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

Factsheet

Making choices

Evidence ratings:

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

Year: Year 5–6, Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General), Electronic Cigarettes/Vaping, Tobacco

Tags:

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Making your own choice

There is no single reason why people use drugs and alcohol. Usually, several things act in combination. Influences include:

- To fit in/feel part of a group
- To forget problems
- To escape reality
- To loosen up
- To be rebellious
- Out of curiosity
- Out of boredom
- To feel more sociable
- To try and have fun and feel happy
- A belief that everyone else is doing it

Although it varies from person to person, situations where you have to disagree with others or refuse something can sometimes feel awkward and difficult to handle.

It may help to know that by not taking drugs you are in the majority. Most young people in Australia do not use illegal drugs.

Here are a few options to help you deal with situations where you may be inclined or pressured to use drugs and alcohol:

- Option 1: Avoid situations
- Option 2: Give a reason
- Option 3: Walk away
- Option 4: Be assertive
- Option 5: Be a 'broken record'

Option 1: Avoid situations

If you don't think you will be able to resist the offer or pressure to take drugs and alcohol then it may be best to avoid that situation or group of people altogether. Try to hang out with people who share similar interests and do not use drugs and alcohol. Good friends should respect your decision not to use drugs and alcohol. Getting involved in a new activity and meeting some new people can help.

Option 2: Give a reason

As the title implies, this involves the person giving a reason to get out of what they don't want to do. For example:

- ***"No thanks, my parents are picking me up soon"***
- ***"Last time I had it, I reacted really badly"***
- ***"I've got to go soon"***
- ***"I can't take any tonight; I'm on medication"***
- ***"No thanks, I will stay sober and keep an eye out to make sure everyone else is safe".***

Option 3: Walk away

If a person offers you drugs, you can simply make your excuses and go. You can leave by saying: "I need to go to the bathroom" or "Is that Angela over there? I need to catch up; I haven't seen her in ages".

Option 4: Be assertive

Assertive communication involves a person clearly stating their needs, wants and feelings whilst still being respectful of others. Learning to be assertive takes practice, so don't worry if it doesn't come naturally.

Assertive communication includes three steps:

1. **Stating your answer;**
2. **Giving your reason;**
3. **Showing understanding.**

The following is an example of assertive communication:

Tom: *Just have one pill, your parents won't know.*

Katie: *No thanks, I don't want to risk it. They probably won't find out but if they do I'll be grounded for life.*

Showing this understanding makes it very difficult for people to keep trying to exert pressure and most people will stop. There will still be the odd person who will keep trying, but most people will stop.
If you're comfortable with your decision not to use drugs, that will come across in your body language.

Usually people will see that it's a waste of their time and will drop the subject pretty quickly. This can be achieved by:

- Keeping a clear firm voice, speaking clearly and deliberately;
- Maintaining eye contact;
- Facing the person with your body so that you do not look like you are hiding;
- Having a facial expression that says what you mean.

Option 5: Be a 'broken record'

This just involves continually saying "no" in the politest possible way. You just say it over and over again and never change your tune. An example is provided below:

Sam: Come with me tonight.

Jess: No thanks, I don't really want to go to a club.

Sam: Just this once.

Jess: No thanks, not even this once.

Sam: But you're normally such fun.

Jess: Not tonight. No thanks.

Sam: Go on, you're my best friend.

Jess: Yeah, but no thanks, I don't feel like going tonight.

Personal stories

"I experimented with ice once. I was 18 and at a party. A pretty girl wanted me to try it with her and I said yes. I tried it and had the worst night of my life. I felt scratchy and wide awake. I hated myself for trying it."

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 Student booklet for more information.

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