



**What every
Parent and Grandparent
needs to know about
Drugs and Alcohol**

by **John Mann MP**

INTRODUCTION



WHAT EVERY PARENT AND GRANDPARENT NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

“Today more than ever parents, grandparents and carers need to know the risks that face their children.

Life is more complex now than it was even a generation ago. Stronger drugs, so-called ‘legal highs’ and the internet provides us with new challenges. But if you spot the signs, drug and alcohol abuse are nightmares that we can do something about.

You should look out for slurred or forced speech, glassy eyes, loss of balance and coming home late. If you suspect anything, you should talk to your child or grandchild. Don’t be confrontational - if they are depressed or angry you don’t want to make matters worse. And the golden rule: always get advice from your GP without delay.

I have seen at first hand the damage drugs and alcohol can do as I work with people across Bassetlaw. I hope that by providing clear information we can all help save young people’s lives.”

John Mann

ALCOHOL

Most of us enjoy a drink now and again, but that doesn't mean you should let your children. Even the fairly small amount of alcohol that is safe for an adult can have long-term implications for a teenager or child. What's more, young people are drinking more than ever with most getting their alcohol from their parents—with or without their knowledge.

Alcohol can be seriously dangerous: at peak times, up to 70 percent of all Accident and Emergency admissions are alcohol related. Drinking too much harms judgement and means your child may get themselves into dangerous situations.

What to do....

Make sure your child understands the dangers of alcohol and help them understand their limits. Drinks in the UK are labelled with how many 'units' of alcohol that they contain. A pint of beer has two to three units, one 25ml shot of vodka equals one unit. An adult should have no more than two to four units in one evening, and no more than three times a week, but even this is dangerous for young people.

If your child has been drinking alcohol they need to allow at least 48 hours before their system is free of it. If your child develops an alcohol problem, you should contact a GP who can give advice about confidential services available to them.

Danger zone

Alcohol is broken down in the liver. But drink too much, and the body can't get rid of it. For adults, drinking more than two to four units regularly can lead to stomach cancer, cirrhosis of the liver, increased chance of strokes and obesity. 22,000 people die each year from alcohol related diseases.

But the most immediate danger for young people consuming any alcohol is crime. **45% of violent crimes, and almost 75% of teenage deaths are alcohol related.** An individual who begins drinking as a young teen is four times more likely to become dependent on alcohol later on in life.

John Mann has been working with the **Bassetlaw Youth Alcohol Forum**, a group of local 16 and 17 year olds, to look at how we can curb our youth drinking culture. Their survey showed that most young people who drink get their alcohol from their parents, with or without their knowledge.

But it also showed that most young people are highly responsible, and recommended that the authorities give their top priority to providing more activities for young people to do. John is working with young people to give teenagers something more positive to do with their time. Read more at www.johnmannmp.com/youth

COCAINE AND CRACK

Coke, snow, rocks, Charlie, freebase—new names are being used all the time, but whatever you call it, **cocaine use is highly addictive and illegal**. So even though the high from cocaine rarely lasts for more than 30 minutes, if your child tries it, they can quickly become regular users.

As young people get addicted to drugs they often try to fund their habit through crime, or even theft from their own home and family. Look for warning signs like red, bloodshot eyes, a runny nose or frequent sniffing, loss of weight and withdrawal or depression.

What to do...

Talk to your children and make sure they know how addictive cocaine can be, and how they are at risk trying it even occasionally.

If you think your child is taking cocaine, you need to take action. Book them an appointment with a GP, who will be able to offer confidential advice on treatment. Your doctor will not involve the police.

Mixing any drug with other substances creates an even greater risk, and cocaine users often use other drugs and especially alcohol, which can often mask their cocaine problems.

Danger zone

Cocaine addicts may experience seizures, abdominal pain, nausea, malnourishment, breathing problems and even heart attacks.

But that's nothing compared to what it does to your brain and nervous system. It can physically alter your brain tissue, leading to psychiatric problems including violence, delusions and paranoia.

These unsettling side effects also make it difficult for addicts to find work and hold together relationships.

Possession can lead to seven years in prison, while giving cocaine to friends can land your child with a custodial sentence.

Cocaine comes from several species of the coca bush in South America. Like Heroin (the sale of which supports the Taliban in Afghanistan), trading in cocaine supports organised crime in South America. Over the generations this has destabilised the region, causing the deaths of innocent civilians.

To farm cocaine, thousands of square miles of precious rainforest have been devastated as farmers make way for their crop. Santos Calderon, the vice-president of Colombia, recently appealed to UK users of the drug to think about the **four square metres of rainforest cut down to produce a single gram of cocaine.**

CANNABIS

Dizziness, bloodshot eyes and a poor memory are all symptoms of using cannabis. Sustained use can lead to paranoia and damage to brain tissue.

What to do....

Talking to your children about the real dangers of cannabis use could help them to make the right choice. You could also go and see your local GP for advice, or use one of the contacts listed at the back of this booklet.

Danger zone

Cannabis is a 'Class B' drug. The Police are currently cracking down on it. Besides its association with harming mental health, users have a higher chance of getting lung cancer, reduced fertility, poor coordination and lose the ability to learn easily.

A lot of middle age people are out of date with understanding what cannabis actually is. Today, 80% of cannabis comes in the hugely stronger form of skunk. Old fashioned cannabis to skunk is like comparing beer to whisky.

