

# INHALANTS AND SOLVENTS

Inhalants and solvents are chemicals that can be inhaled, such as glue, gasoline, aerosol sprays, lighter fluid etc. These are not drugs at all and are, in fact,

legally available from a large number of shops. However, they are abused widely by the poorer sections of society, particularly street youth.

## ***What do they look like?***

Inhalants can look like almost anything (glue, paint thinner, gasoline, lighter fuel, cleaning fluids, etc).

They usually come in tubes or bottles.

## ***How are they used?***

Often, the chemical is placed in the bottom of a cup or container and then placed over the nose and mouth. Other methods include:

soaking a rag in inhalant; placing a rag in bag or sack; placing the bag over the face and inhaling the vapours.

## ***The effects of using inhalants***

Inhalants may give you a high for a very brief period of time. They make you feel numb for a short period of time, dizzy, confused, and they give you progressive drowsiness. They can also cause headaches, nausea, fainting, accelerated heartbeat,

disorientation, and hallucinations. They can damage the lungs, kidney and liver in the long term. They can also cause suffocation, convulsions, and coma.

## understanding drug abuse

### Understanding drug abuse / Why do young people use drugs?

Experts who have studied drug abuse have come up with what they call the "Modified Social Stress Model" to understand why particular individuals start abusing drugs.

This is really just a fancy term for something that is very common-sensical. What the experts say is that there are a number of factors in ones life that can cause one to start using drugs; these, they call RISK FACTORS. At the same time, there are some other factors that prevent one from doing so and these are called PROTECTIVE FACTORS. If the risk factors in an individual's life outweigh the protective factors, it is likely that (s)he will start abusing drugs.

**Think of it along these lines:** What is the chance that THAT particular boy or girl will fall in love with you? Now most of us know that it is not just a matter of being decent looking. There are many other factors, some of which will work in your favour and some of which will go against you. For example, does the object of your desire have another boy/girl friend, do your interests match, are you in the same school or college and so are likely to meet often, do you have common friends who will act as your messengers?





Depending on how you answer these questions, there will be a greater or a lesser chance that you will get what you want. The same goes for drug abuse.

Both kinds of factors, that is, risk and protective factors, can be further divided into two. They can be either personal or environmental. Personal factors are those that have to do with the individual and environmental factors are those that have to do with the social, familial and physical environment that the person lives in.

We will now list out some of these factors so that in the course of your prevention work, you will be able to identify those young people who are most at risk and hence, need more attention from you.

## RISK FACTORS

### *Personal factors*

- ❖ **Being a man or a woman** – worldwide, many more men than women use drugs. However, this is changing. For example; the 1999 Drug Use Survey in the USA questioned 25,500 young people ages 12 to 17, and found that 16 per cent of the girls and 16.7 per cent of the boys had used drugs. The other thing to remember is that often, girls abuse licit or legal substances like alcohol, prescription drugs and other substances that are socially accepted.
- ❖ **Being young is in itself a risk factor** – young people are in a constant struggle to establish their identities, and answer questions like, “Who am I? What is my role in society? What do I want to be?” Finding answers to these questions is never an easy thing and it takes some time. Often, during this period, you can start doubting yourself, your ability to achieve and to do things. It is then that you may try to “forget about the world” or “drown your sorrows by abusing different substances.
- ❖ If a person has **mental problems**, (s)he is more likely to start using drugs.
- ❖ **Undeveloped or underdeveloped personal skills** like the inability to take decisions, to express what (s)he feels, to assert themselves, to solve problems, etc. also put an individual at greater risk of succumbing to substance abuse.

### ***Environmental Risk Factors***

The environmental factors that are likely to encourage substance abuse are:

- ❖ The young person's parents do not know how to look after him/her emotionally, physically or in terms of providing the right kind of support and guidance;
- ❖ The person does not have a family;
- ❖ The person's parents, brothers or sisters abuse drugs of any kind;
- ❖ The young person is being mentally, physically, sexually or verbally abused;
- ❖ The young person is moving around with a group of people who abuse drugs;
- ❖ The society that the person is part of has cultural and/or religious values that encourage substance abuse or the media, advertising and attitudes in the society condone abuse;
- ❖ The person is homeless and is living with or without his/her family on the streets;
- ❖ There are few/no opportunities for education;
- ❖ There is a lot of free unstructured time in which there are no constructive, imaginative and challenging activities to take part in;
- ❖ There are no job opportunities or even the hope of getting a fulfilling job;
- ❖ Health services are not provided or if they are provided, they are not youth friendly;
- ❖ There is widespread availability of licit and illicit substances, since laws and regulations that are supposed to discourage or prevent abuse are not stringent or are not enforced.

