

## Why do some young people use drugs?

“It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities”. This quote from J K Rowling’s book, Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets identifies an issue that all teenagers face, making choices. Some teenagers choose drugs. Drugs don’t choose teens and conscript them to a life of dependence. It is teenagers who make decisions, be they good or bad, logical or illogical, teenagers decide what they let into their bodies. We wanted to know why only some teenagers use drugs. To help us understand, we conducted a primary survey of our peers and the results proved very interesting. We discovered 5 main reasons for trying drugs.

### **Curiosity : ‘Curiosity has its own reason for existing’ – Albert Einstein**

This was the reason that 52% of our peers gave when asked why would they try drugs. Basically, they wanted to know what it was like. Of course they do. Adolescence is all about discovering the world and its possibilities. But here’s the irony. Teenagers are educated about drugs and told they can’t have them and shouldn’t try them. What is the best way to spark a teenagers curiosity ? Tell them they can’t have it. Now they really want to try them. They often have the delusion that they are invincible. They never really believe that anything bad could come of it if they only ‘try them once’, and so some of them do.

### **Belonging : Peer Pressure : ‘We need to share. To belong’ – David Gemmell.**

It is no secret how important fitting in is to teenagers. It is the desire to belong and fit in that can drive some teens to start experimenting with drugs. Our survey showed that 19% would try drugs because of peer pressure. The social learning theory describes how people learn from observing others, so if it appears that their peers are getting enjoyment as a reward for using drugs, then other teens will be tempted to do the same. Sometimes the cost of saying no or missing out seems greater than the cost of getting involved with drugs.

### **Coping : ‘Problems are not the problem, coping is the problem’. – Virginia Satir**

Teenagers face many and varied problems. Bullying, family break-ups, social exclusion, low self- esteem, exam pressure, the list seems endless. We all know that drugs aren’t good for us. But just because something isn’t good for us, doesn’t mean it can’t make us feel better. Often, just surviving ‘now’ is all that matters. Teenagers who start using drugs often start from this perspective. A teen may think ‘right now, this substance seems better for me than the situation I am in’. The problem of long term addiction in the future doesn’t matter compared to dealing with the pain of the present. The desire to escape from the situation can be very powerful and drugs can offer that escape.

**Teenage brain development : *'Brain : An apparatus with which we think we think'* – Ambrose Bierce**

Neuroscientists have been reporting for years that the teenage brain is not fully matured until the age of 25. The brain develops slowly from back to front, leaving the prefrontal cortex the last section to develop. It is the prefrontal cortex that is responsible for decision making, your conscience and the ability to see the future consequences of your current actions. This means that teenagers are prone to errors of judgement and risk-taking behaviour. Despite this clinical evidence 58% of our peers that were surveyed did not believe that there was a scientific reason why teens use drugs.

**Popular culture : *'I got mushrooms, I got acid, I got tabs and aspirin tablets'* – Enimem**

Teenagers are known to be firmly influenced by popular culture, which hugely glamourizes the idea of drug use. Music is a highly influential form of expression. Teens often idolise musicians and artists who glamourize and popularise the use of drugs or alcohol. An example is the Enimem lyric for the 1999 song 'I'm Shady'. It says 'I'm your brother when you need, some good weed to set you free. You know me, I'm your friend, when you need a minithin'. The influence that artists have is huge and, by including songs with lyrics like these could well make some teenagers decide to try drugs after all it appears to be the 'cool' thing to do.

Our research has shown us that when people turn to drugs, they focus on the presumed benefits of the changes they may provide, and not the potential harm they may do. Temptations are part and parcel of every person's life. Life is a maze of experiences and you can only absorb the true essence of life when you have experienced it to the fullest. Teenagers are an extremely vulnerable group, dealing with hormonal issues, family problems, exams and even just fitting in. Some give in to this temptation unaware of the consequences of acting on these temptations. The teenage world is full of angst, emotions and social pressures, so little wonder that some teenagers try drugs. We would like to end with a positive message to all teenagers. Believe in yourself and you can achieve unbelievable things and remember drugs can take you to hell disguised as heaven.

Bibliography

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