

# Drugs, substances & alcohol

## It's a choice - you can say 'no'

Lots of young people want to know about drugs and alcohol - this doesn't mean you have to take them or feel like you should just because people around you might be.

There are lots of reasons why people drink or take drugs, sometimes it is because they think it's going to be fun. Drugs can seriously affect your health and the way you see the world around you - what may seem fun at first can easily start leading to serious problems which you may find difficult to try and solve without additional support. It is easy to get into drug debts, start dropping out of education or training, have arguments at home, be exploited or get involved in an accident or criminal activity. There are many risks with any drink or drug use, so ask yourself, is it really worth it?

Prescription medicines and those that are available from a pharmacist can often be misused. Extreme care should be taken when using medicines as they can have serious side effects. Even too much paracetamol can have a life-long effect on your liver! Only use them for the purposes they have been prescribed. Children under 16 should not use aspirin.

### **'Legal highs'**

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### **What does the Act mean by 'psychoactive'?**

For the purposes of this Act, a substance produces a psychoactive effect in a person if, by stimulating or depressing the person's central nervous system, it affects the person's mental functioning or emotional state.

The new law excludes alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, and medical products.

Offenders can face up to seven years in jail. The Act will also enable police to shut down 'headshops' (stores from which 'legal highs' and drugs paraphernalia can be bought) and online dealers. However, new 'legal highs' are being created all the time, meaning that it may be hard to control them. There are also fears that the sale of 'legal highs' could move to the dark web.

### **Are you drinking too much?**

Most young people choose not to use drugs or alcohol and it is a myth that you need to drink or use drugs to enjoy yourself. It's a good idea to make sure that you have good factual information about these substances before you decide if you are going to use them.

**“Health officials tell us that an alcohol-free childhood is the healthiest and best option.”**

They say that it is best not to drink until at least the age of 15. If you are between 15 and 17 and are going to drink alcohol, it is safer to drink only very small amounts under adult supervision. Even small amounts of alcohol can lead to a number of health problems as well as becoming a victim of crime, being vulnerable to assault and doing something you may regret later. Alcohol can affect different people in different ways, even what may seem like a very small amount can be harmful.

If you think you may be drinking too much or you or other people are worried about your drinking then seek information about cutting down.

If you feel under pressure to drink alcohol or are drinking because you have problems, try to address this by talking to an adult you trust or a sensible friend.