

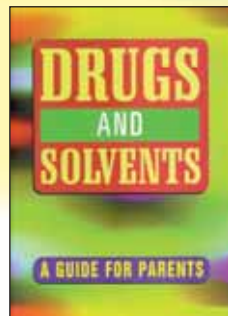
Further information about drugs

If you're worried about your child and drugs, don't feel you have to deal with it alone. There are lots of places where you can get help and advice.

The **National Drugs Helpline** is a free and confidential service. Trained counsellors offer general advice and information about specific drugs and can direct you to local support services in your area.

Call the National Drugs Helpline on 0800 77 66 00.

For information about what drugs look like, how to recognise the signs of drug taking and what to do in an emergency, ask for a copy of *Drugs and solvents - a guide for parents*. You can get this booklet free from the National Drugs Helpline or from the local Health Promotion Department of your Health and Social Services Board area.



Your **family doctor (GP)** is another good source of advice about drugs and local support services.



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TALKING

about

DRUGS

A guide for parents

Growing up

Young people seem to grow up much earlier these days. The world of a nine year old today is quite different to what it was 20 or 30 years ago. Children and young people are subjected to a huge range of pressures and influences. They are bombarded daily with media images from around the world. We can't always protect our children from such images and pressures.

Why talk about drugs?

- drugs are available in Northern Ireland;
- young people hear about them and some as young as ten years old have been offered them;
- accurate information about the risks and dangers of drugs can help protect young people;
- children do listen to and respect their parents;
- young people need to have someone to talk to whom they trust.

Remember if you don't talk to your child about drugs, somebody else will.

Drugs can be a very confusing subject for children. If they're so dangerous, why is the medicine cabinet full of them? If alcohol is so bad for you, why do mum and dad drink it? Children are constantly receiving mixed messages about drugs. Parents can help their children sort out the facts from fiction.

What age should you start talking to your child about drugs?

There isn't really a lower age limit. Children and young people hear about drugs at an early age on television, from older brothers and sisters and from older friends. Plus, research shows many children and young people are being offered drugs.

It's important that children understand early that drugs are dangerous and could do them harm. As they grow older you can be more specific about different drugs.

Tips on talking with your child about drugs

- Listen carefully - find the time and space to listen to and talk with your child. Find out what they know 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 drugs to be part of a crowd or to fit in.
- Establish a clear family position on drugs. Explain that drugs are dangerous, and because you love your children you don't want them to take drugs.
- Give lots of praise - this helps boost your child's self-confidence and encourages them to avoid making choices which could cause them harm.
- Have positive expectations - always expect the best from your children, not the worst.
- Establish clear rules about right and wrong behaviour - children do look to parents for acceptable limits. If you have clear rules about issues such as homework and watching TV, it's easier to set rules about other behaviour such as taking drugs.
- Repeat your messages when you can - but in a way that makes sense to your child. Use everyday experiences and issues raised on television to bring the subject into your conversations.
- Although there is no 'set age' for starting to talk about drugs, children from the age of nine upwards should know that drugs are dangerous.
- As children get older they should be encouraged to discuss any specific concerns about drugs as and when the issue arises.