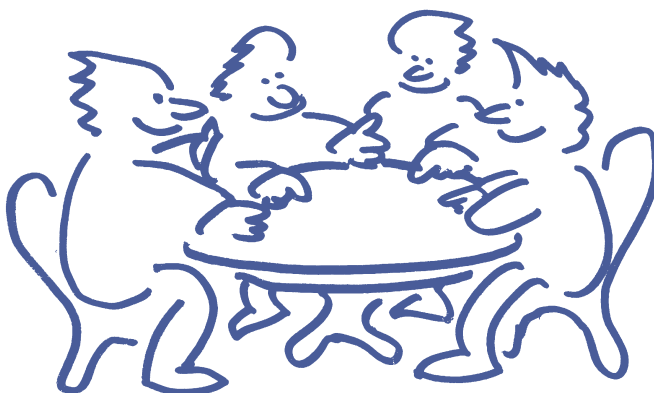




## Drug Information for Parents



February 2001



Department of Education,  
Employment and Training

# Drug Information for Parents...

## As a parent you can make a difference

Whether your child chooses to use drugs or not, he or she could be aware of the issue of drugs through the media or peers. You can support your child by talking with them about drugs and by finding out how he or she is coping with the pressures of life. This pamphlet is designed to help you to talk with your child more confidently about drugs. It provides you with accurate information and answers to questions asked by many parents. It is based on a harm minimisation philosophy.



## What is a drug?

A drug is any substance, except food and water, which when taken into the body changes the way the mind and/or body functions.

Therefore medicines, caffeine, tobacco, inhalants, alcohol, cannabis, heroin and steroids are all drugs.

## What are the main groups of drugs and what are their effects?

Drugs are often grouped according to their effect on the central nervous system.

There are three main groups of drugs:

- Depressants
- Stimulants
- Hallucinogens



# What is a drug?

## Depressants:

This term does not mean that you will feel depressed or sad after taking a drug. Depressant drugs slow down the central nervous system and the messages being sent to and from the brain. The heart rate and breathing slow down.

### Depressants include:

\***Legal** - alcohol, minor tranquilisers, inhalants (glue, petrol and spray paint), codeine such as *Panadeine*, opiates such as methadone.

**Illegal** - cannabis (marijuana, hashish, hashish oil), opiates such as heroin.



\*The legal status of drugs depends on certain factors. For example, alcohol is a legal drug but it is not legal, under most circumstances, for people under the age of eighteen to purchase.

### Mild effects can be:

- Feeling relaxed
- A sense of calm and well being
- A sense of euphoria
- Feeling more courageous

### Stronger effects can be:

- Slurred speech
- Uncoordinated movement
- Vomiting and nausea
- Unconsciousness by breathing and heart rate slowing down
- In extreme cases, death

Depressants affect concentration and coordination and may slow down the ability to respond to unexpected situations - this can impair driving. When one depressant is taken with another depressant, for example alcohol and cannabis, the effects can be intensified in unpredictable ways.

Cannabis has a higher tar content than tobacco, and may cause bronchitis, mouth, throat and lung cancer and other smoking related diseases. Cannabis can affect a person's short term memory and logical thinking.

Heroin is an opiate. Opiates are strong pain-killers and powerful depressants.

Often heroin sold on the street is not pure and complications and serious side effects can result from the purity of the heroin. Sharing needles, syringes and injecting equipment carries the risk of HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis C and B, and other infections.

# Depressants

# Drug Information for Parents...

## Stimulants:

Stimulants speed up the central nervous system and the messages going to and from the brain. Stimulants increase the heart rate, body temperature and blood pressure.

### Stimulants include:

**Legal** - nicotine (cigarettes), caffeine (coffee, cola, chocolate, slimming tablets), ephedrine (found in some cough medicine).

**Illegal** - cocaine, non-prescription amphetamines, LSD and ecstasy.



### Mild effects can be:

- Thirstiness
- Loss of appetite
- Inability to sleep
- Dilated pupils
- Talkativeness
- Restlessness

### Stronger effects can be:

- Anxiety
- Panic
- Seizures
- Headaches and stomach cramps
- Aggression
- Paranoia
- Mental confusion
- Unconsciousness

Users of stimulants can be physically run down because of lack of sleep and food.

# Stimulants

## Hallucinogens:

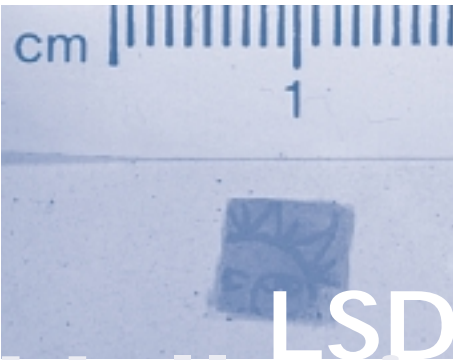
Hallucinogens affect perception. People who have taken them may see things in a distorted way. The senses can become confused especially time, sound and colour. The effects of hallucinogens vary greatly and are not easy to predict.

### Hallucinogens include:

**Illegal** - LSD, magic mushrooms, mescaline, ecstasy and marijuana (in strong doses).

### Some effects can be:

- Chills and hot flushes
- Dilation of pupils
- Loss of appetite, stomach cramps or nausea
- Increased activity, talking and laughing
- Panic and feelings of persecution (paranoia)
- Long term flash backs



# LSD Hallucinogens

# Questions parents commonly ask

## How do drugs affect people?

The effects of a drug will vary from person to person and depends on:

- **The person** - their mood, size, weight, gender, personality, health, when they last ate, expectations of the drug and what their previous drug experiences have been.
- **The drug** - the amount used, the strength, how it is used (smoked, eaten, injected) and whether the person has taken other drugs at the same time.
- **The environment** - whether the person is with trusted friends, alone, in a social setting or at home.

