

KNOW YOUR STUFF

ADDICTION



WHAT'S GOING ON?

As well as the immediate effects drugs can have on someone – and longer-lasting impacts such as coping with the aftermath, which may include a hangover/comedown or fear/shame about what was said or done – any drug can be habit forming, and as such, any drug can be addictive.

WHAT IS ADDICTION?

Addiction is a mental health condition, and is sometimes referred to as dependence, or substance use disorder. The person finds it very hard to stop taking the drug, which may mean that they let other things in their life slide, for example school work, hobbies, or even friendships - they don't seem as important as they used to be. So drug addiction isn't necessarily about the amount someone is using, or even how often, it is how much of a priority it has become and the impact it is having on their life.

An added complication of addiction is that the brain changes. Essentially it becomes highly focused on using the drug, to the point that the person can't think clearly and rationally about it anymore. This means it can be very difficult for them to realise their drug use is a problem. These brain changes are usually reversible if the person stops taking the drug.

Any drug can be addictive, because there are lots of factors involved, including how it makes someone feel, their motivation for the behaviour in the first place and so on – it is about a lot more than the drug itself. It is worth knowing that someone who uses a drug as a coping strategy, for example, drinking alcohol to feel confident at a party, or smoking cannabis as a form of escape from problems at home or school, is more likely to become addicted.

Mental health also plays a part, with issues such as anxiety and depression increasing a person's risk of becoming addicted, and likewise addiction having the potential to worsen the severity or exacerbate underlying or existing conditions. This is why someone who is an addict often has other mental health conditions, and someone struggling with their mental health is more likely to develop addiction.

WHEN TO BE WORRIED

Some questions to ask about someone's drug use:

- How often are they using it? If it is frequent, e.g. daily, it could be a sign they feel compelled to.
- How anxious or stressed do they get if they think they might run out?
- If they don't have it, what happens? Feeling restless or agitated, or experiencing mood swings or problems sleeping could be withdrawal symptoms.
- How important has it become to them? They may say it hasn't, but think about whether they are less bothered about other activities or friends that used to matter to them.

If you are concerned, encourage them to speak to a trusted adult or seek out advice, e.g. from their GP.

For more information, go to:



<https://www.drugwise.org.uk/what-is-addiction>



DSM foundation
The drug education charity

www.dsmfoundation.org.uk

— The —
**Wellbeing
Hub**
— from Teen Tips —



www.teentips.co.uk