything. Be available and encourage them to come back to you if they have anything more to say. Take their lead and be available when they open up to you.
- Set fair boundaries and consequences that will guide future behaviour.
- Try hard to keep the channels of communication open.



# Common reactions and feelings

## Family members are often in greater crisis than the drug user

If your child is using drugs and has no intention of stopping, you may feel anxious, worried, angry and socially isolated. Many parents say they "walk on eggshells" and feel powerless.

## Common feelings

No matter what drug or how much your child has used, or continues to use, you are likely to react in many ways. The following feelings are common for most families:

**Shock & disbelief.** Like any reaction to a crisis, you may experience shock when you find out about your child or relative using drugs. Many people cannot understand why they "didn't see it".

*"I couldn't understand why the hose was getting shorter. I had no idea he was using the hose to make 'bongs' to smoke cannabis with."*

Susan (Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

*"I just couldn't believe that my son, my beautiful boy was mixed up with drugs. I didn't want to believe it... he was always so fit and into being healthy."*

Marg (Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

**Alienation & Isolation.** Many people feel they cannot talk about the issue to others and are ashamed of the situation.

*"The longer her drug use went on, the more I withdrew from family, friends and neighbours. I felt I couldn't face anyone."*

Anita (Parent)

**Grief.** It is common to experience intense grief, particularly if your relationship with your child is stressful, or if you no longer have any relationship. Grieving is a normal reaction when your child is not living the life you wanted for them.

*"My child used to be beautiful – happy, intelligent and a real go-getter. Now that drugs are in her life, that person is no longer here. I am scared of her never coming back to us."*

Jim (Parent)

**Anger.** It is OK and natural to feel anger. Try and separate the behaviour from the person when it comes to talking to your child. Find someone you trust to talk to, preferably someone who will not judge you.

**Fear.** This is a normal reaction for parents. Fear of what might happen to their son or daughter if they continue using. Fear of what might happen to you as a parent.

## Common reactions and feelings

**Guilt & shame.** As a parent, the guilt and shame you feel about your child using are possibly two of the most difficult emotions to endure. You may have asked yourself many times already, "Where did I/we go wrong?" "How could this happen?" Sometimes parents blame themselves and feel worthless.

Feeling ashamed of our family and ourselves can prevent us from reaching out to others – including our extended relatives.

*"I just felt so incredibly scared that my own mother would judge me if she found out that my son was injecting drugs, so I didn't say anything. I just battled on and eventually she asked me what was going on with Brett. When I told her we both cried together and it was such a relief to tell someone who loved Brett as much as I did."*

Samantha (Parent)

Feeling judged by others, including those closest to us, will happen to many of you. Families often believe something must have gone wrong and try to rationalise it, searching for reasons why.

*"When I first found out my daughter was addicted I didn't know who to tell or where to go for help. I thought people would judge me, that I was a bad mum or Natalie came from a bad home environment, none of which was true. Natalie came from a loving home and went to a good school."*

Shelley (Parent)

*"Love keeps most people going. Hold onto it and do not forget who your child or relative is."*

Val (Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

### "Things I Would Change if I Knew What I Know Now"

- I would be careful about handing over money.
- I would try and negotiate rather than be manipulated.
- I would take better care of myself instead of placing my son at the top of the list.
- I would listen to my daughter's grievances more. She did miss out a lot and has told me so.
- I would go to a support group (or at least try and find one I could link in with). There is so much that I didn't know back then. I needed to know if what I was feeling was a normal reaction to my son's use.
- I would like to be stronger in myself and believe in my decisions and not be so afraid of consequences (e.g. never see my son again, suicide, going to jail).

Susan (Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

## Facing drug use in the family

If you are a family member or closely associated with someone using drugs, no doubt you are worried and anxious – most people are and this is a normal reaction.

*"I had no idea about drugs. I didn't even look for signs because I didn't think my child would even consider it. She had always been so anti-drugs."*

Sue (Parent)

Many parents feel out of control, highly stressed and desperate to fix the problem. It's normal to feel this way.

*"I was cleaning out his room and found some plastic bags with white powder in a bag under his bed... I was so furious I flushed them down the toilet. When he came home I screamed at him and asked him how he could do this to himself. He told me he was looking after it for a friend."*

Margaret (Parent)

*"It is really hard to see my parents coping with my brother's drug use. He is just so abusive and difficult to be around. They just run around after him all the time and I get really angry with that... I wish he would just listen to us and understand that it is destroying our lives."*

Penny (Sister)

The other people in your family are on this journey too. No doubt it has impacted heavily on all of you. Your relationship with your partner and other relatives may have been put under extreme stress. Relationships with other children in your family may also be strained, as they may not have had the attention you and they feel was deserved. There may have been times when you felt you could deal with it and times when running away appeared to be the best solution.