## What harms are associated with drug use?

**Possible harms include:**

- Harms to the body
- Harms to relationships with others - friends, family, community
- Harms to lifestyle - employment, education, accommodation
- Harms associated with breaking the law

Intoxication can cause impaired judgement and people may take risks they normally wouldn't take such as diving into a pool that is too shallow. It is important that young people are equipped to keep themselves as safe as possible.

While children may choose not to use drugs, they may still be affected by the drug use of others. A common risk is

getting into a car with someone who has been drinking alcohol.

Some drugs, especially medicines are necessary or have benefits to health. Harm can occur if these are shared with friends.

## Why do young people use drugs?

Young people use drugs for the same reasons that adults give for using drugs.

These include:

- To have fun
- To escape from and forget their problems
- To gain confidence and courage
- To remove personal responsibility for decisions
- To socialise
- To celebrate
- To experiment
- To relieve boredom
- To relax and relieve stress
- To relieve pain

Experimentation and taking risks are part of growing up and part of life for many people. Parents' own drug use can have a major influence on the drug use of their children.

## How can I tell if my child is using drugs?

It is very difficult to tell if your child is using drugs. The effects of drugs vary greatly from person to person. There are no physical or emotional changes that are specific to drug use only but if your child

# about young people and drugs...

is behaving in an unusual way over a long period of time, then there may be an issue. Remember that all of these changes can just be part of growing up. Be careful to talk with your child before jumping to conclusions about possible drug use.

## **Some warning signs include:**

- Lethargy
- Changes to eating patterns
- Extreme mood swings and explosive outbursts
- Staying out all night
- Drop in school grades
- Trouble at school
- Sudden and frequent changes of friends
- An unexplained need for money
- Having lots of money
- Valuable items missing
- Trouble with the police

## **What should I do if I find my child is using drugs?**

Consider your child's safety and the safety of others.

**Don't panic:** Over reacting will make your child less willing to talk to you and tell you exactly what has happened. Talk calmly to your child and find out what's happening.

**Get the facts:** Talk to your child and find out which drug is being taken and how often. Your child may have been experimenting with the drug and has since stopped using it.

**Show your concern:** Make it clear that you love your child but that you don't like him or her taking drugs.

**Choose the moment:** If you try to discuss your child's drug use with them when they are under the influence of a drug, or you are angry, it is likely that the discussion may turn into an argument. Wait until they are no longer under the influence of the drug and you feel calmer.

**Recognise problems:** If your child is regularly using a drug to satisfy a need or to solve a problem, then they need help and support. Don't be afraid to get professional help.

**Don't blame yourself:** If your child is using drugs, it doesn't mean that you have failed as a parent. Many young people go through difficult times or experiment with drugs no matter how caring or supportive their parents are.

## **How can I influence my child's decisions about drugs?**

Experimenting is a natural part of growing up. Many teenagers experiment with alcohol and tobacco. Some will experiment with illegal drugs also - most often marijuana.

There are some things parents can do to reduce the likelihood of their children coming to harm from drugs.

**Provide a good role model:** Children of parents who smoke and drink are more likely to smoke and drink themselves. Consider your own use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs and the message this might give your child. Discuss your own drug use and that of others in a way that encourages your child to explore and clarify their attitudes and values.

**Be informed:** Be prepared to discuss drug issues openly and honestly. If you don't know the answer to a question seek further information to provide an answer. This could be something that you and your child could do together. If you tell exaggerated stories about the dangers of drug use to try to scare your child away from drugs, they may not listen to what you have to say in the future.

**Talk and listen:** Be prepared to listen to the problems and concerns your child may have. Over reacting or trivialising your child's concerns may make them unwilling to talk to you. Communicating with your child is a two-way process.

It is important to be able to talk to your child about everyday issues. Parents who don't discuss things like music, school or sport with their child may find it difficult to discuss an emotional issue like drug use.

**Set ground rules:** Plan ahead for potentially difficult situations. It is useful to establish rules about acceptable behaviour in relation to alcohol and other drug use.

Allow your child to participate in making the rules. This gives them more responsibility for adhering to these rules. Teaching young people to negotiate can help end unresolved arguments and support positive conflict resolution.

**Get to know your child's friends and their parents:** Other parents can provide a great source of support and encouragement.

**Look for alternatives to drug use:** Parents can encourage their children to use other ways to relax or deal with difficulties.

#### Agencies to contact in this locality:

This pamphlet was developed by the Department of Education Backgrounds Project, which is funded by the Community Support Fund as part of the Victorian Government's '*Turning the Tide*' program.

The Backgrounds Project School Clusters and Auspicing Agencies are:

- Springvale/Noble Park School Cluster, managed by Wallarano Primary School, Noble Park.
- Flemington/Kensington/North Melbourne 'Intersect' Cluster, managed by Douтта Galla Community Health Services.
- Coburg/Moreland/Pascoe Vale/Upfield 'Partnership' Cluster, managed by RAFT (Rehabilitaion and Family Therapy) Inc.



Department of Education,  
Employment and Training

Victoria