

A parent's guide to drugs

How do I talk to my
children about drugs?

Do I have
all the facts?

How do I know if
they are taking drugs?

Drugs. *There are answers.*





Talking about drugs

Drugs and drug use strikes at the very heart of parents' deepest concerns.

Talking with your children about drugs and drug use can be quite a challenge.

Many parents feel they don't know enough about the subject or they may think that young people will not listen to them.

Parents do make a difference

You know your children better than anyone else. You know their character, their moods, their strengths and weaknesses. So don't underestimate what you as a parent can do. Research shows that parents can influence both the views and behaviour of their children towards drug use.

Encourage communications

Because you know your children, you'll know when is a good time to bring up the subject, and when it's best to leave it for another time. Drugs should be treated like any other subject you discuss with your children.

Encourage your children to talk to you, and above all, listen to what they have to say.



Before you talk with them, think about what you want to say. **Most importantly, inform yourself about the facts**, so that you can have a balanced discussion. Our fears about drugs are often reinforced by sensational media coverage or by misinformation and myths. Many 'new' and 'dangerous' drugs we hear about are often just new slang names for drugs already around.

Once children reach a certain age, scare tactics don't work anymore. You'll need balanced information, and remember - your children may not know as much about drugs as you think they do.

What else can you do?

You can help your child develop a sensible attitude towards drugs, partly by setting an example yourself.

- Know where your children are, who they are with and how much money they have with them when they go out.
- Get to know their friends.
- Set reasonable limits about when they can go out and when they should be home.
- Encourage children to get involved in healthy activities such as sports, hobbies or youth organisations.



Why do young people use drugs?

Typical reasons why young people may experiment with drugs include curiosity, peer influence or a desire to escape boredom or worries. They may believe it's a fun or fashionable thing to do, or simply because they enjoy the effect the drug has on them.

Possible signs of drug taking

Often parents ask how can they tell if a young person is using drugs. Lists of 'signs and symptoms' need to be approached with caution, as many of the possible signs may well have other causes.

- Sudden changes in mood
- Loss of appetite
- Unusual tiredness/falling asleep during the day
- Lack of interest in schoolwork, sports, hobbies
- Change in friends and people they hang out with
- Unexplained disappearance of money or belongings from home
- Telephone calls that frighten the young person
- Physical signs, such as unusual spots or sores on arms or around the nose and mouth

If you discover your child is using drugs, don't panic. Find out the details of their drug taking - what they've been taking, for how long, and why. A trained professional can help you assess the situation and decide what action is necessary.

Drugs education is not just your job - schools and the wider community also have a role to play. Find out what your children are being taught about drugs in school. If the school has a drugs policy, find out what it says. Education works better when everyone is giving the same messages.



What to do in an emergency

If you find a young person drowsy or unconscious, it's important you know what to do.


- Firstly, stay calm
- Dial 999 or 112 and ask for an ambulance
- Ensure the person's airway is clear
- Turn them on their side and try not to leave them alone (take care when turning to avoid possible contact with needles or sharp objects)
- Give any powders, tablets, etc that you find to the ambulance personnel

Where to go for more information/help

A free informational booklet on drugs is available through the National Drugs Awareness campaign by ringing **1850 719 819** or by logging onto **www.drugsinfo.ie**.

The Health Service Executive (HSE) has staff trained in drugs education, counselling and treatment that can be contacted through your local HSE Health Area.

Other useful contacts for information and support include your local family doctor, pharmacist, community Garda, Regional Drugs Task Force, Local Drugs Task Force or community drugs awareness group.

Drugs. *There are answers.* 

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www.drugsinfo.ie



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