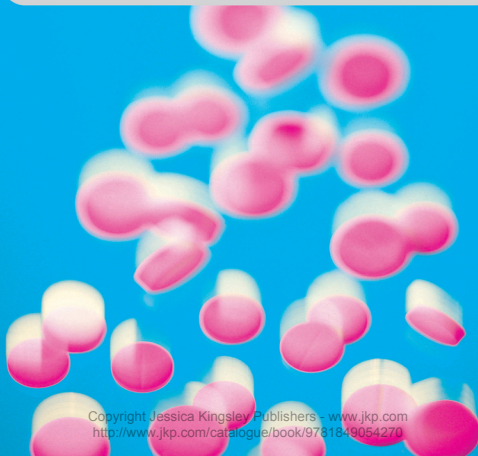


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# ALL ABOUT DRUGS YOUNG PEOPLE

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION AND ADVICE  
FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS



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# INTRODUCTION

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This book is for parents and professionals who work with young people. It gives accurate, up-to-date information to help you to understand young people's use of drugs. I also provide realistic, practical advice to help you respond to young people's involvement with drugs in sensible ways that will help to ensure their safety and well-being.

By 'young people' I mean those aged between 14 and 25 years old, although some of the information and advice I have provided will also be relevant to younger children and those aged over 25.

When I say 'parents', I am aware that some young people do not live with a biological parent and may be cared for by other family relations, including older siblings and grandparents, or by foster parents or care home staff. In some cases parents may also be concerned about, or supporting, a young person who is not their own child.

This book is designed to help anyone who is caring for and supporting young people.

By 'professionals' I mean anyone who works in a paid or voluntary capacity with young people, including school teachers, college and university lecturers, youth and community workers, drug and health workers, counsellors, mentors and advocacy workers, social care and criminal justice workers, including police officers, probation and youth offending team workers, prison officers, magistrates and judges.

Before I outline the contents of the book I want to emphasize what it is not.

It is not a scaremongering treatise about the horrors of drug use. In fact, I go out of my way to make sure that I do not exaggerate the risks and dangers. I do not condemn or condone drug use by young people. Rather, I emphasize that we nearly all use drugs and that, whether we like it or not, and whatever we may do,

young people will continue to use drugs. I highlight the need to be realistic and to focus on the safety and welfare of young people.

This book does not focus on the biological aspects of drug use in any detail. I don't mention serotonin or dopamine even once. It also does not analyse or overtly criticize government policy and the laws regarding drug use or propose how they might be changed for the better in future. That is beyond the remit of this book.

I have also tried to avoid using too much jargon. I deplore the many management, business and psycho-babble clichés that have entered the drugs field, and so many other aspects of our lives, in recent years. Many professionals use such language to hide away in a pretended, and often self-congratulatory, objectivity and also to mystify everyone else. Unfortunately, such has become the fate of many professions.

The book is divided into five sections.

## PART A: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG PEOPLE'S DRUG USE

This provides background information about the trends in young people's drug use, why they use as they do, where they get drugs from and how much drugs cost. It also considers the 'official' and slang language used to discuss drugs, what determines the effects of taking drugs and how dangerous it is, drug laws and legal obligations and rights and whether you can spot if a young person is using drugs.

Parts B and C are based on my many years of working directly with young people who experience problems with their drug use, and the training, support, advisory and counselling work I have carried out with parents and professionals who work with young people.

## PART B: BE PREPARED

This part of the book focusses on practical information and advice about how you can develop your own knowledge, attitudes and skills so that you will be better placed to respond sensibly and effectively to situations where young people are involved with drugs. It includes exercises that you can do by yourself or with other people, including young people, to help you feel more informed, calm and confident.

If possible, I strongly recommend that you read Parts A and B, and work through the exercises in Part B, *before* you are faced with an incident where your own child, or a young person you work with, is involved with drugs in a way that you find difficult to deal with.

