

## Topic 4: Drugs fact sheet

### What are drugs?

Drugs can be:

- illegal substances such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis
- misused household products, like gases, glues and aerosols
- medicinal drugs
- alcohol and tobacco.

### The facts

- 8.5% of 16 to 59 year olds living in England and Wales have tried illegal drugs in the last year
- 20% of 16 to 59 year olds living in England and Wales have used illegal drugs in the last year
- Illegal drugs are responsible for approximately 2,593 deaths a year in the UK, and destroy thousands of relationships, families and careers
- Cannabis is the most commonly used illegal drug in the UK.

Sources: <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information> <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk>

### Negative effects

Drug misuse can be dangerous for three main reasons:

- you could become addicted to the drug
- the drug could cause you physical and psychological harm
- drug abuse can have a negative effect on your quality of life and relationships

### Tipping point

Drugs become an even bigger problem when you lose control. The term 'tipping point' is used to describe the moment when something under control becomes something out of control, for example, you become addicted, you start to hallucinate or you become paranoid.

### Tips for helping a mate

Often a drug user might not know when they have reached a 'tipping point' and you may need to try and help a friend. Here are a few tips on how to approach the situation:

- First of all, don't assume they're on drugs, until you know for sure.
- Talk to them calmly. Try to seem in control rather than being a drama queen.
- Don't push it. If they don't feel like talking, leave it and try again later.
- Offer alternative help. If your mate seems uncomfortable talking to you, you can help by suggesting they contact a helpline, like FRANK: 0800 77 66 00.

### Helping yourself

If you are worried that you might have a drug problem there is lots of help available. There are a number of websites with useful information and helplines where you can speak to someone for advice.



## Here are some useful websites:

*FRANK* ([www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)) is a website that includes lots of useful advice and information to answer your questions about drugs. It also offers a text, email and phone helpline service if you need advice.

*NHS Choices* ([www.nhs.uk/livewell](http://www.nhs.uk/livewell)) provides information and advice about the effects of drugs. There is a teen boys and teen girls section.

*ChildLine* ([www.childline.org.uk](http://www.childline.org.uk)) is an email, text and telephone helpline. There is lots of useful information on their website, or you can speak to a counsellor for advice.

## Expert help

There are many healthcare professionals that help young people to deal with drug problems.

Here are typical days in the lives of two experts.

### A day as a psychiatrist

I'm based in the mental health unit at my local NHS hospital, and start work at 9.00am.

My first patient is a 25-year-old alcoholic who may need to be referred to a psychiatric hospital for 24-hour observation and care. She is suffering from severe depression and has suicidal tendencies. After my assessment, we both agree that full-time psychiatric hospital care would be beneficial, and I arrange a bed for her. I also refer her to a psychotherapist for some counselling to help her understand and overcome her addiction.

The rest of the day is spent running the department - answering queries, directing staff and assessing patients. I have a lot of responsibility, but my job and the patients I see are incredibly varied. I feel that I really make a difference to the community.

### A day as a psychotherapist

At 9.00am I begin a couple therapy session with a married couple in their forties. The husband is trying to overcome his heroin addiction. I encourage them to interact calmly and talk frankly about things that have happened in the past and the wider relationships they have with friends and other family members. They begin to discover the causes of their current feelings of distress.

Throughout the day, I counsel individuals and groups - helping them free themselves from stress, emotional problems and relationship issues. I feel that my recent psychotherapist training has boosted my ability to help people in distress, and I'm happy to offer this unique form of therapy.

Do these jobs sound appealing? If so, the Step into the NHS website provides more information about these and many other careers in the health sector. Visit [www.stepintothens.nhs.uk](http://www.stepintothens.nhs.uk) and search careers by A-Z.