The police are more active than ever over cannabis use. Last year, 75% of all drugs seized by police were cannabis or skunk.

PRESCRIPTION & OVER THE COUNTER DRUGS

Prescription and over the counter medicines are the most accessible drugs for young people and **top the list for being most commonly abused**. Drastic changes in behaviour are often a sign of a dependency on drugs. This could be mood swings, or simply increased irritability. It could also be the case that medicines at home start to disappear, or your child starts buying lots of over the counter drugs.

What to do....

Be aware of which and how many prescription and over-the-counter drugs you have in your home. Make sure you will know if any are missing. Keep an eye on internet use. Online pharmacies can be unregulated and allow drugs to be delivered direct. If you are unsure how to handle the situation seek advice from your GP.

Danger zone

Any drug can be dangerous, and prescription drugs are no different. You should only take prescription drugs following doctor's orders. Prescription drugs are safe only when taken as instructed. Mixing drugs can be even more dangerous. Taking more of them or in different ways doesn't just boost the 'high', it boosts the danger, too.

HEROIN

Heroin is the most soul destroying drug available, and has been seen to tear Bassetlaw's families apart. It is hugely addictive and expensive, although dealers are often willing to give people their first dose for free. But even experimenting with heroin can lead to someone becoming addicted for life.

Typical symptoms of an addict include:

- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Decreased awareness
- Stealing and prostitution to fund their habit.

What to do....

Although Heroin is one of the most destructive drugs, help is available, Bassetlaw is leading the way in providing medication for addicts. The golden rule is: contact your GP. Treatment on the NHS uses a range of options to control and steadily reduce the addiction. An addict can re-take control of their life and get back into work.

In this area most heroin is injected, causing further health dangers, including overdose death and the spread of Hepatitis and HIV Aids. The earlier treatment is started the more successful it is.

Danger zone

There is a risk of death from overdose, especially if taken with other drugs such as alcohol. Heroin stops your cough reflex, so there is a risk of death from choking on vomit.

Addicts build up a tolerance to heroin, and need more and more to get their high. A heroin addiction can cost over £100 a day, and many addicts steal to fuel their habit. As an addiction continues, addicts continually worsen their health.

When John became MP for Bassetlaw in 2001, he met several mothers of heroin addicts. He was immediately appalled at the level of service available to them, and launched the Heroin in Bassetlaw inquiry. By working with local health services, police and the community Bassetlaw has gone from having one of the worst heroin problems in the country to being a real success story. Read more at www.johnmannmp.com/heroininquiry

In 2002 only two heroin addicts were receiving treatment in Bassetlaw. However, today that number has grown to four hundred, with a **75% drop in burglaries**. This clearly shows treating addiction is beneficial for both them and the communities in which they live.

ECSTASY

Ecstasy pills or 'E' used to be seen as the party-goers drug, they are class A and highly addictive. Ecstasy gives a boost in energy, so users can keep partying harder and longer. This can lead to dehydration - the body not having enough water to keep on going - and ultimately death.

Ecstasy can give the feeling of being 'at one' with everyone and everything. Withdrawal can often lead to heavily depressive feelings the next day.

What to do....

If you become concerned that your child might be using ecstasy, speak confidentially to a doctor. Talk to your child. Do not make accusations, and be prepared to listen. Stress and depression may be at the root of your child's decision to take drugs, and you don't want to make matters worse.

Some experts advise that people who do take ecstasy should take breaks and drink about a pint of water every hour. Even then ecstasy will still do long term damage. There is little awareness that drinking too much water will dilute the salt in your child's body again causing health problems or even death.

LEGAL HIGHS & THE LAW

‘Legal Highs’

‘Legal highs’ are not safe and may not, in fact, be legal. The name refers to chemicals that are available legally, but when abused give the user a high. Just because a chemical is available legally, does not mean that it is legal or safe to misuse it.

Some of these drugs, like solvents, have been around for years. However new substances are also entering the markets. So called ‘herbal highs’ are chemically manufactured and, as yet, their long term side effects are unknown.

The Government is now fast tracking a number of legal highs onto the list of banned substances.

Some people are now using the internet in the search for these drugs. You should keep an eye on your child’s internet use and tactfully ask them about any web pages you are unsure about.

Class A

Possession leads to seven years prison or an unlimited fine or both. If caught supplying these drugs, even to friends, they risk life in prison and an unlimited fine.

Class B

Possession risks five years in prison and an unlimited fine. Dealing leads to 14 years in prison and a heavy fine.

Class C

Possession risks two years in prison and an unlimited fine. Dealing up to 14 years in prison or a heavy fine.

USEFUL NUMBERS

John Mann MP

01909 506 200

Hetty's—Support for parents, grandparents and friends

0800 0850 941

Nottinghamshire Drug and Alcohol Action Team

01623 414 114

National Drugs Helpline

0800 776 600 or www.ndh.org.uk

Drinkline

0800 917 8282

FRANK

www.talktofrank.com

If you suspect someone may be dealing drugs,

contact CrimeStoppers confidentially on

0800 555 111

For more information on drugs and alcohol see

www.johnmannmp.com

Disclaimer

This is a guidebook to the law and general health advice. Always consult your doctor on matters relating to alcohol and drugs.

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