Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Factsheet

How to help a friend or family member with their alcohol or other drug use



Evidence ratings:

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

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Drugs (General)

Tags: effective communication

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Concerned about a friend or family member?

Are you worried about a friend or someone you know who is using drugs? Here are some tips about how to support them and talk to them about it:

- Gather information about the drug you think your friend may be taking.
- Have a clear idea of what it is that worries you about them taking drugs.
- Choose a time to talk where you will have some privacy and won't be interrupted.
- Be prepared for a negative reaction. Your friend or family member might not see their drug use as a problem.
- Try to stay calm and reasonable. Don't let it turn into an argument.
- Don't be judgemental or tell them what to do. If you start lecturing them, there's a good chance they will stop listening.
- Ask about their drug use; don't make assumptions about what they are doing or taking.
- Don't focus on the reasons they are using drugs — this can mean you get side tracked from the main issues that concern you.
- Use statements including "I" as this doesn't put the blame on them. So instead of saying "You make me feel worried when you use drugs" say something like "I feel worried about your drug use".

If you think someone is in serious danger because of drugs, let someone such as a parent, elder or trusted adult know.

- Let your friend know you care about them and remind them of their good qualities. People are more likely to listen and take advice on board if they feel valued and respected.
- Be trustworthy and supportive so that your friend knows that they can rely on you and that they're in a safe space.
- Remind them that we are all human and that we all have problems so that they don't feel alone.
- Let them know that change is possible but it may take time. Don't try to set deadlines for them as they may be less ready to change when there is time pressure.
- If your friend does not want to change, encourage them to learn how to reduce their risk of harm. Let them know you're around to talk if they'd like to.

Getting help

There are a number people that can offer advice and support when a young person is going through a tough time. These include:

- A parent, elder or teacher
- School Counsellor
- GP or health worker
- Youth worker
- Psychologist.

See Where to get help for a list of services to help people of all ages with any drug or alcohol issues.

It is important to encourage your friend to talk about the problems, rather than ignoring them in the hope they'll go away. Running into problems at home or school is very common, and the people listed above will be able to help.

You can watch the following video to find out more about what it is like to see a psychologist, what to expect, and how they can help.

- Watch 'what to expect when you see a psychologist'

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 NSW and the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University. SeeStudent booklet for more information.

© 2026 Positive Choices | Built by Netfront