

Talking about solvents



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

Why talk about solvents?

- More teenagers in Northern Ireland die from misusing household products than from taking Ecstasy and cocaine.
- A lot of young teenagers in Northern Ireland still try misusing solvents: as many as one fifth of 15-16 year olds have experimented with solvents.
- Solvents are widely available and are relatively easy to obtain.
- They are used by younger teenagers, usually before experimentation with illegal drugs.
- Information about the risks can help protect young people.
- Children do listen to and respect their parents.

REMEMBER: If you don't talk to your child about solvents, somebody else will.

What are solvents?

The range of products known as solvents is extensive and includes:

- aerosol sprays (like hairsprays, air fresheners or pain relieving sprays);
- butane gas (cigarette lighter fuel);
- solvent-based adhesives and glues;
- dry-cleaning fluids;
- paint and paint thinners;
- correcting fluid;
- nail varnish remover;
- petrol.

Solvent sniffing is not illegal, but selling solvents to young people, knowing or suspecting that the product will be misused, is against the law.



What are the risks?

- Misusing solvents carries the risk of 'sudden sniffing death', which can occur with first-timers as well as regular users.
- Inhaling (breathing in) solvents can cause the heart to beat irregularly and sometimes stop.
- Using large plastic bags when inhaling solvents can result in suffocation.
- Solvents act as depressants and cause intoxication and occasionally hallucinations.
- Users may become unconscious and choke on their own vomit.
- Inhaling solvents in dangerous places increases the risk of accidents.
- Young people misusing inflammable solvents run the risk of seriously burning themselves, especially if they smoke at the same time.
- Long-term regular use may also cause problems with the brain, kidneys, bone marrow and liver.

What are the signs of misuse?

Changes in young people's behaviour are not unusual, so don't jump to conclusions. But ask yourself the following questions:

- Are certain household products being bought more often than usual?
- Do you have aerosols that appear to be full but don't spray?
- Are household products out of their usual place in the house?
- Have you noticed a sudden change in your child's behaviour such as changes in their mood, eating or sleeping patterns?
- Is your child mixing with a new set of friends?
- Have you noticed any physical symptoms, such as a runny nose?
- Have you recognised signs of intoxication/drunkenness?
- Have you smelt chemicals on clothes or on the breath?



What can I do as a parent?

- Listen carefully - find the time and space to listen to and talk with your child. Find out what your child knows and if they've any worries.
- Reassure your child that it's OK to be independent or different - sometimes children feel they have to try solvents to be part of a crowd or to fit in.
- Establish a clear family position on solvents. Explain that they are dangerous and because you love your children you don't want them to take solvents.
- Give lots of praise - this helps boost your child's self-confidence and encourages your child to avoid making choices that could cause them harm.
- Have positive expectations - always expect the best from your child, not the worst.
- Although there is no set age to start talking about drugs or solvents, children from the age of nine upwards should know that they are dangerous.
- Keep up to date with your child's interests and friends, especially any new friends.
- Stay alert to the possible signs of solvent misuse - as a parent you are in an excellent position to spot some of these signs.



Where can I get further information?

If you're concerned about your child and solvent misuse, you can get help and advice from:

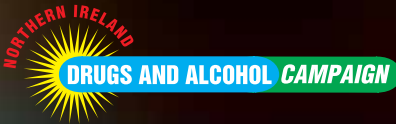
- **Re-Solv** (the society for the prevention of solvent and volatile substance misuse)
Graham House,
Knockbracken Healthcare Park,
Saintfield Road,
Belfast BT8 8BH.
Tel: 028 9070 2493
www.re-solv.org
- **The National Drugs Helpline**
Provides free, confidential advice and information on drugs and solvents.
Tel: 0800 77 66 00

The following organisations also offer support and counselling to solvent and drug users and their families:

- **Northern Ireland Community Addiction Service**
40 Elmwood Avenue, Belfast BT9 6AZ.
Tel: 028 9066 4434
- **Dunlewey Substance Advice Centre**
226 Stewartstown Road, Belfast BT17 0LB.
Tel: 028 9061 1162
- **The Breakthru Project**
18 Killymeal Road, Dungannon BT71 6LG.
Tel: 028 8775 3228

Or why not visit your GP? Your family doctor will be able to advise you on solvents and local support services.

For free, confidential advice
and information on drugs
and solvents call the
National Drugs Helpline
0800 77 66 00



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