You may have had to deal with the confusing array of agencies, running from one counsellor to the next, finding no one who can deal with all the issues at the same time. Perseverance does pay. You can call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)** and speak to a counsellor or parent volunteer immediately.

*"It was such a relief when I spoke with a counsellor as well as a parent volunteer who knew what I was talking about."*

Tom (Parent)

# Suggestions on what works well

## Look after yourself

This is the **most** important advice for you to remember. You may be highly stressed and anxious and it's so easy to forget about yourself when you are worried about your family. Do something nice for yourself everyday – go for a walk, meet a friend for coffee, go to a movie, have dinner out, or take a long warm bath. Feed yourself with nutritious meals, reduce your alcohol and caffeine intake, try some exercise and keep talking with others.

Set time aside for your partner and other children. Put energy back in and draw upon the strength of others. Time spent by yourself will help to soothe your nerves and may give you added insight into the situation.

## Reach out for support

Evidence suggests that drug users whose families get help and support, will often have better outcomes.

There is help out there for you. The Parent & Family Drug Support Line is a great place to start. You can talk to a professional counsellor or a trained parent volunteer who has a lived experience of a child with drug and alcohol use problems. These parent volunteers, understand and know what it is like. They can provide support and assist you with what steps to take next.

A lot of callers to the Parent & Family Drug Support Line, often say they do not know where to go, what to do and feel overwhelmed. When help was found, most wished they had accessed it sooner. They also found that speaking with other parents was just as beneficial as getting professional help.

## Try not to fix the problem

Everyone tries to do it. You want the drug use to stop. You plead, beg, argue, confront, demand, fight, order, and at times give in. At the end of the day, what every parent needs to come to terms with is that our child is using and he or she is the only one who can make the decision to stop or cut down.

*"The counsellor said to me that whilst I was at home worrying sick, John was out with his mates and having a great time. That was a turning point for me."*

Kim (Parent)

## Encourage ownership

As hard and as painful as it is, it is better for your child to take the lead regarding when they get help. You could encourage them to think about this, by asking them to think about some of the benefits of getting help and what this could do for them.

## You set the rules

The only thing you have control over is how you chose to respond. Setting very clear limits has been found to be helpful. It is suggested that you talk it through with your partner and/or other family members, and make decisions about what you are prepared to accept and what you aren't.

You will notice that many people will try and tell you what rules to put in place, but bear in mind that different rules work for different people. It depends on your family and the rules and boundaries that will work for you. Try and find common ground and negotiate around that.

*"I told her that we expected her to not use drugs in the house, and that if we found out she was, we would consider asking her to leave."*

Tim (Parent)

## Allow your children to experience the consequences of their behaviour

This is a difficult one for everyone. Drug use often brings other problems such as debts, poor health, chaotic routines, unemployment, homelessness and difficult relationships. Parents may experience the dilemma of watching their children involved in problematic drug use sink deeper and deeper into trouble.

# Suggestions on what works well

If you find you are always picking up the pieces by paying bills, giving your children money, driving them to and fro, consider making a decision to stop 'bailing' them out.

*"I realised that I had spent a fortune, possibly thousands on helping him out. I realised I had become my son's ATM."*

Simon (Parent)

*"It was hard, but I told her that I was no longer going to pay her bills or give her money."*

Lindsey (Parent)

Some parents change the way they offer support such as buying their children food or giving them smaller amounts of cash that would not be enough to contribute greatly to drug use.

*"I could not see him starve, so what I did for him was stock his pantry each week with basics. At least he had food to keep himself nourished whilst the rest of his money went up his arm. It was the only way I could survive it."*

Prue (Parent)

You need to do what is best for you and it may be a matter of trial and error. Some things work for others that may not work for you. However, hearing other people's strategies can give you ideas to try and may be really helpful.

## **Keep telling them you love them**

Sometimes it is hard to know how to respond to your children, particularly when they are abusing you or refusing to talk. The experiences of other parents show us that telling your child you love them does make a difference.

