

Adult Guidance

Impact of Drugs and Alcohol

This is the last lesson in the unit focusing on how drugs, alcohol and smoking can affect the body. It is important that this session is part of the children's wider learning relating to the use of substances. While this lesson touches upon some of the social and emotional reasons for substance use, it does not explore them, as the focus is on the impact on the body. In this lesson children learn some of the common reasons people have reported they take drugs or drink. It is suggested that this is further explored in a PSHE context, for example, by learning of the alternative ways one can deal with stress.

Drugs

It is important that children understand the difference between drugs that are legal and illegal, as well as prescribed drugs.

It is important that children understand why a doctor needs to prescribe the medication. The main reasons include:

- So we take the appropriate dosage of medication.
- So that medication is given based on knowledge of any previous conditions and potential problems.
- To ensure that if patients are taking more than one type of medication, that they will not interact in a way that is harmful or cancel out the effect of the other.
- So that there is a record of the patient's history and any prescriptions they are currently taking in case of emergency (this is a legal requirement).

Many prescribed drugs include substances such as opiate derivatives, so while some drugs are illegal for personal use, they are not illegal for medical use.

Alcohol

It is important to make children aware that there are norms in this country which are particularly unhealthy. Binge-drinking, for example, is less prevalent in many other countries. The reasons people have for drinking in other countries also appear to be different, for example people are more likely to drink with a dinner than as part of 'a night out'.

On average teenagers in the UK have their first drink at 13 and many have been drunk by just over the age of 14 (statistics: Drinkaware Trust). Half of teenagers aged between 11 and 15 have tried at least one alcoholic drink with their friends, and half of 16 to 17 year olds drink once a week. There is a correlation between those who start drinking at a young age and increased risk of violent behaviour, truancy, engaging in unprotected sex, mental health problems as well as damage to their growing brains and liver.

Smoking

Unlike alcohol, which if drunk in moderate quantities can have some health benefits for adults (there is no evidence of any benefits to children or teenagers), smoking tobacco has no health benefits, although it was assumed that it did in the past.

The new issue of e-cigarettes is not without controversy. Some argue that it will help smokers to reduce and then quit smoking, although it is too soon to say if this is the case. Others have pointed out that there are no studies into the potential problems and risks of e-cigarettes over time. The mimicking of smoking is itself seen as troublesome and promoting of the habit. For this reason, e-cigarettes are banned, for example by certain airlines.

While tobacco companies have severe limitations on advertising, e-cigarette companies have been allowed to advertise on television in this country which many anti-smoking campaigners are against.