

SAFEGUARDING ADOLESCENTS

STRATEGY GUIDE

Theme: Drugs and Alcohol

Introduction

Substance misuse is a complex issue that is defined as the continued misuse of any mind-altering substance that can affect a person's:

- physical and/or mental health,
- education, training, or employment,
- relationships with family and friends,
- and potentially result in antisocial or offending behaviours.

Illegal drugs, alcohol, drugs sold as psychoactive substances (previously known as legal highs), illicit prescription drugs and volatile substances can all be misused. Whilst the number of children with a serious substance misuse problem is relatively small, it is important to note that someone's substance misuse can impact on everybody around them.



There are many reasons young people become involved in the use of substances, ranging from curiosity, peer acceptance or peer pressure, to self-medicating and dealing with trauma, suppressed feelings or as a coping strategy. Some children consider their use of substances as experimental or recreational, whereas others will become problematic or dependent users of substances.

What is the impact on safeguarding adolescents?

The use of substances amongst children has become somewhat normalised in recent years – however, most children fail to see the context in which their use takes place and the risks that come with it. The misuse of substances can be linked to multiple safeguarding issues, for example:

- Becoming involved in criminal activity to fund use, such as shoplifting, criminal and/or sexual exploitation in exchange for substances or money.

- Being involved in the supply of substances.
- Being a victim or perpetrator of domestic abuse.
- Overdosing.
- Becoming suicidal after use.
- Being physically or sexually assaulted.

Common signs and symptoms of substance abuse

Below is a list of some common signs and symptoms of substance use. It is important to note that many of these may simply be normal signs of adolescence or due to some other cause, rather than drug use, so further investigation is vital.

The common signs and symptoms of substance use are:

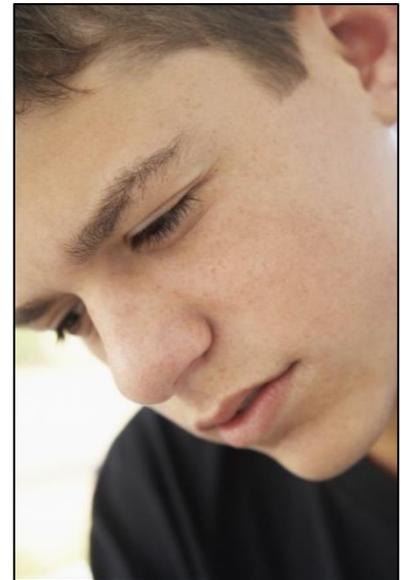
- Marked and uncharacteristic mood swings, aggression, and apathetic behaviour.
- Truancy and lateness for school, college, work etc.
- Deterioration in personal hygiene and dress.
- Covering suspicious behaviour with lying, being vague etc.
- Unusual conflict with authority figures.
- Sudden and marked change of habits, loss of purpose in life, lacking in motivation or goals.
- Excessive borrowing of money.
- Stealing from family, friends, school, shops, work etc.
- Selling of own property with little or nothing to show for it.
- Furtive telephone calls and use of drug slang.
- Many short visits from new or old friends and many short excursions away from home.
- Wearing dark glasses, even in dull weather.
- Short-term memory loss and deterioration in performance.
- Loss of concentration and loss of co-ordination.
- Poor appetite and weight loss or eating binges.
- Suffering a succession of colds and episodes of flu which may persist for an unusually long length of time.
- Depression, shyness and poor self-image.
- Spending time away from home, usually overnight.
- Excessive sleeping, usually after time away from home.
- Drunken behaviour and slurred speech.

Important: Many of the above may simply be normal signs of adolescence or due to some other cause rather than drug use. It is wise to make further investigations.