## PART C: DEALING WITH SPECIFIC SITUATIONS

This provides information and advice about dealing with some of the particular scenarios you could be faced with when young people are involved with drugs. The chapters in Part C are short and to the point and signpost you to information and advice elsewhere in the book that is relevant to the specific situations and issues they address. Part C will be particularly useful for you if you are faced with a situation that is causing you anxiety and that you are finding difficult to manage.

Part C also has an introduction that highlights some of the things parents and professionals should seek to do, and avoid doing, in any situation where young people are involved with drugs.

## PART D: THE DRUGS

This contains detailed information about the various drugs that are sometimes used by young people. You may wish to read through the whole of this section, but you can also use it to refer to specific drugs that you want to find more about. For each drug there is information about what it is, street names, a brief history, legal status, availability, extent of use and cost, effects of use and possible harms. I also give harm reduction advice for each drug to use in situations where young people are likely to continue to use drugs, whatever we say to them or do.

Apart from minor tranquillizers, I have not included information about the many prescribed and over-the-counter medicines that can be mood-altering and are sometimes used recreationally, or in a dependent way. Many medicines can be harmful to use, especially in high doses or when combined with use of other drugs. Examples include anti-depressants such as Prozac, codeine-based painkillers and cough syrups, Viagra, stimulants such as Ritalin and cold remedies and decongestants that contain ephedrine, and some diet and travel sickness pills. In addition, paracetamol has been implicated in many fatal overdoses and suicides, including among young people. For detailed information about these, and other, medicines refer to the 'A to Z of medicines' section of the NHS Choices website ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk)) or the British Medical Association book, *New Guide to Medicines & Drugs* (Dorling Kindersley).

## PART E: WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

Here I list websites where both you and young people can find more information about drugs, including those from which you can access contact information about helping services in your locality. I have also listed national telephone helplines and recommended books about drugs that you might wish to read.

This book is drawn from my experiences as a professional in the drugs field, father and drug user. I have tried to pass on some of the lessons I have learned.

# B1

## BE INFORMED – LEARN FACTS, NOT MYTHS

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You don't have to have an encyclopaedic knowledge of drugs to understand young people's drug use. In fact, it is probably more important to be able to empathize with young people and take account of what life is like for them and how they may be feeling. However, it is important to not fall for the many myths and stereotypes that surround discussion of drug use, particularly in the media.

In my experience adults often know more about drugs than they realize. Sometimes, and particularly when faced with a difficult situation where a young person is involved with certain drugs, parents and professionals tend to panic, fear the worst and forget that they do know something about drugs. Young people, especially teenagers who may be new to drug use, sometimes know less about drugs than they realize. They think that because they know a bit of street language they are knowledgeable.

This chapter contains a couple of simple exercises that you can use to further your understanding of drug use and also suggest ways you might avoid drug mythologies and develop your knowledge of the facts and reality of drug use. Chapter B8 discusses ways you can help young people to become better educated about drugs.

### DRUG KNOWLEDGE QUIZ

Decide whether the following statements are TRUE or FALSE. Then look at the answers at the end of the chapter.

1. Alcohol use has been increasing among young people over the last few years.
2. Amphetamines are stimulant drugs that give an energy boost.

3. It is illegal for shopkeepers to sell caffeine tablets to under-18s.
4. Some forms of cannabis are much stronger than others.
5. Cocaine and crack are sedative drugs that relax people and slow them down.
6. Ecstasy always comes in the form of tablets or capsules.
7. It is particularly dangerous to take GHB while drinking alcohol.
8. Heroin use mostly occurs in poor, deprived areas.
9. Ketamine is used as an anaesthetic for operating on children and animals.
10. Khat is commonly used in African-Caribbean communities.
11. Legal highs tend to be a lot safer to use than illegal drugs.
12. In recent years there has been an increase in the use of LSD.
13. A magic mushroom trip usually lasts for up to one hour.
14. Mephedrone is usually smoked.
15. Nitrous oxide has been used for pleasure in the UK for over 200 years.
16. Poppers give people a short-lived rush of energy.
17. It is illegal for shopkeepers to sell butane gas to under-18s.
18. A lot of body-builders inject anabolic steroids.
19. In recent years cigarette smoking has fallen among adults, but not young people.
20. Many adults are dependent on medically prescribed tranquillizers.

