

### OTHER TITLES

#### Create It

*Teaching your children to talk about their feelings*

*How can I help my young child learn to get along with others?*

*If you're a parent, you're a role model: How to teach your children by example*

#### Nurture It

*How can I teach my young child to deal with peer pressure?*

*Teaching your children the truth about drugs and gambling*

*How can I help my young child to be more confident?*

*How to listen actively to your children*

#### Choose It

*How can I help my child if my partner is addicted?*

*Helping your teen work through anger*

*The truth about popular drugs*

*How do I know if my teen is using drugs?*

*How do I talk to my teenager about drugs?*

*Raves and club drugs: How do I protect my kids?*

#### Get It Back

*Helping teens evaluate their drug use*

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*Intervening when your teen is using drugs*

*Getting help for your son or daughter who is drinking, using other drugs or gambling*

*Supporting your son or daughter in recovery*

IF YOU'RE LIKE MOST PEOPLE, you've heard a lot about drugs. If you're like most parents, you're concerned about the dangers they could present for your kids, but you're not completely sure what those dangers are.

You may not have a lot of specific knowledge about every drug you've heard about, but you do know that when they are overused, they can create problems.

When most people think of drugs, they think only of illegal drugs, and they think of them as one big group of things you shouldn't have anything to do with. But there are big differences among drugs. They range from helpful (like antibiotics, when you have a bad infection) to very dangerous, with most drugs falling somewhere in the middle with the potential to help or hurt.

The drugs that people become addicted to are the mood-altering drugs (MADs) that change the way we think, feel or behave. They are dangerous for any of us when we make them the centre of our lives. You probably know this in principle already: any activity, including watching television, or even working, is a problem when you do it so much that it damages major areas of your life. These areas include your physical health, employment (work or school), legal status, leisure time, family or social life, emotional health and spiritual life.

The truth about drugs is that most of them can be used in ways that do little damage. Exceptions to this are the inhalants and non-beverage alcohol, which are poisons not meant for human consumption.

"The reality" is that most people who use MADs, with the exception of those who use tobacco, do not become addicted.

The truth about drugs is that all of them have a price. As with anything else in life, you can't get something for nothing. Using

cocaine makes you feel awake right now, but you just postpone the fatigue, you don't erase it. Later, you crash. Marijuana may bring a couple of hours of peace now, but when you use it a lot and then can't get it, you'll feel irritable and anxious—plus you won't have learned healthier and more reliable ways of getting to peace and happiness. Some MADs are more addictive than others, but it is possible for any mood-altering drug to become the centre of your life, hurting every other part of your life.

Many people who use drugs do not do so safely, and most drugs can damage mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

Drugs do not affect everyone in the same way. How a drug affects someone depends on the person (body size, health factors, metabolism, etc.), the drug (dosage, purity, etc.), and the environment in which the person is using the drug. Drugs taken in combination can have a much greater effect than either drug could have on its own (for example, alcohol combined with some painkillers has caused brain death).

People who start using young suffer the most when they start to rely on drugs to help them cope with the challenges of growing up: making friends, facing fears, and dealing with sexual pressures and the need to perform well at school, at work or in sports. They don't get a chance to develop their own life skills, and when they want to quit, they have to catch up with their peers before they can have a normal drug-free life.

Here's a brief look at "the truth" about some drugs that you may know, or are likely to have heard of in the media.

## **“Invisible” drugs**

The most commonly used and abused drugs are the legal drugs, which most people don't even think of as drugs. Nicotine and caffeine are two of these drugs. As a parent, you may be concerned about your child smoking and drinking coffee and cola drinks, and you can learn more about these drugs by reading the ABCs of Smoking, and the ABCs of Caffeine.

Alcohol is another legal drug, one that is involved in more deaths, illness and injury than any drug except tobacco. People can overdose on alcohol: passing out and vomiting are two ways that the body responds to an alcohol overdose. Hangovers are symptoms of withdrawal after short-term use of alcohol. For someone who is addicted to alcohol, withdrawal can actually be life-threatening.

## **Illegal drugs**

Cannabis is the most popular illegal drug in Canada, among both adults and kids. It is used in the form of marijuana (dried leaves and flowers of the cannabis plant) and as hashish and hash oil (from the resin of the plant). Many people think that cannabis is safe because it is “natural” and “organic.” However, marijuana smoke causes many of the same problems as tobacco smoke: people have been shown to get precancerous lesions (wounds or sores) on their lungs, and they get more frequent lung infections. It is true that some illnesses are helped by cannabis, but since research has only just begun, no one knows if cannabis is actually the best treatment for these illnesses. Cannabis is less addictive than many other drugs, but people who use it regularly do become psychologically dependent on it. They often can't feel good without it. Those who use high daily doses can become physically addicted. When they suddenly stop, they may experience nervousness, anxiety, sweating, poor sleep, irritability, low appetite, nausea, chills, fever or tremors.

Crack is a form of cocaine that can be smoked or injected. People can get high with a smaller quantity when they smoke or inject crack than when they snort powdered cocaine. Injecting or smoking crack cocaine gives a faster high, but a shorter one. People then feel like they need another “hit.” When people take repeated hits, and get the resulting very quick highs, they are much more likely to become addicted. This is why crack is much more addictive than powdered cocaine.

In either form, though, cocaine is addictive both physically and psychologically, and it's a very difficult habit to kick.

