

Understanding substance abuse

If you are going to develop a drug abuse prevention programme in your community, it is important that you know what the various drugs are that are being used in your community, where they come from, what their effects are, by which names they are known etc. This section will give you information about various drugs that are found across the world and their effects. If you would like more details about the effects of particular drugs, we suggest you look up the following websites:

www.undcp.org
www.nida.org
www.freevibe.com

And if you don't have access to the Internet, write to us at the address given on the previous page and we will try and give you the information that you want.

All about drugs

What are drugs?

A very basic question but one that needs to be clarified. For, if we start thinking of drugs as just the substances that cause problems or are abused by people we know, then we are likely to ignore other substances that, for one reason or another, are not thought of as drugs by our immediate communities.

A psychoactive substance is any substance people take to change either the way they feel, think, or behave. This description covers alcohol and tobacco as well as other natural and manufactured drugs. In the past, most of the drugs that were used were made from plants. That is, plants grown and then converted into drugs such as cocaine, heroin and cannabis (or marijuana). In the 20th century, people found out how to make drugs from chemicals. These are called man-made, or synthetic drugs, and include speed, ecstasy, LSD, "batu", "hot ice", "kleenex", "adam" and "meth", etc.

What follows is a brief description of the most common drugs of abuse.

CANNABIS

What does it look like?

Marijuana is made from the dried flowering, fruiting tops and leaves of the cannabis plant. Its colour ranges from greyish-green to greenish-brown. It can look like a dried herb, or coarse, like tea.

Hashish is the dried, compressed resin separated from the flowering tops of the plant. It is sold in

block pieces, and ranges in colour from light brown to nearly black. It is stronger than marijuana.

Sometimes, the juice or resin of the hemp plant is extracted. This hash oil or cannabis oil is the strongest form of the drug and is also called honey oil or red oil. It is a dark, almost black, thick liquid and is sold in small bottles.

How is it used?

Marijuana is usually smoked in hand-rolled cigarettes and can be cooked in foods and eaten as well. Hashish is usually smoked in a pipe or

cooked in foods and eaten. Cannabis oil is usually smoked with tobacco, smeared on to cigarettes or occasionally eaten.

The effects of using cannabis

Young people may have very different experiences using marijuana depending on the strength of the drug and height, gender and weight of the person. Some people feel happy and they feel like they can do anything. Sometimes they babble and laugh more than usual. Marijuana can make you very hungry or give you "the munchies", increases your pulse-rate and makes your eyes red. At a later stage, you will find you feel sleepy and become quiet. Cannabis smoke contains 50 per cent more

tar than smoke from a high-tar cigarette, so regular use of cannabis increases the risk of lung cancer and chronic bronchitis. Regular use of cannabis can make you psychologically dependent on it. Your heart rate usually increases when you use cannabis. Using cannabis also leads to some problems in what are called our "psychomotor" functions, that is, in the ability to coordinate our actions. This is especially important when you are doing things like driving, operating machinery etc.

Street names

Cannabis, marijuana, blow, resin, hashish, oil, green, grass, hooch, weed, dope, gungun, ganja, hash, leaf, pot, bango, hemp, marihuana, thai-sticks, buddha-sticks, joint-sticks, kif, marie-jeanne, sinsemilla, charas, hash, khif, shit, H, hashish. Sometimes, marijuana is also used in combination with other substances like PCP or crack cocaine. In such cases, a whole new array of names comes into play like "boat", "acc", "amp", etc.

A good link for street names is: <http://www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/streetnames/default.asp>

COCAINE

Cocaine is prepared from coca leaves, which are greenish-yellow leaves of different size and appearance. Cocaine is often called the “champagne of drugs” because of its high cost.

It makes you feel like your body is going very fast. Your heart races and the “highs” and “lows” are sudden. Crack, which is smoked, is a much stronger form of cocaine.

What does it look like?

Cocaine usually comes in a white powdered form and crack looks like hard white rocks.

How is it used?

Cocaine is usually snorted up the nose. It can also be injected or smoked. Crack is smoked.

The effects of using cocaine

A small amount of cocaine will raise your body temperature, make your heart beat faster, increase your breathing, make you feel over confident and make you more alert with extra energy. When crack is smoked, all of these feelings are intensified.

