

# Drugs – Get the Facts

## Introduction

Migrating to a new country can be difficult for all family members. For parents, there are many challenges and obstacles to face without their usual support networks of extended family and friends. For children, there are problems too, because the demands on their parents are greater.

The Victorian State Government provides information and strategies on drugs to parents of teenagers so that they will be better equipped to respond to drug issues. The Government wants to help all parents, including migrant parents, prevent drug problems.

## Prevention tips

Experimenting is a natural part of growing up. Nearly all teenagers experiment with alcohol and tobacco. Some will experiment with illegal drugs. The most effective prevention measures are good communication and building strong relationships with your children. Here are some other tips.

### Be a Good Role Model

Children are exposed to legal drugs such as alcohol and tobacco at a very early age and learn from the behaviour of their parents. Children whose parents smoke or drink are more likely to smoke and drink themselves.

### Be Informed

Be prepared to discuss drug issues openly and honestly. Your child may know more about drugs and their effects than you do, so find out the facts in advance. Don't exaggerate about the dangers of drugs or try to scare your children, because they may stop listening.

### Listen

Listen to your child's problems or concerns. Don't over-react. If your children can talk to you, they will be less likely to have problems or make stupid decisions.

### Talk

Talk about everyday things with your children as though they are adults. If you talk to your children regularly about school, friends, sport or the music they like, it won't be as difficult to discuss an emotional issue like drugs.

### Develop Trust

You must trust and have confidence in your own children. Don't question their judgement. Often children want to prove to their parents that they can be trusted about the choices they make. Talking about drugs with your children won't trigger an interest.

### Ensure Your Child Knows That You Care

Show your children that you care about them. Try to spend recreational time with your children as a family.

### Establish Some Agreements

Plan ahead for potentially difficult situations and establish some acceptable agreements about drinking and drugs. Agree to collect your children rather than let them drive after drinking or be passenger with someone who has been drinking. Part of the agreement is that the parent will come without any fuss. All discussions should wait until the next day.

## Types of drugs

While alcohol and tobacco are legal and therefore more "acceptable", they can be just as dangerous and addictive as illegal drugs.

Five drugs that parents are concerned about:

**Herion** – a depressant which affects concentration and coordination. Heroin slows a person's ability to respond to unexpected situations.

**Ecstasy** – ('the party drug') is taken as a tablet. Ecstasy speeds up the central nervous system and causes hallucinations.

**Marijuana** – is dried cannabis leaves usually mixed with tobacco and smoked. Although illegal it is viewed by some young people as fairly harmless.

**Alcohol** – including beer, wine, spirits, is easy for people under 18 years to obtain. Young people are exposed to alcohol and may use even though the minimum legal purchase age is 18.

**Tobacco** – Even though smoking causes harmful health effects, many young people think it is a 'cool' thing to do.

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## Some of the warning signs.

It can be difficult to tell if your child has a problem with drugs because the effects vary greatly. Sometimes drug related behaviour can appear like difficult teenager behaviour.

Things to look out for include:

- wild mood swings
- staying out all night
- a drop in school grades
- trouble with the police or at school
- a sudden change of friends
- an unexplained need for money.

## What should I do if I find out my child is using drugs?

**DON'T PANIC:** Sit down and discuss the issue with your child and try to understand and help. Trying drugs doesn't necessarily lead to continued use or to abuse.

**SHOW YOUR CONCERN:** Make it clear that you love your child and that drug taking can cause harm.

**CHOOSE YOUR MOMENT:** Don't try to discuss things when your child is intoxicated or under the influence of drugs. Talk it through when everyone is fresh the next day.

**RECOGNISE PROBLEMS:** Children may be experimenting with drugs because they have some sort of problem or need help and support. Try to address the actual problem and get professional help if required .

**DON'T BLAME YOURSELF:** If your child is using drugs, it doesn't mean that you've failed as a parent. Many young people go through difficult times no matter how caring or supportive their parents are.

**SEEK HELP:** Drug issues can't really be dealt with adequately as an isolated family group – it is important to get professional help. The earlier you get help the better.

## Services

The Victorian State Government funds a range of services for people with drug and alcohol related problems, their families and carers. These services vary from counselling services for drug users and their families (provided by social workers, health professionals, psychologists and general practitioners) where no referral is required, through to specialist services requiring referral from a medical practitioner (eg. Specialist methadone services).

The range of services is designed to meet the diverse needs of clients. Some services are provided to people in their own homes (eg: home-based withdrawal, outpatient withdrawal). Residential services are available where people live within a therapeutic community to assist them with their rehabilitation (eg residential withdrawal, residential rehabilitation, supported accommodation).

There is much more information available on the drug issue that you can obtain by calling 1800 888 236 or by visiting our website at: [www.drugs.vic.gov.au](http://www.drugs.vic.gov.au)

Or if you wish to speak to someone in your language, you can call your local culturally specific agency on:

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