## **Keep talking with the rest of the family**

When you are very stressed, you may find yourself totally focused on the child or relative who is using. Try to consider the other people in your family. Many siblings report feeling like they've been forgotten. Talk to everyone in your family and make time for them as well as yourself.

## **Focus on the positives**

Try and think about the characteristics of your child that you love. In the face of the trauma, it is very normal to feel extreme hate and sometimes wonder if life would be better if they were not around. Most parents are horrified when they find themselves in this moment. Finding one good thing just keeps you in touch with who your child really is. Stay in touch with the good memories that you have.

## **Keep your sense of humour**

It's amazing how we can find space to laugh even when we feel dreadful. You either laugh or cry.

## **Be aware of the tendency to put your life on hold**

Keep breathing. Keep laughing. Keep talking.

## **Be strong & positive**

No matter how difficult your situation gets, looking forward to better times and holding onto hope is important. Sometimes it's very hard to remain strong and positive, but that is when speaking to others who will be understanding and supportive such as the Parent & Family Drug Support Line parents can help.

## **Remind yourself that it is their choice**

The emotional blackmail that our children can subject us to can be crippling.

# Suggestions on what works well

*"She said to me that I was the reason for her using. If I weren't such a horrible mother then she wouldn't need to use drugs. Is that true? Is it my fault? That's what she tells me."*

Jeanette (Parent)

*"My son rang me and asked me for money. He said he hadn't eaten in two days. I offered him food instead and he called me every name under the sun. Said I was trying to run him into the ground, and that I hated him and didn't care."*

Susan (Parent)

## **Try to maintain some sort of relationship with your child**

People have said that whilst they were using drugs, the one thing they were grateful for was that their parents and families stood by them and worked hard at maintaining a relationship.

## **Help them with information**

Seek out useful information, for example treatment options that you can give them. Read books, stay informed, visit libraries, watch videos and collect pamphlets. When they are ready to seek treatment or help, you can assist by having the information at hand.

Encourage them to talk to someone from the **Alcohol & Drug Support Line**. It's an excellent place to start. You may want to go and have your own counselling, even if your child does not.

Call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)** to talk about your options.

## **Support your child**

Encourage your child to stay involved with the family. If possible and if safe, invite them to attend family events, Christmas, birthdays and special meals.

## **Patience & honesty**

Be patient if they don't tell you the truth. Be honest about how you feel.

## **Involve the family in discussions & decision making**

Discussing, negotiating and agreeing on decisions is important because it indicates a united front to your child. If parents and other family members are clear about how to respond, it reinforces your position and helps your child face the responsibilities and consequences of their drug use.

## **Be assertive & calm**

Try and talk to your child calmly and assertively. State how the drug use affects you and the family. State clearly what you want to see happen and how you would like them to behave. Be very clear about what you will and will not tolerate. Involve others in the decision making because you will need support. Parent groups are wonderful for support and for helping you make tough decisions. Call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line to find out about the one closest to you.

## **If something is working - keep doing it**

When you and your family members are feeling OK and your child's behaviour is reasonable, take note of what you are doing at this time and if possible, keep doing it. Think about what works well and try to do more of it.

## **Try something different**

If your responses or actions are not getting a positive result, try something different. For example, many parents choose to stop asking their children questions about drug use and often stop talking about it altogether. See what happens when you make some changes.

## **Extended family can help**

If you can talk to other relatives who are supportive of you, they can be a valuable resource just by listening and providing other ideas.

## Suggestions on what works well

### **Talk with another parent or seek professional help**

Most people wished they had accessed help earlier, and when they did, found it very helpful to talk with other parents and family members. There are other people in the community who understand exactly what it is like and there are support groups for you. Many people remain focussed on their child receiving treatment or rehabilitation.

Regardless of whether your child wants to go or not, make an appointment for yourself. There is enough evidence to suggest that seeking counselling for yourself raises the chances of your child seeking help, contributes to a better outcome for your child when they do seek treatment and helps to reduce your stress levels.

### **Seeking your own counselling can:**

- Help reduce stress
- Help you make decisions and follow through
- Increase the chances of your child seeking treatment
- Lead to a better understanding of the treatment process
- Contribute to a better treatment outcome for your child
- Help you talk through your situation and plan the way forward.

# Different ways of coping with drug use

Most parents and families are under chronic stress when living with a family member who uses drugs. Parents, friends and other family members are at risk of serious health consequences because of the stress they experience.

The following is a list of typical coping responses. It is useful to weigh up the pros and cons of each type of response and see what works for you.