You might also ask a friend, work colleague or your partner to try the quiz and discuss their answers with you. If appropriate, try the quiz with your own child and/or a young person you work with.

## DRUG MYTHS EXERCISE

Look through the list of drug myth statements below. They are all untrue yet commonly held views about drugs.

### *General myths about drug use*

- Drug use only happens in poor, inner city areas.
- It is easy to recognize different drugs by looking at them.
- All illegal drugs are imported from abroad.
- Illegal drug use is always very expensive.
- Most young people obtain illegal drugs from professional dealers.
- Many young people are forced into drug use by dealers.

### *Myths about people who use drugs*

- Many people go through life without using drugs.
- Children and elderly people do not use drugs.
- Most young people use illegal drugs.
- Most drug use involves young people rather than adults.
- Drug use among young people is a new phenomenon.
- There is something wrong with people who use drugs.
- Many young people are pressurized into using drugs.
- Very few adults used illegal drugs when they were young.
- Middle class people do not use illegal drugs.

- It is easy to recognize if someone uses illegal drugs.
- Addiction is inbred and caused by genetic make-up.

### *Myths about the effects and harms of drug use*

- Most young people who use illegal drugs come to serious harm.
- The same drug has the same effect on different people.
- Drug use is always very dangerous.
- Illegal drugs are always more dangerous to use than alcohol.
- One try of some drugs and you become hooked.
- Once you are addicted to drugs you are addicted for life.
- Cannabis is a very dangerous drug.
- Cannabis is a completely safe drug.
- Legal highs are not as dangerous as illegal drugs.
- Most drugs users commit crimes to get money to buy drugs.
- Many drugs users are very violent when high on drugs.

### *Myths about what we can do about drug use*

- Tougher laws will stop young people using drugs.
- Shocking young people about the dangers of drugs will stop them using.
- Giving young people the facts about drugs will stop them using.
- Telling young people to 'say no' to drugs will stop them using.
- Talking to young children about drugs will encourage them to use.



- If we give young people more to do they will not use drugs.
- There is no help for people who have drug problems.

### *Questions to consider*

1. Which, if any, of the myths do you tend to think are true?
2. What evidence is there for the statements being true or not?
3. Which of the myths might professionals, parents and young people believe to be true? Why might this be the case?
4. What other commonly held drug myths are there, other than those listed above?

If you still think some of the statements are true read more of this book, especially the chapters in Part A. Also have a look at some of the books by other authors that I recommend at the end of the book.

You might also discuss the myths with a friend, work colleague, partner or other family members. If appropriate, talk to your own child and/or a young person you work with about the myths.

### **LEARNING MORE**

There are a number of ways that you can learn more about drug use. Part A of this book covers a wide range of drug issues. Chapter B8 focusses on drug education and its impact on young people. Part D gives information about a wide range of different drugs. You might also read some of the drug books I have recommended and look at some of the websites listed in Part E.

You may be able to attend drug training courses in your locality. Contact your local drug service – see Part E for information about how to find them – and see what training is available. Both professionals and parents may be able to attend training courses and local agencies may be able to put on training sessions for particular professional and/or community groups when requested.

If you want to learn more about drugs talk with other people; friends, work colleagues, your partner and other family members, but most of all, young people themselves. We can learn a lot from talking to each other.

## DRUGS KNOWLEDGE QUIZ ANSWERS

The answers are as follows:

- TRUE: 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, 15, 16, 17, 18, 20.
- FALSE: 1, 3, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 19.

How well did you do? Have a look at Part D of this book, which provides information about all the drugs in the quiz, to find out more.