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United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



WHAT TEENAGERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT DRUGS

Technically, drugs are chemical substances that alter or affect the function of the body. Therefore, medicines are drugs, as are cigarettes, coffee and alcohol. However, here we are focusing on the drugs we cannot buy in a shop, that is, illegal drugs.

There are lots of reasons why people take illegal drugs. Some take them to escape their problems while others are bored, curious or just want to feel good. People may be pressured into taking drugs to "fit in" with a particular crowd or they may take drugs to rebel or to get attention.

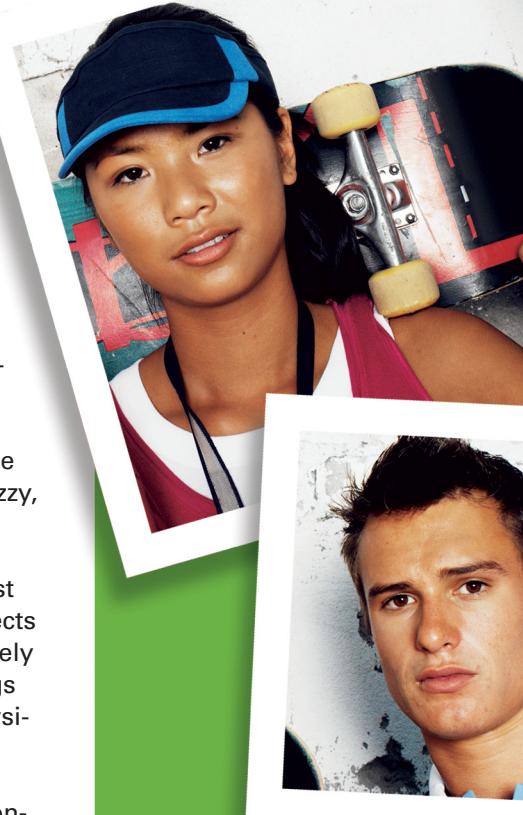
Drug users come from all kinds of backgrounds. They are male and female, young and old, rich and poor, working and unemployed, from the city and the countryside—it does not matter. Drug use can affect anyone.

Marijuana (pot, grass, weed, ganja) is usually smoked in a cigarette and sold in brown chunks. Amphetamines (including meth) and ecstasy are usually sold as pills, but can also come in a powder that can be mixed into a drink. Users simply swallow the pill or the drink. Cocaine, a white or brownish powder, is usually snorted through the nose, while heroin is generally injected with a syringe.

Different drugs have different effects on the body. While effects vary from one person to the next, in general, marijuana gives users an initial "high", or a dizzy, light-headed feeling, followed by a more relaxed sensation. Amphetamines provide an energy boost so that users can stay awake longer and work or dance more. Cocaine can give users a very happy, euphoric feeling when first taken, and it can make users forget they are hungry or tired. While these effects might sound nice, they do not last long. Many people get depressed and lonely afterwards and start feeling sick. Also, it is common for people who use drugs to seem confused, have red eyes, sweat a lot and not to care about their physical appearance. And, of course, there is the risk of becoming addicted.

Drugs have other physical side effects. For example, a marijuana cigarette contains much more tar than a normal cigarette, which increases users' risk of getting lung cancer and other respiratory diseases. People who snort cocaine risk damaging the fragile tissue in their noses. Injecting drugs can expose users to various infectious diseases, including HIV/AIDS. And drug use in general can lead to a number of health problems, such as malnutrition, apathy, menstrual irregularities and irregular heart rhythm.

Studies have proved that people who start smoking cigarettes and/or drink alcohol at a young age are much more likely to experiment with illegal drugs than people who do not smoke or drink.



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