## **Being highly emotional and trying to fix the problem**

Many people find themselves pleading, begging and threatening their family member to stop.

*"I told him he had to go and seek help. He just told me to back off because I didn't understand. What don't I understand? He HAS to stop."*

(Parent)

*"I found myself pleading and begging with her each night to stop... I said that she would stop using drugs and destroying herself if she loved us."*

(Parent)

## **Searching for reasons why**

Often there are no apparent reasons for drug use and your child may not be able to give you an explanation.

## **Blaming yourself or someone else**

Blaming yourself or someone else is a perfectly natural reaction but it may be your personal way of coping rather than a genuine attempt to find the real reason – if one exists.

*"We ask ourselves a dozen times a day, what did we do wrong? The smallest happenings from years ago assume gigantic proportions as possible causes of the current situation."*

(Parent)

*"If he hadn't met up with that girlfriend of his, this would never have happened."*

(Parent)

## **Worrying about what other people might think**

This can be another cause of stress for parents. This is a natural response given that many people often judge parents and suggest that family life or upbringing may have contributed to the problem. Remember that drug use does not discriminate and can affect any family, anywhere at any time.

## **Trying to take control**

Often parents feel that if they could control their child's money and movements for example, providing a strict allowance or taking control of the car keys, that this would restrict some of their child's drug use and associated harm. For some families this may bring short-term benefits and relief. However, in other cases it may turn out to be an ineffective long-term solution if, for example, it leads to anger, violence and further relationship breakdown.

## **Withdrawing**

Sometimes it feels easier to withdraw from interacting with your child by going into a different room, leaving the house, or not talking to them. Sometimes you may do this for the sake of peace and quiet. These strategies can be useful at times but be aware that you may be risking your child feeling more alienated and disconnected from you.

## **Tolerating their behaviour**

Again, for the sake of peace parents may sometimes find it easier to tolerate some drug taking behaviour. For example, a parent might provide money even when they know it will be spent on drugs, or they may clean up the mess after a drinking session. If this is the case, not only do you risk being taken advantage of and becoming part of the drug use cycle, you may end up feeling more stressed and frustrated.



# Different ways of coping with drug use

## Including the user

Parents may continue to include their children by extending invitations to engage in family activities or to return home if they need to.

## Confronting the user

When parents are able to communicate their needs in a calm, supportive manner, this can be helpful for all concerned.

## Getting on with your life

Many parents, often through sheer exhaustion or fear of negative consequences, find it difficult to do and enjoy day-to-day activities. For example, going out for coffee, going to the movies, meeting friends or just getting some quiet time alone can feel very overwhelming. Parents may not feel up to going out, or they may have concerns about leaving the house as valuable items may be taken or property may be damaged, for instance. However, as parents, it is important to get on with your life and look after your own health. Supporting a drug user can become more stressful if you are constantly sick and under pressure.

*"I told her that I loved her, wanted her to stop using and wanted her home BUT she had to live by our rules and that meant no drugs in our home."*

Sandy (Parent)

## What works best?

It has been suggested that a **combination** of the following:

## Support

Provide support and encouragement to your child and offer time and space to talk and be honest.

## Be up front

Let your child know in a calm, non-threatening way how their drug use impacts on you.

## Look after yourself

Do things you enjoy and take care of yourself, even if the problems continue.

## What help is available for parents and families?

Help for parents is available throughout WA in a variety of ways. Counselling is provided by most drug and alcohol agencies, and in many instances it is offered free of charge.

Counselling is about providing you with the opportunity to talk about your situation in private. Counselling may even be offered by phone, particularly if you live in a regional or remote area.

A qualified counsellor can work with you and your family to develop strategies, offer support and help you make decisions. Even if your partner or other family members are not interested in attending, it may still be worth going.

Support groups are also offered by many agencies, where you can meet other family members facing the same types of issues. Qualified counsellors run some groups and other groups are facilitated by parents who have 'lived the experience'. Many of these parent and family support groups are held in comfortable, easily accessible facilities. Call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line** for more information. If your child is involved in treatment, the agency may invite you to attend counselling or a support group. You do not have to wait for this to happen. Be pro-active. Seek help for yourself. It does not have to be with the same treatment agency.

It's important for parents to seek help. Parents are important because they have their own needs when impacted by a child using drugs. If not involved in treatment or counselling, a parent may be missing out on valid support and information. We also know that when parents seek help for themselves, there is likely to be a better treatment outcome for all involved.

