Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
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Factsheet

Why do young people use drugs and alcohol?



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General)

Tags: drug use motives

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Why do young people use drugs?

An insight into the pressures young people face can give parents and teachers an understanding of the reasons young people may use drugs and alcohol. This can help in responding in a constructive way. Below are some of the reasons young people give for using drugs and alcohol and ideas for starting conversations with them.

"Someone had some and I just thought I'd try it"

- Ask if they knew what they were taking and discuss the effects of that particular drug.
- Ask whether it was what they expected, and talk about the risks of continued use.
- Try and find out if they felt pressured, and if so, discuss ways to handle similar situations in the future.

"I always wanted to try that stuff"

- Ask what made them want to try that particular drug, and what they expected from it.
- If they are happy to talk, you could discuss whether they have tried other drugs, and if so, why.

"All my friends were doing it so I thought why not?"

- Let them know most young people don't use drugs and alcohol. You could refer to the statistics on this page here to highlight that by not using drugs or alcohol, they are part of the majority.
- Ask why they thought their friends used the drug.
- It's useful to discuss the importance of being able to make their own choices, even if these choices are different from those of their friends.

"It made me feel really good"

- Find out how they have been feeling in general, as this may be a good time to offer help. Find out if there is anything else going on, or if they want to talk about another issue.
- Talk about less risky and healthier ways of feeling good.

"All my problems from school, at home and in life just went away"

- Let them know that you'd like to talk about any problems and discuss how to make things better.
- Discuss whether the problems returned after the effects of the drug wore off and talk about how using only makes the problems disappear for a while.
- Make it clear that you want to work together to find a better way of solving their problems.

"It gave me more confidence"

- Let them know that they don't need drugs to be more confident.
- Share similar experiences where you found it difficult in social situations and explain things you did to gain more confidence.
- Consider ways in which you can help improve their confidence and self-esteem.

"I don't want to talk about it"

- If they don't want to talk about it, offer to help them find someone else to talk to.
- Reassure them that what you want is what is best for them and understand if they would prefer to speak to someone else outside of the situation.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University.

See Teacher Booklet and Parent Booklet for more information.

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