What to do if a child tells you they are using substances

If a child tells you that they are using substances, there are some key things for professionals to remember:

- Do not panic!
- It is important to reassure the young person that they have done well to confide in you.
- Try not to let your own personal feelings about drugs or alcohol form part of your conversation.
- Tell the young person that there are services that can help them.
- Provide some brief advice to the young person to reduce risks, even if that means looking through websites together (see available resources below).
- Do not feel you need to have all the answers immediately, but instead take the time to get the correct information.



Additional Resources and Information

National

[Talk to Frank](#) - Find out everything you need to know about drugs, their effects, and the law. *Talk to Frank* for facts, support and advice on drugs and alcohol today. The website has an A-Z on drugs which uses slang or street names so is a good resource if you do not know about a substance.

[KFX](#) - This is a drug consultancy initiative run by Kevin Flemen. It seeks to balance a large amount of common sense with up-to-date harm reduction and drug policy. The site is a great resource for professionals.

[Young Minds drugs and alcohol](#) - Information on how drug and alcohol use can affect mental health.

[Young Minds](#) – A parent's guide to supporting a child with drugs and alcohol.

[Adfam](#) - Information and support for the families of drug and alcohol users.

[Alateen](#) - For teenage relatives and friends of alcoholics. Part of Al-Anon.

[Al-Anon](#) - Family Groups are for the families and friends of alcoholics who share their experience, strength and hope in order to solve common problems.

[Parent Support Link](#) - Aims to provide a 24-hour service to callers seeking either information about illegal substances and their effects, or as a listening ear to people who find themselves affected by another person's drink or drug use.

[Nacoa](#) - Provides information, advice and support for anyone affected by a parent's drinking.

[Drinkaware](#) - Provides independent alcohol advice, information and tools to help people make better choices about their drinking.

[Mind](#) - Explains the mental health effects of recreational drugs, including the use of recreational drugs when already presenting with a mental health problem. Provides further details on where to find support.

[Drug wise](#) - Information on the reasons why young people take drugs.

[Release](#) - In-depth descriptions, pharmacology, history, harm reduction and the law on over 50 drugs. Also includes harm reduction information.

[Re-solv](#) - A UK charity providing support and advice to anyone affected by solvent abuse. Includes free information and FAQs about solvent abuse issues.

Local

[Hampshire constabulary](#) - Resource pack on county lines.

Local young people's substance misuse services

Southampton City

[DASH \(Drugs, Alcohol Support and Health\)](#) – This is a service for young people under the age of 25 living in Southampton City who would like support with their drugs and/or alcohol use.

Tel: 02380 224 224

Email: enquiries@nolimitshelp.org.uk

Portsmouth City

[The Drug and Alcohol Support Service \(DASS\)](#) - Works with young people under 19 in Portsmouth who are using substances.

Call or text: 07951 497898 or 07557 753131

Email: dass@secure.portsmouthcc.gov.uk

Hampshire (excluding Portsmouth and Southampton cities and IOW)

[Catch22 Hampshire 24/7](#) - A county-wide specialist treatment service offering targeted, specialist, and family support for children and young people affected by substance misuse. They offer free and confidential advice and support for young people aged up to 25.

Tel: 08005999591

Email: 247hants@catch-22.org.uk

[Inclusion Recovery Hampshire](#) - Supporting those affected by drugs and alcohol in Hampshire.

Tel: 03001240103

Isle of Wight

[#InclusionInspire](#) - A free and confidential service for all children and young people aged 24 and under.

Tel: 01983 526654

Email: inclusion.iow@nhs.net

Local support for parents/carers

[Parent Support Link](#) - Aims to provide a 24-hour service to callers seeking either information about illegal substances and their effects, or as a listening ear to people who find themselves affected by another person's drink or drug use.

Tel: 02380 399764

Email: admin@pslcharity.org.uk

Films and resources

[BBC bitesize](#) - Drugs and alcohol. Includes 40 classroom videos.

[Britain's teenage drug runners](#) - BBC Three documentary exploring how gang members use teenage drug runners to sell large amounts of crack and heroin miles away from home.