To find out where to go for help, call the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line**. Speak to a counsellor or a parent volunteer who has been trained to provide you with assistance and can share personal experiences and strategies.

If you are a parent who has adult children with alcohol or other drug problems, you might also have grandchildren in need of attention. Some of the issues you may be facing include:

## Fear of grandchildren being harmed or neglected

When your son or daughter is using drugs and children are involved, you may find yourself constantly worrying about the well-being and health of your grandchildren.

## Lack of access to grandchildren

If your relationship with your son or daughter is strained or volatile, you might have difficulty seeing your grandchildren regularly. This can be very stressful, particularly when you want to see them to make sure they are OK. After spending time with them, it can be equally difficult to say goodbye.

## Responses from government departments

Making contact with the Department for Child Protection and Family Support in order to discuss concerns or make a complaint regarding the welfare of children can be a very anxiety provoking and frustrating experience. It may be difficult to understand why no action is taking place, or you may feel that you have not been adequately consulted.

## Taking over the care of your grandchildren

Many grandparents find themselves taking on the unexpected role of parenting their grandchildren. This may happen because a son or daughter has died or because their drug use makes them incapable of parenting.

## Juggling relationships

Sometimes it is difficult to keep a good relationship with your adult son or daughter and care for your grandchildren at the same time. It can also put a strain on your marriage and place you under scrutiny from other family members.

## Financial and health problems

Caring for grandchildren can place you under extreme financial pressure. If you are dealing with one or more of these issues your health may suffer as a result. Try to continue to:

- Talk your concerns over with other family members. You may want to involve them in some important decision making.
- Reach out for support. Call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line and ask about grandparent support services in the community.

## Help for grandparents

- If you are having difficulty getting to see your grandchildren, try and find other ways of having a relationship with them. For example, write letters, phone, send emails, attend school carnivals and concerts, remember their birthdays etc.
- If you feel it is safe to raise concerns about your grandchildren with your son or daughter, do so calmly and firmly. Let them know specifically what you are concerned about and why. They may become angry or accusatory, but calmly remind them that all you want is for them and their children to be safe and happy.
- If you have concerns about the welfare of your grandchildren, contact your local Department for Child Protection and Family Support or Crisis Care on 9223 1111 or 1800 199 008 (country callers) and talk it over with a duty officer. If you are unsure about whether this is the right thing to do, talk 'hypothetically', for example, ask about what type of action might be taken if someone made a particular complaint.
- If or when you make a complaint, try and be as specific as possible. You may want to write down your concerns and when you observed them. If you are not happy about how your complaint has been handled, or feel misunderstood, the Department for Child Protection and Family Support have a Consumer Advocate (9222 2594 or 1800 013 311) who assists in reviewing decisions and resolving complaints. Remember that removing a child from parental care is the last resort for Department for Child Protection and Family Support – even if drugs are involved. Also remember that people who use drugs still love their children and can still be good parents.
- It is important to know that there are home visiting and/or residential services available to support drug-using parents and their children. Call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line to find out more about these services.

**For more advice, information, support and referral options please contact the Parent & Family Drug Support Line on 9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)**

# Drug induced psychosis and treatment

Sometimes when people use drugs, it can affect their mental health. A combination of lack of sleep, lack of food and the drug itself can lead to depression, anxiety, withdrawal from social contact, mood swings, hyperactivity and sometimes psychosis. A psychosis is an impairment of a person's sense of reality and can negatively affect their capacity to function emotionally and or cognitively. Symptoms of psychosis may include increasing paranoia, aggression, delusional behaviour and fear. People often make comments that someone is following them, or that people 'are out to get them'. They often act in bizarre ways and experience auditory (hear voices) and visual (see things) hallucinations.

A psychosis can be very confusing and frightening for everyone concerned.

Drug induced psychosis is a temporary state and is usually associated with excessive use of cannabis, amphetamines, methamphetamine, ecstasy or alcohol. If a person stops using the drug, the symptoms usually cease. At times however, people need to be medicated and/or hospitalised in order to manage a psychotic episode.

Many drug users are aware of some of the early signs of psychosis, but if they ignore these and continue to use drugs such as those listed above, they may start to lose contact with reality and behave in dangerous and unpredictable ways.

Some people may be more prone to developing a psychosis than others, due to having a pre-existing mental health illness, a family history of mental health illnesses or a mental health illness that has not yet been diagnosed. Drug use may trigger off a single episode of psychosis or a longer term mental health illness.

