Putting someone in the recovery position

If a person is unconscious, or non-responsive but breathing, they should be placed in the recovery position while waiting for help to arrive (see Helping someone who has taken an illegal drug). If they are left lying on their back they could suffocate on their vomit or their tongue could block their airway. Putting someone in the recovery position will help to keep the airways open.

To place someone in the recovery position:

1. Kneel beside the person.

2. Straighten their arms and legs.

3. Fold the arm closest to you over their chest.

4. Place the other arm at a right angle to their body.
5. Get the leg closest to you and bend the knee.

6. While supporting the person’s head and neck, gently take the bent knee closest to you and very gently roll the person away from you. Adjust the upper leg, so both the hip and knee are bent at right angles. Ensure the person is steady and cannot roll.

7. Tilt the head back and make sure the airways are clear and open

Find out more about how to help someone who has taken an illegal drug.

Evidence Base
This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the NHMRC Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use, National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre, UNSW and the National Drug Research Institute, Curtin University. See Teacher booklet, Parent Booklet or Student Booklet for more information.