

# Drug Use **FACT** or **FICTION**

What is the truth about young people and the use of drugs? If you believed everything on TV and in newspapers then "all kids are turning in to junkies and will end up dead". However many young people see things differently, they enjoy using drugs and think that their parents exaggerate the dangers.

There is a lot of misinformation and from this many myths about taking drugs are created. It is important to have **accurate information** about drugs, their effects and why young people take them. If you and your parents need to talk then you should be honest with each other.

## The main drugs used are:

**Cannabis** - by far the most widely used illegal drug

**LSD, Poppers, Ecstasy, Amphetamines, Solvents, Magic Mushrooms & Cocaine** - All are used by a sizable minority

**Heroin & Rock Cocaine** - Used only by a small minority

## Myths

**It's a new thing** - No it's not. There has been drug use throughout history, there are numerous examples of previous drug scares & panics.

**They're all at it** - Not every young person tries drugs and many who do use them do so only occasionally. Although plenty of young people have tried drugs, it's important to keep it in perspective.

**They're all going to die** - Most who try drugs will not come to any serious harm. Many will either dabble occasionally, or use more frequently -but carefully, much like adults who limit their drinking. Not everyone who drinks dies of alcohol poisoning.

**It only happens in deprived inner city areas** - Drug use is not just in inner city deprived areas, it is also common in middle class suburbs. Young people & drugs travel easily.

**Boys use more than girls** - This used to be the case, however, recent surveys have shown girls are catching up fast. This may be happening because girls mature quicker than boys and tend to mix with older boys. It may also have something to do with the fact that girls can more easily get in to pubs & clubs where drugs may be available and used.

**There is something wrong with young people who use drugs** - Drug use is a very normal thing for many young people today. This doesn't mean that they have something wrong with them. They may see drug use as something fun or a way of feeling good and reducing any inhibitions they may have on a night out. It is not easy to say why they use drugs, it could be for all sorts of different reasons and those reasons will vary from person to person.

**They all do it for the same reasons** - A young person who dabbles or uses occasionally will have very different reasons to someone who uses regularly. Some young people who use regularly may do so because of emotional or social problems they face. They will use drugs as a means of escape from what they see as a cruel world rather than just to have a good time. Drugs are used in different ways and for many different reasons.

**They do it because they are bored** - It's not as simple as that. Lots of young people who lead active lives use drugs.

**They do it because of peer pressure** - They may be encouraged to do by friends or to fit in, but there is also a lot of pressure not to take drugs.

**They do it because they mix with the wrong sort** - It's often thought the young people get involved with "the wrong sort", but who are they? It is easy to blame someone else rather than realising that a lot of young people freely choose to use drugs.

**It's easy to tell if someone is using drugs** - This is the same as saying it's easy to tell if someone's had a drink. We all have specific ideas of what drug users look like, but most young people who use drugs don't fit the stereotype

**Dealers give them free drugs to get hooked** - The truth is that most young people get their drugs from friends, older brothers/sisters and small time dealers/users rather than from big time drug dealers

**Nearly all drugs are imported** - This is true of drugs like heroin & cocaine, however cannabis is sometimes grown in this country and drugs like amphetamine, ecstasy & LSD are often manufactured here.

**Most drug users turn to crime to pay for drugs** - It's true that a lot of crime is drug related, However, most of it involves people who are regular users of crack & heroin. These drugs are not commonly used among the younger age range. Most young people who use drugs will not get involved in crime to pay for their habit.

**All drugs are very expensive** - Although cocaine, crack & heroin are still relatively expensive, most drugs are well within the reach of young people.

**Most people who use drugs come to serious harm** - Problems can arise from use of legal and illegal drugs. These can include physical & mental health problems, accidents, accidental & deliberate overdose, problems with relationships and getting a criminal record. The real risks of drug use are dependent on 1) The Drug - what's taken, how much, how often & what else it's mixed with. 2) The person taking the drug - their physical & mental health, body weight, if they have previously used the drug. 3) The Place - where the drugs are taken and what the person is doing at the time.

**All drug use is very dangerous** - The fact is that most young people who use drugs will come to little or no harm.

**Lots of young people end up dead** - Illegal drugs kill less than 2000 people a year. Tobacco related deaths are in the region of 30,000 and alcohol related 10,000 annually. All drug related deaths are a tragedy but there is a need to keep it all in perspective.

**One try of heroin and cocaine and they are addicted** - Very few young people become "addicts". It takes time to become addicted to a drug but some drugs are easier to become addicted to than others. It also takes time to kick the habit once you are addicted, but most people who become addicted eventually give up or are better able to control their use.

**They start on cannabis and end up on heroin** - Most heroin users will have tried cannabis but most cannabis users will not have tried or go on to try heroin.

**Cannabis is addictive** - Cannabis is not physically addictive like heroin or cocaine. You can't die from a cannabis overdose.

**Cannabis is harmless** - Some young people think that this is the case, it is not. Some may feel the need to be high all the time in order to face the world and therefore become dependent on it mentally. Recent research shows the use of cannabis can have serious effects on mental health. Smoking a lot of it becomes very expensive and this can lead to debt and may lead to crime and a possible criminal record. Also driving and operating machinery can be dangerous whilst / after smoking cannabis. But most importantly cannabis is illegal.

## Parental Myths

**We were never Young** - Not True, Were we all angels?, what drug use (legal/illegal) were we involved in. Remember, most young people experimenting with drugs today will grow out of it.

**We know nothing about drugs** - You know more than you think. Even if you have never used illegal drugs you can learn a lot about your own use of alcohol & tobacco. What was your use of alcohol & tobacco like when you were young?

**It's our fault if our children use drugs** - A lot of young people are experimenting with drugs. They come from all backgrounds & areas of society. Feeling guilty does not help anyone - especially your children

**We know how to stop them** - There are no magical solutions, in all honesty it is not known how to completely stop young people from using drugs. All sorts of things have been tried and they have not worked. What may work for one may not for another

**Tougher laws will stop them** - All this seems to do is to send drug use underground and may even increase related crime & violence

**Being really strict will stop them** - This may mean they will go to greater lengths to conceal it from you

**Shocking & scaring them will stop them** - Telling young people how bad and dangerous drug use can be, hasn't worked either. They find out it is not as dangerous as is made out and then they don't believe a word you say and think you don't know what you're talking about. Then there is a very real danger that they will not listen to anything useful you have to say and believe that drugs aren't dangerous at all

**Giving them the facts will stop them** - Facts and accurate information are vital but that doesn't stop them using altogether, however it may make them more careful about what they do and dramatically reduce the risk of serious harm

**The experts will sort them out** - Drug workers don't have magic wands either. Young people will always make their own decisions, however, they can provide help, advice & support when a young person most needs it. But when you think about who spends most time with your children, it's probably you, and you are far more likely to have influence than any expert

# What can you do as a parent?

- Learn about drugs yourself
- Think about your views and your own drug use
- Talk & listen to your children
- Know where & how to get help
- Be realistic about their drug use & what you can do about it
- Work out some drug rules together
- Help them get a good drugs education