Remember people suffering from a severe psychosis are highly unpredictable and you must ensure your own and other family members' safety before you can be of any help to them.

# Drug induced psychosis and treatment

If you feel that it is an extreme situation, consider the following:

- **Keep yourself and your family safe.** Remove yourself from the house or immediate surroundings if necessary.
- **Give your child space and quiet.** This may help them calm down.
- **Try not to reason or argue with them.** These types of behaviours, particularly if done in a condescending or patronising manner, are only likely to antagonise your child.
- **If your child is threatening violence or being violent, you may need assistance.**
  - For emergencies call 000
  - For police attendance call 9222 1111 or 131 444

This is very difficult for any parent to do but you may not have a choice. Safety for yourself, other family members and your child is paramount. In these situations your child needs help and getting the police to intervene may be the first step.

- **Call the Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) if anyone is at risk of self harm or placing others at risk.**

**MHERL 1300 555 788**

**MHERL country callers 1800 552 002**

Describe the behaviour exhibited by your family member. If there is a sense of danger the Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) may have to call the police for their own or your safety. If they cannot assist you directly, they will refer you to an appropriate service or course of action.

- **Seek help from a doctor.** 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 a hospital Emergency Department.** Be aware that you may have to wait a while but it's going to be safer to wait at hospital than at home.
- **Contact a health team at:**

**Health Direct  
1800 022 222**

**or**

**CRISIS CARE  
9223 1111 or 1800 199 008**

- **Family support for mental health.** If you or your family are in need of support, contact **Mental Health Carers Arafmi (WA)** on 9427 7100 or rural freecall 1800 811 747 [www.arafmi.asn.au](http://www.arafmi.asn.au)

# The risk of overdose

## The risk of overdose

Overdose can occur from any drug and each type of drug overdose exhibits different symptoms. Many people use more than one drug. This is referred to as poly-drug use. When different drugs are used at the same time, the effect of the drugs can be increased and the symptoms can be unpredictable. An overdose can happen at any time. It is important to note that sometimes the use of a contaminated substance, particularly when it is injected, can have similar effects to an overdose.

Amphetamine or Ecstasy Overdose	Heroin Overdose	Cannabis Overdose
<p>Amphetamine-type substances including methamphetamines and ecstasy are central nervous system stimulants. When this type of substance is of high purity, or a person uses too much, they are likely to become quite hyperactive, get severe headaches, pains in the chest, heart palpitations and exhibit rapid breathing. They may become highly anxious, panicky, agitated, hot and sweaty and have spasms. They are unlikely to die from an amphetamine overdose.</p>	<p>Heroin is a central nervous system depressant which slows down a person's breathing and heart rate. If a person has not used heroin for a while, or has taken alcohol and/or benzodiazepines as well as heroin, they are at more risk of an overdose.</p> <p>If you suspect your son or daughter has overdosed on heroin or another depressant drug/s, help them stay alive by doing the following:</p>	<p>Cannabis can have combined effects of stimulant and/or depressant along with other effects. There is no evidence of any person dying from cannabis overdose; however, people can suffer from negative side effects in high doses. People can experience hallucinations, paranoia, delusional thoughts and confusion. The effects only last for a short time, but can be very frightening for the person. If your child shows signs of cannabis overdose:</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Call an Ambulance on 000 and tell the operator what you suspect.</li> <li>■ As a parent you may be able to help them calm down. Try to get them to a quiet or restful place.</li> <li>■ Stay with them and keep talking in reassuring, calm and quiet tones.</li> <li>■ Give them sips of water if needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Dial 000 for an Ambulance immediately.</li> <li>■ Apply DR ABC. Check for danger, try to get a response, lie them on their side and clear their airway, check for breathing and circulation.</li> <li>■ If they have stopped breathing, start CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation).</li> <li>■ Stay with them and continue CPR until the Ambulance arrives.</li> <li>■ Police do not attend unless there is a fatality, duty of care requirement or Ambulance staff are threatened.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ As a parent you may be able to help them calm down. Try to get them to a quiet or restful place.</li> <li>■ Give them a glass of water if needed.</li> <li>■ Talk to them when they are more coherent.</li> </ul>

# What help is available for my child?

There are many forms of help available to your child and at times, it can seem overwhelming trying to choose the best place for them to go. There are a variety of programs to select from, such as drug and alcohol counselling, in-patient detoxification, home detoxification, long-term residential rehabilitation, GP support and family counselling. Many users, when they are ready, need a range of these options starting with assessment, counselling and detoxification/withdrawal and then possibly moving on to residential rehabilitation.