Excessive doses may lead to convulsions, seizures, strokes, cerebral haemorrhage or heart failure. Long term effects of cocaine/crack use will lead to strong psychological dependence, and other health problems like destroying nose tissues, breathing problems and losing weight.

Street names

Cocaine, crack, coke, C, charlie, nose candy, toot, bazooka, big C, cake, lady, stardust, coco, flake, mister coffee, blanche, koks, snow.

HEROIN

Heroin is a drug obtained from morphine and comes from the opium poppy plant. Heroin is a drug that slows down your body and mind.

It is a very strong painkiller and can be one of the most dangerous things to mix with other drugs.

What does it look like?

Heroin usually comes in a rock or powdered form, which is generally white or pink/beige in color and could come also in dark grey/medium brown.

How is it used?

Heroin can be injected, snorted, smoked, or inhaled. This last method is often called “chasing the dragon”.

The effects of using heroin

When injected, heroin provides an extremely powerful rush and a high that usually last for between 4 and 6 hours. The effects of heroin include a feeling of well being, relief from pain, fast physical and psychological dependence, sometimes nausea and vomiting, sleepiness, loss of balance, loss of concentration and loss of appetite.

An overdose can result in death. One of the most dangerous effects of injecting heroin is the increased possibility of contracting AIDS. A lot of the time, people who inject heroin use each other's needles and this is the main source of infection. Studies have also shown that people who are “high” on drugs tend to have unprotected sex. This too puts you at risk of getting the AIDS virus.

Street names

Hammer, horse, H, junk, nod, smack, skag, white, beige, white lady, white stuff, joy powder boy, hairy, harry, joy powder.

AMPHETAMINES

Amphetamines are stimulants and affect your system by speeding up the activity of your brain and giving

energy. Ice is a strong type of amphetamine, and is very similar to crack.

What do they look like?

Amphetamines are man-made drugs and relatively easy to make. Usually, they are white or light brown powder and can also come the

form of a pill. "Ice" usually comes as colourless crystals or as a colourless liquid when used for injecting.

How are they used?

Amphetamines can be swallowed, snorted, injected or smoked.

The effects of using amphetamines

Amphetamines can cause an increase in your heart beat, faster breathing, increase blood pressure and body temperature, sweating, make you more confident and alert, give you extra energy, reduce your appetite, make it difficult to sleep

and might make you talk more. You may also feel anxious, irritable, and suffer from panic attacks. Frequent use can produce strong psychological dependence. Large doses can be lethal.

Street names

Amphetamines, Speed, ice, browns, footballs, hearts, oranges, wake ups, black beauties, crystal meth, crack meth, cat, jeff amp, dexies, rippers, bennies, browns, greenies, pep pills.

ECSTASY

Ecstasy belongs to the same group of chemicals as the above category that is, stimulants, and is most often used in the form of tablets at rave parties. Ecstasy is a

drug that speeds up your system by increasing your physical and emotional energy. Like amphetamines, ecstasy is also a synthetic (or man-made) drug.

What does it look like?

Ecstasy is usually a small, coloured tablet. These pills can come in many different colours. Some ecstasy tablets also have pictures on them, such as doves,

rabbits or champagne bottles. The colour or the "brand" of the tablet is usually unrelated to the effects of the drug.

How is it used?

Ecstasy tablets are usually swallowed.

The effects of using ecstasy

You'll probably feel happy, warm, loving and more energetic. You would feel emotionally close to others, you might say or do things that you usually would not. Feelings of depression and tiredness after stopping the drug, nausea and vomiting, rise in blood pressure and heart rate, possibly even death due to overheating of the body and dehydration or

loss of water are some effects of ecstasy. Prolonged use of ecstasy could lead to brain and liver damage. The book "Ecstasy" by Irvine Welsh gives a vivid description of the effects of ecstasy and the kinds of things people do when under the influence of this drug. There is mounting evidence that using ecstasy can lead to brain damage.

Street names

Ecstasy, adam, essence, MDM, MDMA, XTC, eve, MDE, MDEA.

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.

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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?

