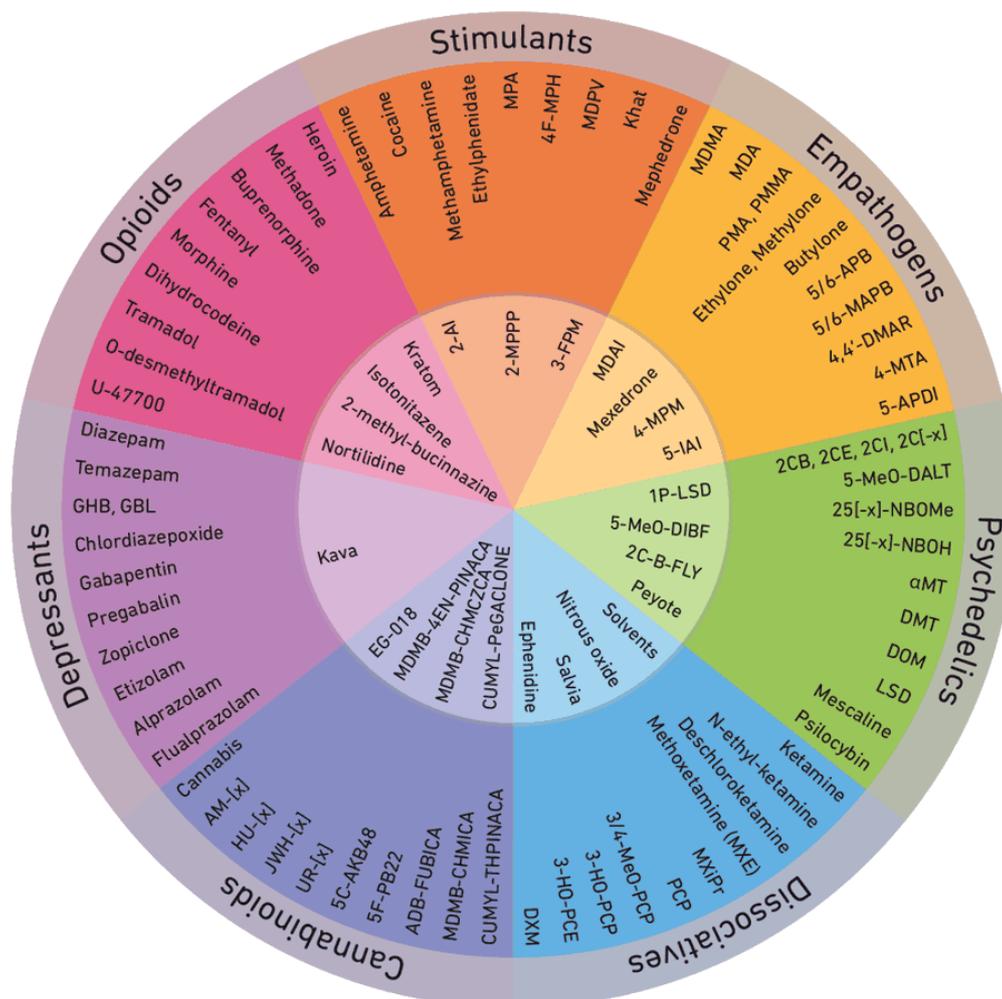


Surrey Young People's Substance Misuse Service

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SUBSTANCE MISUSE AND COVID19 - STAYING SAFE

The current global COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for people around the world. Some people may have noticed their drug and/or alcohol (substance) use increasing, some may be finding it harder not to use substances and some people may be concerned about someone they know that is using substances. The way that people communicate and reach out for social support has changed as a result of spending more time apart; however, support is still available, and it is okay to speak to someone if you are concerned about your own or someone else's substance misuse. This leaflet is for young people, parents and professionals affected by substance misuse who would like to find out more about how they can keep themselves and other people safe during these unprecedented times





Overdose -

An overdose happens when you take too much of a substance and overwhelms your body which makes it shut down. **If you think that you or someone you know may have overdosed, contact 999 or go straight to A&E immediately. The quicker you do this, the greater the chance of survival.**



Mixing Substances -

Some people choose to mix substances, particularly with alcohol - this significantly increases the potential harm that could be caused and can carry a high risk of overdose.



Relationships -

Many substances affect the part of your brain that is responsible for self-control, decision-making and logical reasoning; they can cause people to act and behave in a way that they would not normally do. People using substances may experience extreme mood swings and can be unpredictable. This can have a negative impact on family, friends and the wider community, and can result in a breakdown in relationships. When faced with a young person behaving this way, it is not always easy to remember that it is the substance and not the young person that you are seeing.



The Unknown -

You never truly know what is in the substance you are taking... even alcohol contains many chemicals that most of us have never heard of. People often refer to taking substances as a 'Russian Roulette' and unless you are a chemist with a testing lab, you never know what is in the drug and how your body is going to react to it.