The main thing to remember is that they have to want to get help before they will be admitted into any of the treatment agencies.

*"I think that any time spent in 'rehab' is worthwhile, whether that is one, two or five days because everyday they are in 'rehab' is a day that they are not using. They are learning that they can get through a day or a week without drugs."*

(Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

Many parents want their children to go into treatment. It can be very frustrating to hear from 'experts' that unless the user wants to change, you cannot force them into a program. This is really hard to accept, especially when your child may not seem to be thinking clearly or making sensible decisions for themselves. However, the reality is that forcing someone into a program in order to stop them using drugs does not work – unless they want to stop.

## Understanding change

The process people tend to go through when they change their behaviour is sometimes described as 'the stages of change'.

### Stage 1 – Pre-contemplation

When people are happily using drugs, that is, where the benefits outweigh the problems, they will have no reason to consider stopping. As a parent, you may see the problems and it might be causing extreme anxiety and chaos in your family, but unless your child sees their use as a problem, they will not consider changing. This is the stage where they haven't even begun to consider making changes.

### Stage 2 – Contemplation

After a period of use, your child might start seeing their drug use as causing a few problems. They might find they have no money and nowhere to live. They may have split up from a relationship, be experiencing increasingly poor health or feel separated from their family. At this stage, they are beginning to be aware of some of the difficulties associated with their drug use. At the same time, however, they are still enjoying some of the benefits of the drug use. Therefore, although they are starting to feel two ways about it, they continue to use. This is called the contemplation phase.



# What help is available for my child?

## Stage 3 – Ready for Action

When problems from the drugs overtake the pleasure of using, you might start seeing signs of your child wanting to change. They might ring you and ask for help, or they might see a counsellor or GP about treatment. At this point, they are preparing for action.

## Stage 4 – Action

When your child resolves to do something about their drug use, you will often find they enrol in a treatment program or come to you or someone else ready for action. They usually want to do something about their drug use at that very moment. This is called the action phase.

## Stage 5 – Relapse

If someone has changed their drug use for a period of time or gone through a treatment program, it does not automatically mean they will never use drugs again. Relapse is something that can happen at any stage. A relapse for some may be a short-lived return to drug use followed by a return to the preparing for action or the taking action stage. For others, it could mean a return to regular use which could take them back to the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage.

## Stage 6 – Maintenance

This is the stage where your child has managed to sustain the choices they've made regarding changing their drug use for a period of at least six months. It is still however, no guarantee that they have broken the cycle forever and will never use drugs again.

It is important to remember that many people trying to beat an addiction go through the stages of change described above a number of times before they learn how to successfully maintain their behaviour change. It is not an easy path, for the user or the parent. As a parent, you may want to consider where your child is on the stages of change.

# What help is available for my child?

## As a parent, what can you do?

- Your child will most likely have the motivation to change when the negative consequences of their drug use start to outweigh the positives. This is why it is so important for them to experience the negative consequences (i.e. debt, loss of friends, jobs etc).
- Seek information about the variety of treatment agencies and options. When your child is ready for change, you can support them by having the information at hand.
- Consider what behaviour you will allow in your house and when and where to draw the line. Talk it over with the rest of your family and make decisions together if possible.
- Reach out for help and support. If you share your situation with other parents in similar situations or counsellors, then you will feel more supported when it comes to making tough decisions or dealing with difficult situations.
- If your child enters treatment, enquire about family support options through that agency.

*"Support, encourage... find out about the various treatment options, but don't shove it down their throats ... have the knowledge there so if they make a decision you can guide them... they have got to want to go."*

(Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

*"If your child comes to you and says 'I need help, help me' – at least you know where the places are."*

(Parent & Family Drug Support Line, Parent Volunteer)

If you would like to talk through these options, speak to one of the counsellors or parent volunteers at the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line**.

If your child would like to look at options for themselves, then provide them with the number for the **Alcohol & Drug Support Line on 9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers)**.

