

Topic 4: Drugs factsheet

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
- performance enhancing

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.

Key facts for hospital admissions related to drug misuse:

- 7,027 hospital admissions for drug-related mental and behavioural disorders
- 16,994 hospital admissions for poisoning by drug misuse
- 99,782 admissions with a primary or secondary diagnosis of drug-related mental and behavioural disorders

Source: digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-drug-misuse/2020#top
2019/2020



Tipping point (continued)

You must never be afraid to phone an ambulance if you think a friend might be in trouble with drugs they've taken.

Tips for helping a friend

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. Focus on empathising with them, show that you understand and care.
- Don't push it. If they don't feel like talking, leave it and try again later.
- Offer alternative help. If your friend seems uncomfortable talking to you, you can help by suggesting they contact a helpline, you can contact FRANK by calling: 0300 123 66 00, texting 82111 or visiting talktofrank.com

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 (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 website (nhs.uk/live-well/healthy-body/drug-addiction-getting-help/)** provides information and advice about the effects of drugs.
- **ChildLine (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 stepintothensh.nhs.uk/careers