Ecstasy is a drug that many kids think is harmless. Kids take it because it makes them feel good about themselves and other people, and because it makes them feel energetic enough to dance all night. Be prepared for your kids to tell you that it causes fewer deaths than alcohol, and that, unlike alcohol, it doesn't lead to violent or obnoxious behaviour. These comparisons are honest, but taking ecstasy is not safe. First, it's an illegal drug, and you can get charged with possession. Second, because it is illegal, you don't know what you're buying. You could end up with something like PMA, which looks like ecstasy and is sold as ecstasy in Canada, the United States and Europe. It is much more harmful and has caused several deaths. Third, people have died at raves because ecstasy contributes to dehydration, and also gives you the energy for nonstop dancing. People forget to drink water, and have died of overheating and dehydration at raves. Finally, many kids experience depression and fatigue for days after taking the drug. There is also some evidence that using ecstasy damages the brain.

These consequences are scary, but it's important to keep a balanced outlook. Yes, kids have died at raves, but many more die from the consequences of drinking alcohol. There have been a few deaths at raves, among the millions of kids in Europe, the United States and Canada who have attended raves. The brain damage that has been shown was slight, and limited to only one kind of memory loss.

If you exaggerate the dangers, you may lose the trust of your kids. They may know other kids who have used drugs and seem to be just fine. Still, your kids are better off not using drugs, especially illegal drugs.

In recent years, addiction counsellors have reported seeing an increased number of teens who use “uppers.” Uppers are stimulant drugs like amphetamines, which were originally used to help people lose weight and stay awake. Methamphetamine has the same effects as the amphetamines, but is slightly different chemically, making it easier to dissolve and inject. Crystal meth is a slang term used for a powdered form of methamphetamine, which is often snorted. The same name may be used for a smokable form of methamphetamine more commonly known as ice. Smoking gives a more intense high. The term speed includes all of these drugs, but is usually used to refer to amphetamine and methamphetamine in pill form.

Uppers make people feel wide awake, energetic and confident. Kids use these drugs to lose weight, to stay awake so they can study or work while going to school, and to feel better about themselves. Unfortunately, you can't get something for nothing, and the use of uppers depletes the stores of energy

in the body. The user may begin to feel restless and anxious. Using high doses for several days can lead to hallucination (thinking you see, hear or feel something that isn't there), psychosis (losing touch with reality) and paranoia (unreasonable fears). People who use frequently can become psychologically dependent on the drug (first you use it to feel better, then you use it to just feel normal). Some forms of speed are injected, some smoked, some taken as pills. Injecting can be especially dangerous, as shared needles can pass on HIV (the virus that causes AIDS) and hepatitis.

### For more information

We understand that everyone's needs are different. Whether you want to prevent your child from using alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or you want to help your child deal with a drug problem, we can help. Information and prevention programs, group and family counselling, outpatient and residential treatment, and the Protection of Children Abusing Drugs program are offered by Alberta Health Services and its funded services to help your child and your family.

For more information and to find an addiction services office near you, please call the 24-hour Helpline at 1-866-332-2322.

## Activity Page

Match the description to the drug. Try this quiz with your kids.

### Drug A

Some people call me the most addictive drug, because nearly everyone who uses me regularly becomes addicted. I kill more people per year than any other drug. Teenage girls use me more often than teenage boys. People who sell this drug to women imply that it will make them slimmer. Who am I?

### Drug B

I am the most popular illegal drug. Most people relax when they use me, but they also get clumsy and shouldn't drive. Using a lot daily can cause physical and psychological addiction. Users sometimes experience anxiety, panic and paranoia. My effects are "mixed": I raise your heart rate, but slow your brain. I'm famous for making users hungry. Who am I?

### Drug C

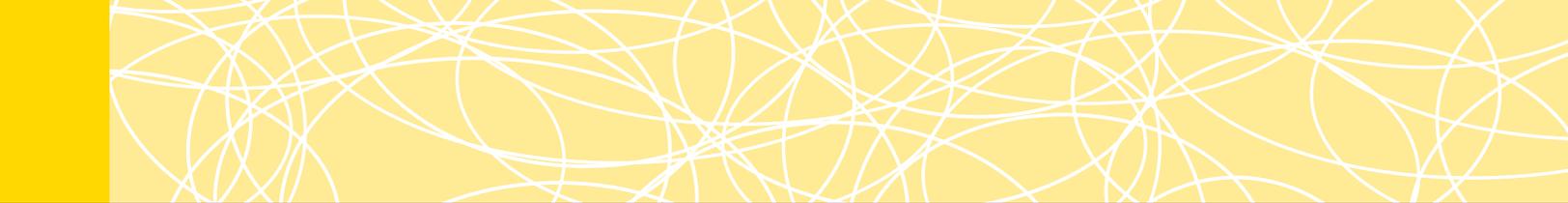
I've been used for thousands of years. I'm natural, made by fermenting vegetables, fruits or grains. Like Drug A, I can cause death. People who use me sometimes get happy, talkative, sociable and silly, or they may get sad, sentimental and weepy. Using me often, and in large amounts, can cause serious brain damage, and hurt your liver, your kidneys and the lining of your digestive system. What's my name?

### Drug D

We are a group of drugs that people use so they can stay awake all night, so they have lots of energy and can be very productive, or so that they lose weight. After you use us for awhile, we also make you feel edgy and nervous. You may even think other people are out to get you.

### Answers:

- A. nicotine
- B. cannabis (or marijuana)
- C. alcohol
- D. stimulants, uppers, or speed, including amphetamines, methamphetamines. Cocaine is a stimulant and has all of these effects as well, but is not usually called speed.



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