

## Drugs - some facts

Australia is a drug-using society. We drink alcohol or take prescription and pharmaceutical drugs for all sorts of reasons. Cigarettes are smoked by about 17 per cent of the Victorian population. To a lesser extent, we also use drugs such as marijuana, amphetamines and heroin.

### Facts about drugs

Many people don't know the facts about drugs, such as:

- In Australia, there are far more health problems and drug-related deaths from the legal drugs alcohol and tobacco than there are from illegal drugs.
- Most people who use drugs are ordinary people.
- The number of young people who experiment with legal and illegal drugs dramatically increases between the school years seven to 11.
- Drug use is often a health problem and drug users need our help and understanding.
- Very few people under 18 experiment with heroin.
- Less than two per cent of people over 14 years have ever tried heroin.

### What to do if you are offered drugs

As a society we tend to either dismiss concerns about drugs or sensationalise the danger. Neither approach is very helpful. The most important thing is to be well informed. Remember, if you are offered drugs, that:

- Legal drugs (alcohol, tobacco and prescription drugs) can be just as harmful as the illegal drugs.
- Illegal drugs often have unpredictable ingredients. You can't be sure what they contain or the amount of the actual drug that's present. This increases the risks.
- You can choose to have a good time straight.
- You don't need to feel pressured to take drugs of any kind. Make the decision for yourself not just because your friends are taking them.

If you do choose to take drugs remember:

- **Some drugs are illegal** - for example cannabis, amphetamines and ecstasy.
- **Be informed** - find out about what you are taking.
- **Take care** - use a smaller amount and don't forget some drugs have a delayed effect.
- **One at a time** - mixing drugs, especially with alcohol, can be lethal.
- **Don't use alone** - stay with your friends until the effects of the drug have 100 per cent worn off.

### How to help your children

Adolescence is a time of experimentation. As a parent, you can influence the decision your child will make about using or not using drugs. However, even 'perfect' parenting does not guarantee that young people will not experiment with drugs. If you create a supportive environment, it will help. It's a good idea to:

- Give children accurate information about drugs; often they receive incorrect information from friends.
- Talk about drugs in a relaxed and open manner.

- Stay calm if you suspect your child is using drugs. Don't panic. Discuss the matter without a fight.
- Look at your own lifestyle. If you abuse alcohol or tobacco it's hard to lecture about drug abuse.
- Negotiate and listen to your child when you set behaviour guidelines.
- Remember we all make mistakes. It is part of growing up.

## **Tobacco is the biggest killer drug**

Many young people are taking up smoking. Tobacco can cause:

- Lung cancer
- Emphysema (lung disease)
- Heart disease.

## **Binge drinking is common among young people**

Drinking increases the risk of:

- Traffic and other accidents
- Legal and money problems
- Fights and violence
- Brain damage
- Unsafe sex.

## **Marijuana causes a range of effects**

Things to remember about smoking marijuana include:

- Driving a car or operating machinery while stoned can be dangerous
- You may get respiratory diseases like bronchitis
- Smoking can cause cancer
- It can cause psychosis and memory loss
- Smoking while pregnant can harm the baby.

## **Where to get help**

- Your doctor
- Directline - alcohol and drug counselling and referral service Tel. 1800 888 236
- Your community health service
- Family Drug Help Tel. 1300 660 068 – for information and support for people concerned about a relative or friend using drugs
- Youth Support and Advocacy Service (YSAS) Tel.1800 014 446

## **Things to remember**

- Drugs can be more harmful when the people taking them don't know much about them.
- There are more deaths from the 'legal' drugs like alcohol and tobacco than there are from illegal drugs.
- Even with 'perfect' parenting some young people experiment with drugs.

**This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:**

Department of Health - Drugs and Poisons Regulation

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