

feel like you cannot handle the situation alone you should try to get support from a friend, relative or health professional that is aware of the suggested approaches to talk about drug use.

SEEKING OUT TREATMENT OPTIONS

Treatment and support options are available and these various approaches work for different people at different times. It is important to note that sometimes a person is not ready to stop using drugs yet, but treatment and intervention (action taken to improve a situation) options to reduce the harms need to be considered and may be helpful. For example, if a person is injecting drugs you would inform them that do not use a needle and syringe that has been shared by others in order to avoid the potential risk of becoming HIV or Hepatitis C infected. It is important to highlight that people with drug dependence problems can and do recover and accessing treatment is often the first intervention. One possible venue for drug dependent persons to seek help is from hospital-based treatment centres.

GETTING SUPPORT

When someone in the family is using drugs, have become dependent and unwilling to change their behavior, it can be a very difficult time for the family. It is during these times that support from others becomes important.

Talking with a friend

It may help to discuss the problem with a friend. Talking about how you feel may help clarify your thoughts and work out what you are going to do. Expressing your inner thoughts and feeling helpless may bring much emotional relief. It is easier to talk with someone you trust and are comfortable with. The friend may already be aware that something is wrong and may have a similar problem themselves as

drug use is increasingly common in the community. People are usually very willing to help a friend. However they often have to be asked before assistance will be offered.

Talking with a professional

Talking with someone outside your daily life and circle of family and friends, such as a professional counsellor, can be a useful option. A professional will have talked with many people in similar situations, and can help you to explore ways to deal with the problem. Professionals experienced in dealing with drug problems can, for example, be found at government hospitals, National Drug Law Enforcement Agency, and at some community health centres.

Talking with a religious leader

Talking to a religious leader may provide spiritual comfort and also give you some new insights of how to address drug use problems. Many people go first to religious leaders to seek guidance on dealing with drug problems. As there are increasing efforts to sensitize religious leaders to these issues a growing number may have links to those that can offer professional assistance.

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RESPONSE TO DRUGS AND RELATED ORGANISED CRIME IN NIGERIA
This project is funded by the European Union

TALKING ABOUT DRUG USE IN THE FAMILY



Drug use happens in the best of families. Throughout the world it has been found that no family, rich or poor, is fully protected against drug use.

In Nigeria drug use has been found in all regions of the country, and in all ethnic, religious and social groups. When drug use is discovered in the family it can result in stress, conflict, worry and a sense of being helpless. It is normal to have these feelings and when shame is associated with drug use there can also be denial by the family and the person taking drugs. People who use drugs can have very unpredictable behaviour, and it can be difficult to know how to act around them. A person using drugs may become aggressive, angry and violent, or withdrawn and detached (emotionally removed from surroundings). There are no simple answers to address drug use in the family but the following approaches may help.

HOW CAN I TELL IF SOMEONE IS USING DRUGS?

As the effects of drugs vary from one person to the next it is not always easy to say with certainty if a person is using drugs. While it may be easy to say behavior change or change of mood may be related to drug use, it is also possible that it may be a result of a personal problem that has nothing connected to drug use. However, some behavior signs will show that attention is required even if it is not drug-related. Some signs to be aware of include:

- Mood swings (sudden, unexpected change of emotions)
- Tiredness
- Sudden emotional outbursts
- Minimal interaction with family
- Trouble with the police
- Changes in eating patterns
- Frequent absences from school/work
- Sudden changes of friends
- Unexplained need for money; declining school/work performance
- Disappearing money and valuables
- Affected memory
- Decrease in other activities that may have been important to the person previously
- Poor concentration and focus
- Withdrawing socially

IS THE PERSON DRUG DEPENDENT?

Some people experiment with drugs for various reasons and following some experiences there is no interest to use again. For others it is possible to develop a drug dependence that ranges from mild dependency to compulsive (uncontrolled urge) drug use (compulsive is often the more severe as the drug starts to take control of the person). It is impossible

to say how long or how often a person must use a drug before they become dependent, because this varies from person to person and some drugs are more addictive than others (cannabis for example is less addictive than cocaine and heroin). Some people who use drugs do become dependent.

HOW CAN YOU HELP A PERSON USING OR BECOMING DEPENDENT ON DRUGS?

If you suspect that a family member is using drugs, try to stay calm and think about how you are going to approach the topic. It is common to feel uncomfortable when expressing your concerns as you feel the conversation will become emotional for both of you. The discussion may also turn into a heated argument, or the person does not wish to listen to your concerns. It is more useful to have a calm, respectful and open communication as an angry verbal or physical confrontation with the person using drugs will worsen, not help, the situation. Trying to define the drug problem can be difficult but international experts agree that a drug problem is not measured by how much, how many or what types of drugs a person uses, but by how the drug affects a person's life and the lives of those around them.

GENERAL SUGGESTIONS WHEN TALKING ABOUT DRUG USE

It is important to be aware of what is going on and to explain how a person's drug taking is affecting you. It is important to manage your expectations as the person using drugs needs to be ready to change before they stop using them. Having a talk will not likely bring about instant change but it's a start of a process. Here are some suggestions to make the conversation easier:

- ◇ Let the person know you care for them and remind them of their good qualities. A person will more likely listen and take advice if they feel respected. Encourage them to share their thoughts, feelings, and opinions as this will show you value what they think.
- ◇ Be trustworthy, supportive and aim for confidentiality (information not for sharing).
- ◇ Gather information and get the facts about drugs so you can share the most accurate information and not myths (something that people wrongly believe to be true).
- ◇ Arrange a suitable time to talk where you have some privacy and won't be interrupted.
- ◇ Avoid attempting a talk while the person is under the influence of drugs.
- ◇ Ask about their thoughts on drugs and if they are using. Do not make assumptions about what they are doing.
- ◇ Be prepared for a negative reaction and stay calm and reasonable. Refuse to be drawn into an argument.
- ◇ Do not be judgmental or tell them what to do as they will likely stop listening to what you have got to say.
- ◇ Let them know change is possible but it may take time and you will support them.
- ◇ Using 'I' statements allows you to talk to the person without seeming to blame them for your feelings. For example instead of saying "You worry me when you use drugs" say "I worry about you using drugs".

Long-term change will only occur when the person takes responsibility for their actions and deals with the consequences. As a result it is important that the person using drugs will try to solve their own drug problem themselves. You are there to support them along this path. If you