

Some advice from young people

Children and young people want to talk to their parents/carers about drugs, but that can be daunting for a parent/carer.

- Take responsibility for talking to us. Don't just wait for us to ask.
- If we ask you things, always tell the truth. Don't put it off or say 'I'll tell you when you're older'. If you don't know something, be honest and say that you don't know.
- Don't try to scare us. Talk openly. We need to trust you.
- Don't be angry and try not to be embarrassed.
- Don't just threaten us or bribe us. We'd rather you talked naturally, little and often and asked us what we think.
- Don't laugh at us or gossip about what we have been talking about.
- Give us books or leaflets, but talk to us too.
- Don't expect school to tell us everything – we want to hear from our parents/carers too.

Useful contacts

Family Lives offers help and advice to parents and carers on any aspect of bringing up children.

www.familylives.org.uk

For accurate information about drugs and further support visit

www.talktofrank.com

For information on talking to children about alcohol, visit www.mentoruk.org.uk or www.drinkaware.co.uk/check-the-facts

For help in stopping smoking contact Camquit 0800 018 4304 or your local stop smoking service.

Talking to Our Children about Drugs

Support and information for primary school families

In school we aim to help children to learn to respect themselves and others and move safely from childhood, through adolescence, into adulthood. As part of this work, we deliver an ongoing programme of drug education. This programme begins as soon as children arrive in school and continues until the end of secondary school. There is more information on our programme inside this leaflet.

We are very aware that the drug education we deliver in school is only a small part of children's learning about medicines, alcohol, tobacco, household substances and illegal drugs. The majority of children's learning in this area takes place with you at home.

We hope this leaflet gives you some more information about our partnership in developing children's knowledge, skills and attitudes so that every child in our school is able to make healthy choices as they grow.

Why should parents and carers talk to their children about drugs?

- Children tell us they want their parents/carers to talk to them about alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
- If families start talking to their children about drugs early, they are less likely to get ideas that worry or confuse them and they learn that it's alright to talk about these things at home and to ask questions.
- Children's attitudes to medicine, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs are shaped by family values, culture and beliefs. It is important to encourage children to discuss these with you and to be a good role model.
- Younger children are more likely to be willing to ask questions and share their ideas with you. But, as they get older, children may be less likely to discuss their views with their parents /carers. Start talking about drugs with them at an early age and keep communication channels open by taking an interest in their views and experiences. Make it clear that their safety and wellbeing are always important to you.

What do children learn about drug education in school?

	Questions children will consider	Content areas
Age 3-5	Do I understand simple safety rules for when I am at home, at school and when I am out and about? Can I say 'No!' if I feel unsure about something and it does not feel safe or good? Can I ask for help and tell people who care for me if I am worried or upset? Who are the people who help to keep me safe? What goes on to and into my body and who puts it there? Why do people use medicines? What are the safety rules relating to medicines and who helps me with these?	Assessing risk Personal safety skills Safety Circle Safe use of medicines Medicines, pills, injections
Age 5-7	What happens when things enter the body? What are medicines and why do some people use them? What do I understand about the roles of doctors, nurses and hospitals? What can I do if I feel poorly? What are the potentially risky substances at home and at school? How can I keep safe from harm if I come across risky substances? What is it like to be persuaded?	Medicines Attitudes to health professionals Feeling ill, feeling better Risky household substances Safety rules Being persuaded
Age 7-9	What medical and legal drugs do I know about, and what are their effects? Who uses and misuses legal drugs? Why do some people need medicine and who gives it? What are the safety rules for storing medicine and other risky substances? What should I do if I find something risky, like a syringe? What do I understand about how friends and the media influence me?	Medicines and legal drugs People who use medicines and legal drugs Rules for safe storage Finding risky items Influence of friends and media
Age 9-11	What do I know about medicines, alcohol, nicotine, solvents and illegal drugs and how they affect people who use them and others? How does drug use affect the way a body or brain works? How do medicines help people with a range of illnesses? What does misusing a drug mean? What are some of the laws about drugs? What risks should I look for around substances? How do my friends influence my behaviour and decision making? How and why do companies advertise drugs? When and how should I check information I am given?	Legal and illegal drugs Effects of drug use Essential use of medicines Misuse of substances Staying safe around risky substances Influence of friends and media Reliable information First aid

How can I talk to my child about drugs?

- Read a leaflet or check facts out online together.
- Talk while you're doing something else like washing up or driving.
- Don't try to scare you child with messages like 'drugs kill you'. Talk openly and honestly about the effects of drugs.
- When you're giving your child a medicine, always make a point of reading out the dosage instructions to them, so they learn about using medicines safely.
- Listen rather than judge. Ask your child what they think.
- Answer questions and don't be afraid to say you don't know.
- If you drink alcohol, explain your decisions to them e.g. 'I'm not going to have a glass now, as I've got to drive later.'
- Have a phrase ready for awkward moments – 'That's a good question. Let's talk about it when we get home.'
- If you smoke, discuss how difficult it is to stop and why. If you wish you'd never started smoking, explain this to your children.
- Use examples of people in books, films or soaps. It's less personal and you can get your views and beliefs across without feeling personally involved.

How can I protect my child from problems with drugs later in life?

You and your family have the greatest influence on whether your children become problematic drug users. Most children will have experience of medicines and most will use them correctly in later life. Many young people will go on to try alcohol and use it sensibly as an adult. A few young people will try cigarettes, but not all will go on to become adult smokers. A small number will try illegal drugs such as cannabis, but only a very small number will try class A drugs, like heroin or cocaine. The following factors protect a child from later drug misuse.

- Strong family bonds
- Strong parental/carer monitoring with clear family rules
- Family involvement in the lives of children
- Successful school experiences
- Strong bonds within the local community and activities
- A caring trusting relationship with at least one adult.

You hold the key to all of these factors, which make the most difference to whether your children have the skills to keep themselves safe around drugs.