## What help is available for my child?

### Remember:

- Successful detoxification or 'physical withdrawal' does not necessarily mean your child will never use again.
- It often takes people many attempts over a period of time before they are successful in changing their drug use behaviour.
- Detoxification is only one part of the process. It is best to consider detoxification as the first step and seek ongoing support as an outpatient through one of the longer-term rehabilitation centres or Community Alcohol and Drug Services. Call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line for more information.
- Relapse (using again) is a normal part of the change process. When someone uses again, a counsellor can help them learn from the experience and identify strategies to try and prevent further relapses occurring.
- Motivation is very important but can also change at any time. Be aware that your child may have periods of high motivation (from minutes, hours, days, weeks etc.) followed by times when they seem only motivated to use.
- Any time that your child seeks treatment, even if they don't follow through at the time, is a step in the right direction.

## Help for Aboriginal families

If you are worried about someone in your family who is using alcohol and drugs, perhaps you could use some information and support. Sometimes people don't get the help because they feel shame talking about alcohol and/or other drug use in the family.

Some of the feelings you may have are:



Aboriginal alcohol and drug workers, Aboriginal health workers and other health professionals are there to help you. They will not put you down. (Strong Spirit Strong Mind, Aboriginal Programs).

- If you feel you need some help, then have a yarn with someone from one of the following services:

**Parent & Family Drug Support Line**  
**9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country callers)**

Please ask for a copy of the Parent & Family Drug Support Line Information and Support Pack for Aboriginal Parents, a booklet designed specifically for Aboriginal parents and families.

**Alcohol & Drug Support Line**  
**9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country callers)**

**Aboriginal Alcohol and Drug Service**  
**9221 1411**

**Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service**  
**9421 3888**

or your local **Aboriginal Health Service**

## Help for families from other cultures

All of the information provided in this resource is likely to be relevant to you, however you may have many extra problems to deal with such as:

- Isolation
- Language difficulties
- Shame within your community
- Difficulty accessing help and getting around
- Problems with reading pamphlets and finding alcohol and drug information
- People not understanding your culture
- Feeling as though your children know more than you do.

If you suspect something is wrong with a member of your family and you believe drugs may be involved, consider the following:

- Reach out to someone in your community that you can trust. Other people might be having the same problems as you. Talking about it can help ease the burden.
- There are drug and alcohol pamphlets printed in different languages available for you to read. Call or ask someone to call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line and ask for drug and alcohol information in your language, or visit the Australian Drug Foundation's multicultural website:  
[www.druginfo.adf.org.au/home/search?searchword=CALD](http://www.druginfo.adf.org.au/home/search?searchword=CALD)
- Reach out for help at one of the many migrant resource centres. They have community workers available to support you. You can also call the Parent & Family Drug Support Line for extra support or advice about where you can go for help.
- When you reach out for help, ask if anybody speaks your language. There are many professional counsellors, health workers and general practitioners who speak languages other than English.

Call the **Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) 24 hours 13 14 50** and request support through the **Parent & Family Drug Support Line (08) 9442 5050** or the **Alcohol & Drug Support Line (08) 9442 5000**.

All costs will be met by the Parent & Family Drug Support Line or the Alcohol & Drug Support Line.

Other drug and alcohol agencies use TIS to help them support you.

## Useful website addresses

- **Alcohol & Drug Support Service** - [alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au](http://alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au)
- **School Drug Education and RoadAware** - [www.sdera.wa.edu.au](http://www.sdera.wa.edu.au)
- **Department of Health** - [www.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.health.wa.gov.au)
- **Family Drug Support Network** - [www.fds.org.au](http://www.fds.org.au)
- **Australian Drug Information Network** - [www.adin.com.au](http://www.adin.com.au)
- **Australian Drug Foundation** - [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au)
- **Mental Health Carers Arafmi** - [www.arafmi.asn.au](http://www.arafmi.asn.au)
- **Mental Health Matters** - [mentalhealthmatters2.com](http://mentalhealthmatters2.com)
- **Beyondblue - the national depression initiative** - [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- **Department of Child Protection and Family Support** - [www.dcp.wa.gov.au](http://www.dcp.wa.gov.au)

All information in this resource is correct at the time of printing.

To find the nearest and most suitable support or counselling service for you, contact the:

**Parent & Family Drug Support Line**

9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (\*country callers)

or

**Alcohol & Drug Support Line**

9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (\*country callers)

**\*Country toll free land line only. All charges to mobile will be at provider rates**



**Parent & Family Drug Support Line**  
**(08) 9442 5050 or**  
**1800 653 203 (\*country callers)**

\*Toll free landline. All mobiles will be charged at provider rates.

Email: [alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au](mailto:alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au)

Web: [alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au](http://alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au)



**Government of Western Australia**  
**Mental Health Commission**