Just because you have taken a drug before, for example cannabis, and never experienced any negative effects, does not guarantee that you will have a positive experience every time

Tips to keep you safe and reduce the harm

- 1.** Talk to a trusted adult - if you are struggling with substances or know someone who is. This could be a parent, GP, friend, mental health professional or teacher. They may be able to provide you with support and signpost you to services that can help.
- 2.** Go straight to A&E or call 999 and ask for ambulance if you start to feel unwell or a friend appears unwell as a result of taking a substance. Some people are worried about seeking help when things go wrong, however it is important to remember that health professionals are there to help you.
- 3.** If you are using substances, keep a diary of how much you are using. This could be on your mobile phone, on a piece of paper or on a computer. Knowing what you are using, how much and how often, can be helpful if you want to make changes to your substance use.
- 4.** Do not consume or mix more than one substance at a time. Some combinations can be harmful to your physical and mental health and increase the risk of overdose, which can be fatal.
- 5.** If you are going to use a substance, whether drugs or alcohol, start by taking a small amount and don't be tempted to take it all in one go. You cannot take a substance out of your body once it is in there, and if you are going to have a bad reaction it will last longer if you have taken a large amount.
- 6.** Make sure that you are in a safe place if you are going to use substances. Some questions to ask yourself include: What are you using? Where are you? Who are you with and how are you feeling? All these factors affect the experience you are going to have. Be with people that you trust, then if the worst happens and something goes wrong, they can share information with a health professional, such as a paramedic, and this could save someone's life.
- 7.** Substances can have a negative impact on your immune system which can reduce its ability to fight off bacteria and viruses. We all need our immune systems to be working at their best to keep us healthy during this pandemic, so try to keep your use to a minimum and make sure you are taking care of yourself, for example eating well and getting regular exercise.
- 8.** The best way to keep safe is not to use substances at all. COVID-19 can survive on surfaces such as fabric, plastic and other materials that may be used to keep substances in, for example small plastic bags. If you are buying drugs/alcohol, sharing equipment such as a lighter, or coming into any contact with others then you always need to remember to wash your hands as soon as possible and carry a hand sanitiser.

Tips for parents/guardians and teachers

- 1.** According to the 'Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use among Young People in England' survey (2018) of pupils in secondary school in years 7-11, 24% of pupils reported that they had ever used substances and 9% had reported taking substances in the last month. Parents and teachers can be some of the most influential people in a young person's life, and there are things that you can do to help and support. Here are a few suggestions:
- 2.** Educate and inform young people to know about the risks and effects of substances. The FRANK website is an excellent resource.
- 3.** Use a harm reduction approach – Some young people will choose to use substances despite your best efforts to intervene. It is therefore a good idea to let young people know ways that they can reduce their risk of harm. For example, not to mix substances, taking a small amount as opposed to a larger dose, etc.
- 4.** Encouraging young people to stay safe – Exploring ways with the young person that they can keep themselves safe if they are going to choose to use substances. For example, when your young person is going out, have they got their phone charged? Do they have credit if not on a contract? Do they know who to call if they get into any sort of danger/ trouble? Who are they going to be with? Where are they going to be? Supporting your young person to think about the potential risks and how they might respond if something happens, will help to keep them safe.
- 5.** Be ready to listen – let the young person know that you are there for them and will not judge them, this will help to encourage them to be more open with you. Wherever possible encourage communication and try to avoid confrontation; ask young people to explain why they are using substances, what does it feel like, etc.
- 6.** When supporting the young person, be aware of the balance between supporting and 'enabling' them to use substances – For example if they ask you for money to go and see a film and you think they will use the money to buy drugs or alcohol, you could book the cinema ticket on line.
- 7.** Agree and set boundaries with the young person – Young people may be more responsive if they are given some level of responsibility with this. You can do this by asking the young person what they think that they can do to help reduce or abstain from using substances and making an agreement around this.
- 8.** Try to be positive – This is not always easy... As parents/adults we can understandably get caught up focusing on the negatives, particularly when the young person's behaviour is challenging and impacting on themselves and others around them. Remember to look for any positives and reinforce these with rewards such as a verbal praise, treats and sharing a favourite meal or movie together. A small achievement for the young person, may be having a substance free day, seeking support, achieving a personal goal or sticking to a boundary.

Catch22 Surrey Young People's Substance Misuse Service

is a county-wide specialist treatment service, offering; one-to-one support to young people and their families, a 24 hour help line, counselling and pharmacological support, as part of a tailored recovery approach for young people aged 11 to 25-years -old, successfully delivering positive outcome for the young people we work with.

“

I learned so much about myself through having the support with Catch22. My worker and I talked about what I have been going through, he listened to me and never judged me; it was a safe place for me to really talk

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24/7 Helpline: 0800 622 662

Tel: 01372 832905

Email: ypsm@catch-22.org.uk

Website: www.catch-22.org.uk/services/surrey-young-peoples-substance-misuse-service/

Drug information for Young People: www.talktofrank.com