



Alcohol & Drug Disorders: A Guide for Young People

How common is Alcohol & Drug use?

Sometimes people drink alcohol, smoke cigarettes or use other drugs to fit in with friends, relax or have fun. The use of these substances can easily sneak up on us & turn into a situation called **substance abuse**. When our friends are also drinking or using drugs it can become very difficult to notice we've started to have a problem. The other difficulty we can experience is not wanting to be different to our friends & so asking for help takes a lot of courage. It can also be tricky to know where to go for support if you're wanting to cut down on the amount of alcohol or drugs you're using, or if you want to quit drinking, smoking or using drugs altogether. Hopefully this fact sheet will give some ideas about how alcohol or other drugs can affect us, recognising when substance abuse might be happening & knowing where to go to get some support.

Why do Alcohol & Drugs cause Difficulties?

When people use alcohol & drugs it **affects on the way we think, feel & act**. The chemicals in alcohol & drugs affect the chemicals in our body & can make us think & feel differently. Often this effect only lasts a short time & people continue to use looking for that same feeling. This can lead to difficulties with **addiction & mental as well as physical health**. As well as causing damage to relationships & the risk of **legal problems**, alcohol & other drugs can cause **difficulties with education** & can put **personal safety** at risk.

How do I know if my Drinking or Drug use is becoming a Problem?

You might be running into difficulties with your alcohol or drug use if it is...

- Making you crave or hang out for the next time you can use the drug or alcohol.
- Interfering with your performance at school or at work.
- Leading to conflict & arguments within your family or with your friends.
- Making you come in close contact with criminal activity.
- Making you feel nervous, depressed or agitated a lot of the time.
- Making you lose touch with reality, for example hearing or seeing things that others can't.
- Becoming difficult to do in moderation e.g. "I can't just have a couple of drinks, I need to get completely wasted".
- Becoming harder & harder to achieve the same effect & you're upping the amount of drugs or alcohol you're taking to get high or drunk.
- Beginning to happen more often, during the day, or when you're by yourself.
- Becoming something you turn to deal with stress or feeling upset or depressed.
- Leading you into dangerous situations like riding with drunk drivers or putting physical safety at risk.
- Leading you into situations where your health is at risk, like having unsafe sex.

What should I do if I am worried about my Alcohol or Drug use?

1. Think about it:

- Is it affecting your general mood & happiness, your progress at school, your relationships at home & with your friends or partner?
- Is your health or safety at risk, for example unsafe sex, dangerous driving or contact with criminal activity?
- Try recording (in a diary) how much you are actually using. You may be surprised at what you find.
- Does it affect the things that you want to do in the future, for example how a criminal record might stop you traveling overseas or how missing school might affect getting in to the course or job you really want?

2. Talk about it:

- Talk to someone you can trust - your parents or caregivers, an understanding relative, teacher or a friend.
- Your School Guidance Counsellor or Family Doctor is a really good option.
- **Youthline** is a confidential telephone service that might be a good place to start if you can't think of anyone else.

3. Be an Expert:

- Become **informed** about the facts & effects of Alcohol & Drugs. A good place to start is on the internet. For Alcohol & Drug information try:

Drug Info:

www.druginfo.org.nz

Fade:

www.fade.org.nz

Trippin:

www.trippin.co.nz

Urge:

www.urge.co.nz

Gambling:

www.inyaface.co.nz

Legal Matters:

www.youthlaw.co.nz

Mental Health:

www.headspace.org.nz

Sexual Health:

www.theword.org.nz

- Anonymous phone advice is available from the following services:

Alcohol Drug Helpline: 0800 787797

Youthline: 0800 376633

Youth Law: 0800 884529

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4. Make some Changes:

Remember you are in charge of your life & can make lots of changes now.

You can change the way you use:

- **Take less** of the substance each session & **take it slower.**
- **Use less potent alcohol & drugs** (for example drink beer rather than vodka).
- **Dilute** spirits more, e.g. put more coke in your bourbon & coke, more orange juice in a vodka & orange.
- **Cut down** on mixing drinks
- **Don't start** drinking or taking drugs **early** in the day
- **Use less** over the week
- Remember that **binging** (drinking/using a lot at once) **is worse** for your health than moderation. Think about ways to not binge, e.g. plan to stop drinking after a certain time & switch to non-alcoholic drinks.

You can make yourself safer:

- **Become an expert** on sexual health & how to keep safe.
- **Know about safe sex** (carry condoms). Find a reliable supplier.
- **Avoid getting into cars** with drunk or drugged drivers.
- **Know what to do** if someone falls unconscious (Recovery Position & *Call 111 immediately!*).

Have a plan when you are out:

- **Stick with friends** you trust - take turns being a 'minder.'
- **Tell someone** where you are going & your possible plans.
- **Keep money** spare for a taxi &/or arrange a lift with a sober driver.
- **Eat** before you go & make sure you drink plenty of non-alcoholic drinks.
- Make sure you **buy/keep an eye on your own drinks** (be careful of drug/date rape).

In the days & weeks after using it is good to watch for:

- 'Comedown' effects
- **Anxiety** (excessive worry) & **depression** (feeling really down all the time)
- **Psychotic symptoms** (losing touch with reality i.e. hearing voices)
- It's also good to **know where to get help** if you are worried about your mental health.

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5. Ask for help

All health or support professionals are obliged to keep your information **confidential**. The only time your information can be told to another person is if you or someone else is at risk of serious harm. If you choose to talk to someone about what you're experiencing, chances are they'll be happy you trusted them enough to want to share your concerns & will work out a plan with you that is based on what you want.

- Approach your **School Guidance Counsellor**, your **Doctor**, your **Health Worker** or a **Youth Worker**.
- Your local **District Health Board (DHB)** will have a confidential **Alcohol & Drug (CADS) Service**. This is useful to have an **Assessment** so you can understand more about the situation & then make some choices.
- **Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)** have groups for young people who are worried about their own drinking, as well as groups for young people who are impacted by the drinking of someone close to them.