

Parenting *ideas* INSIGHTS

Building parent-school partnerships

WORDS Livia Gamble

The Drugs kids are actually using

Talking to young people about drugs has a significant impact, but you need to get the facts about the current drugs available.

The sex talk is one of the most confronting conversations parents have with their children but there is another topic of conversation that is of equal importance and it often gets overlooked. Drug use is something that parents need to talk about with their children. Australian website, the Other Talk focuses on helping families speak openly about drugs with their children. But to be able to start the conversation early parents need to know what drugs kids are being introduced to today.

Geoff Munro from the Australian Drug Foundation says parents should focus on the drugs that pose the biggest risk to young people and they are not necessarily the ones that first come to mind.

Munro said: "I think it's really important that parents understand that the drugs kids are faced with today are the traditional ones, alcohol and tobacco and pharmaceutical drugs to a certain degree."

"Cannabis is also certainly available in the community so alcohol tobacco and cannabis are the ones we really think parents should focus on," said the National Policy Manager.

In particular, parents should direct their attention to alcohol and its effects as it is the most accessible.

However, parents need to know the facts and consequences of drug and alcohol use before they can educate their children against it. Here is what you need to know before you have the conversation.

ALCOHOL

In 2011 the Australian secondary school students' surveys revealed around "three out of four Australian secondary students ages between 12 and 17 had tried alcohol.

According to the Drug Info website drinking:

- Increases risk of injury and self-harm - poor decision making, violence, using illicit drugs.
- Effects mental health - young people who drink to cope with problems are more likely to suffer from depression.
- Effects brain development - memory, ability to learn, problem solving skills can all be affected.
- Contributes to the three leading causes of death amongst adolescents - unintentional injuries, homicide and suicide.

TOBACCO

Munro says, "Tobacco is still a substance that young people are often tempted to try but only about 17 - 18 per cent of young people smoke tobacco."

Tobacco is a stimulant drug which speeds up the messages travelling between the brain and the body. While there are more than 4000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, the three main ones are:

- Nicotine - is what smokers become dependent on.
- Tar - is released when a cigarette burns and coats the lungs and can cause lung and throat cancer.
- Carbon Monoxide - a toxic gas that reduces the amount of oxygen available to the muscles, brain and blood.

There is no safe level of tobacco use. Long-term effects include a higher risk of heart disease, hardening of the arteries and other circulatory problems.

CANNABIS

LA spokesperson for the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit with the Police Department has said, "Generally speaking it's [cannabis] the one that's most available and most accessible."

Cannabis is a depressant drug, which means unlike cigarettes its use slows down the messages travelling between your brain and body.

Long-term effects may eventually cause memory loss, learning difficulties, mood swings, decreased sex drive and regular colds.

Those with a family history of mental illness are more likely to also experience anxiety, depression and psychotic symptoms after using cannabis. But other than alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis, what other drugs should parents be aware of when starting the conversation with school-aged children?

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INHALANTS

Inhalants are something that some kids experiment with but it is usually a passing faze. People who inhale products like paint, cleaning fluid and glue to get high may experience an initial rush, confusion, disorientation or drowsiness, but the comedown can last several days.

Side effects from inhalants include: headaches, nausea and dizziness and can also cause permanent damage. Chemicals from the products can build up in your system, irritate the stomach and worst case, cause organ damage.

Synthetics or new psychoactive substances (NPS)

In the past, kids were experimenting with synthetic drugs but that may have been because they were legal.

Also referred to as herbal highs, party pills or bath salts, synthetics come in the form of powders, pills and dried herbs that have been soaked in chemicals and designed to mimic the illicit drugs; banned drugs are replaced with new ones.

Even though these drugs might be legal, this does not mean they are safe. The ever-changing ingredients mean it is difficult to know the effects. For more information on synthetic drugs visit the Drug Info website.

When it comes to keeping your children away from drugs and alcohol, Geoff Munro says most parents don't realise how influential they are.

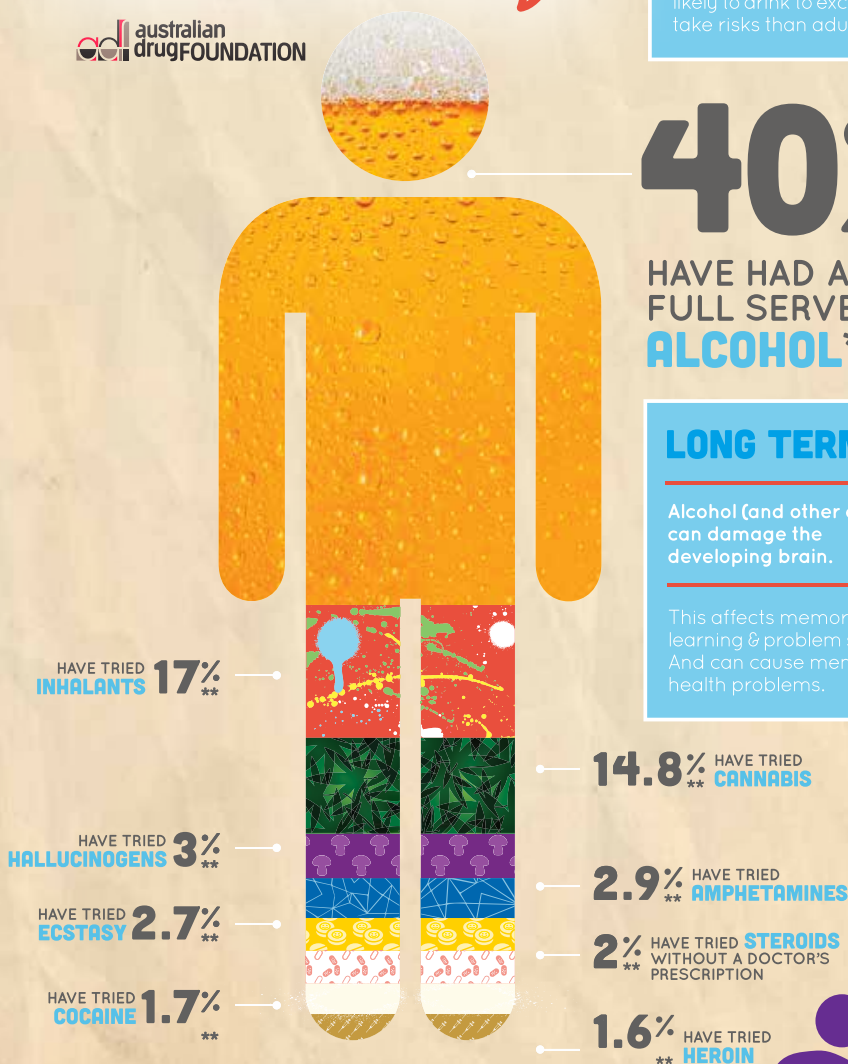
"The research shows that if parents make it clear to their children that they don't want them drinking or smoking, their children are less likely to do that."

Livia Gamble

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WHAT YEAR OLDS 12-17 ARE REALLY USING

australian
drugFOUNDATION



SHORT TERM

Alcohol contributes to the 3 major causes of teen death: injury, homicide & suicide.

Young people are more likely to drink to excess and take risks than adults. ***

40%
HAVE HAD A
FULL SERVE OF
ALCOHOL*

LONG TERM

Alcohol (and other drugs) can damage the developing brain.

This affects memory, learning & problem solving. And can cause mental health problems. ***

* 2010 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report

** 2011 Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) Survey

*** 2009 Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol



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