## **PROTECTIVE FACTORS**

### ***Personal Factors***

The main factors that protect an individual against drug abuse are:

- ❖ Well-developed personal skills to deal with difficult situations such as an ability to analyse situations, to take quick decisions, to communicate with others, to relax, to negotiate and enter into compromises etc.

### ***Environmental Protective Factors***

- ❖ Good personal connections to people including family members and friends, animals and things that encourage caring, sharing and bonding. For example, having a friend who is willing to help them out in difficult situations, who has good personal skills, or having a pet that they must look after. In both these cases, one has to learn to be responsible not only for something/one else but for your own self.
- ❖ Adequate resources to meet physical and emotional needs of the person, e.g. schools, youth friendly health services, social centres with recreational activities, sport facilities, employment opportunities etc.
- ❖ Cultural norms that discourage substance abuse. For example, Gujarat in India, the State where Gandhi came from, has a long tradition of temperance. Alcohol is prohibited and the community at large does not tolerate intoxication. The extent of drug abuse in this state is much smaller than in other parts of the country.
- ❖ The laws that regulate substance use are stringent and well enforced and access to licit and illicit drugs is limited or difficult.

When you go into a community and select your target group for prevention, you must keep in mind these factors while deciding what action to take. Remember though, that all the factors that we have spoken about are a generalization on the basis of the experiences of people who have worked in the field of drug abuse prevention for years.

These factors by no means cover all the possible things that contribute to young people taking drugs. And they certainly don't give you ONE reason or even THE most important reason for drug abuse.

These are just meant to give you an idea of the kinds of things that you need to be on the lookout for when you go into the community to collect information about the causes of drug abuse.



# THE BIG IDEA

*One of the worst things about drugs is that they most commonly affect young people who, because they ARE young, already have problems in their lives. There are many difficult physical and emotional changes that take place when young people move from childhood to the teenage years, a period often called adolescence. This is generally the time when most young people begin experimenting with drugs. However, youth around the world have many different reasons for using drugs. In many cases, young people turn to their friends for support. These friends don't always just pressure them to use drugs but often offer drugs as a solution to their problems.*

*The reasons for doing drugs vary from country to country and from one economic class to another, but there is a certain underlying theme. For example, one of the reasons given by youth from the developed world and from the middle classes in the developing world was BOREDOM.*

*Now, what a strange word that is. Think about it. What is boredom? A lack of interest in anything, a lack of willingness to do something, a lack of motivation to involve yourself in any kind of activity that makes you feel good, frustration with what you have and don't want... A little bit of thought will make you realize that boredom has less to do with a lack of fun and much more with the lack of opportunities to express oneself.*

*Similarly, another reason that came out during discussions with youth from the developing world and the poorer sections of society was a lack of basic rights like food, health, education and the chance to earn a living.*

*Either way, both kinds of reasons point towards one underlying factor, namely the lack of power, of control over ones life. In the case of BOREDOM, this lack of power shows itself in a feeling of not being able to do what you want. Every choice that you get is a choice that you don't want, largely because somehow you know that these are not choices that you had any say in. In the case of a lack of basic rights, this lack of power is felt more immediately as an absence of things, medicines, food, shelter, and water, which are essential for life.*

*It was this sort of reasoning that led all the young people who met at the forum in Banff\* to TAKE CONTROL. The one thing that really tied all the youth together was a willingness to stand up for their rights, to demand their rightful place in each of their societies. The message that came out was, the "high" you get from fighting for your right to be heard and the right to make a difference to the way we live, removes the need for artificial highs.*

*To sum up, more often than not, it is a lack of power that pushes young people to seek "freedom" in drugs. This lack of power may be felt as boredom, as starvation, as abuse, as a lack of opportunities to earn etc. And since power is something that is never given freely by those who have it to those who don't, young people need to learn how to become more powerful.*

*You cannot do this by fighting in the streets or rioting after football matches but by learning how to build partnerships with those who have control over your lives, by using your youth, your fresh ideas and your open minds to find better ways of doing.*

*And this is part of what this handbook will help you do.*

\*See page 7 for details.