

# Drugs and Alcohol

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A drug is something a person can take that affects their mind and/or their body. Many drugs are useful as medicines, but drugs can also be harmful if used in the wrong way. Many drugs are controlled by the law for this reason. They include:

- drugs a doctor might give as a prescription if someone is ill, but which could be very harmful if used in the wrong way
- drugs which are illegal to have, sell or give to somebody
- drugs that are found in everyday things. For this reason those things can only be bought by people over a certain age
- drugs which can only be bought in a controlled way - for example by people over a certain age. Alcohol is one of these - as with other drugs the consequences of using it can be very difficult to deal with.

The effects of taking any kind of drug can be hard to predict - you can see more information about the effects drugs and alcohol can have below.

### **Alcohol - the risks**

Alcohol is a drug. Like any drug, it is not risk free. The risks of drinking can include:

- Making bad decisions - alcohol affects your ability to make decisions and often makes you overconfident. That can mean that you put yourself in unwanted, dangerous or illegal situations. People sometimes make decisions when they are drunk that they find very hard to live with when they are sober again, or which get them in trouble with the law
- Health problems - drinking heavily can kill you, for example through alcohol poisoning, or choking on your own sick - it can also cause long-term damage to your body and mind. Remember, it is possible to become dependent on or addicted to alcohol. Being addicted to alcohol (meaning you feel ill if you don't drink every day) is serious - if this happens, you should get help as soon as you can. People close to you, like friends, family or carers, are often the first people to suffer because of these kind of problems. It can be very difficult to be with someone who is affected by alcohol, particularly if they drink often and heavily.

## **Drugs - the risks**

Using illegal drugs can have a number of risks for you.

These include:

- Risks to your health - some very serious. These are not just risks to your body, but often to your mind as well. See our drugs information pages for more on what these risks can be
- Getting in trouble with the law - the penalties for being found with drugs can be tough. They can be even tougher if you have illegal drugs because you are going to give or sell them to somebody else. Buying and using drugs can put you in touch with people who commit very serious crimes, putting you at even more risk

**Remember** - although cannabis has been reclassified, it is still against the law to have cannabis or supply it to someone else. You can still get a criminal record for this

- Addiction or dependency - if you use an addictive drug, you could become addicted. This means that if you stop using the drug suddenly, or can't get it, you start to feel very ill. It can be very difficult to break out of this, and it can lead to more crime, like stealing to raise money for buying drugs

Not all drugs are addictive, but some people become dependent on a drug - meaning that they feel they can't cope without it, and get bad effects if they stop using it. For example, some people find it very hard to stop using cannabis. You can find more information on our drugs information pages.

people close to you can be badly affected, like friends, family or carers. It can be very difficult to be with someone who is affected by drugs.

## **If you are offered drugs or alcohol**

What to do if this happens is your decision, but you should remember these important things:

- You have the right to make your own decisions - nobody should pressure you into doing anything you do not want to.
- If a drug is illegal or controlled by the law in a certain way, there are reasons why - the law is there to protect you from people or things that could harm you.
- If you have or deal drugs, the police can become involved - you can read more about what the consequences of that could be for you - they could be extremely serious and long-lasting. The penalties for dealing can be heavier.
- Many young people who are hurt or get in trouble with the police have been drinking alcohol - it is often linked to accidents, crime and anti-social behaviour

- Although drugs can have effects people enjoy, all drugs have risks - even ones that are legal in some situations (like alcohol or tobacco). Some drugs can put your health or even your life in danger, so make sure that you understand what the risks are - see our main drugs information pages.

### **The dangers of drug running**

A small but significant number of adult drug dealers employ young people to act on their behalf, as drug 'runners' or lookouts, to sell drugs.

Young people who get involved in this crime put themselves, their families and friends at risk of violence (sometimes extreme violence), robbery, and intimidation by both drug dealers and drug users.

Do you have any information about drug dealers who may be getting young people involved in drug running? If so, call the Gloucestershire Crimestoppers charity on **0800 555 111**. Any information is passed on to the police anonymously.