

**Your son  
or daughter  
is using  
drugs or  
alcohol:**

**what  
can  
you do?**

# BROS & SIS

## Your son or daughter is using drugs or alcohol; what can you do?

### **Talk to them.**

#### **Encourage your son or daughter to talk.**

(Often harder than it sounds!). Listen with genuine interest, without being judgmental. Blaming, preaching or criticising your son or daughter can mess with the relationship, close down the lines of communication, and create conflict. Remember that 'drug use' does not necessarily mean 'drug problem'.

#### **Talk about their behaviour, not the drugs.**

If they're doing something that's bothering you, like anger outbursts, deal with the specific behaviour, not their drug use. You could try naming the specific problem or behaviour, and say it in terms of 'you and I' statements. For example, 'when you lie to me all the time, I feel like I can't trust you'.

#### **Choose your moment.**

It is difficult to talk with your son or daughter if they are intoxicated, drug affected or when you are angry or upset. Wait until they are sober and you feel ready.

### **Understand the drug.**

Get the latest information on the drug they are using and its effects. This may help you to feel more prepared. Have a read of the drug-specific fact sheets on our website, or call Family Drug Helpline, ADIS or DirectLine for advice (numbers are at end of this sheet). Be careful not to overreact or jump to conclusions though, as drug advice pages tend to give you the worst case scenario. Not all drug or alcohol users have problems.

### **Remember you can't 'fix' them.**

Only your son or daughter can take steps to cut down or stop their drug or alcohol use. Sometimes they won't want your help. If they don't admit there's a problem, and are not ready to get help, you can still look after yourself and others close to you. Realise that recovery may take time and many, many attempts before success. Even small steps are a positive sign.

### **You might be limited in how much you can help your son or daughter.**

Many parents invest a lot of energy in trying to cure their son or daughter of

drug or alcohol addiction. This could work, but many find that they have to let their children take their own journey. The most important thing for you to do is to let them know they have your support if they want it.

### **Things that may help your son or daughter:**

#### **Recognise that they may need help.**

You don't have to deal with the issue within the family. Getting treatment for the person may help speed up the process of recovery. Sometimes it's important to simply help your son or daughter to use drugs more safely. At least then they may be fit enough in the future to eventually be able to make a recovery.

#### **Research the treatment options.**

You could start with your GP. Treatment can include (1) counselling, (2) short-term private or public detox (where the person tries to get off the drug), (3) long term residential rehabilitation (where the person learns life skills and tries to get their life back on track), or (4) alternative drug therapy (like methadone). Remember, you cannot force someone into

treatment, and treatment probably won't work if your son or daughter is at all reluctant. You can call Family Drug Helpline, Direct Line or ADIS and they'll help discuss the options with you (numbers at the end of this fact sheet).

### **Set rules in your relationships**

– this can be hard, but try your best to work out what you're not willing to do, and draw the line. For example, don't do things for your son or daughter that they should be doing themselves. Setting boundaries will help them to develop a sense of responsibility and realise how unacceptable and inappropriate their behaviour is. Start off small and achievable with clear consequences and be prepared to negotiate (eg. If they don't wash up, you won't cook them dinner). Boundaries will also help all your children feel that their family is a fair, structured and normal one. Making it easier for someone to keep using drugs or alcohol usually does not help them in any way.

### **Your other children need support,**

even though they don't seem to have as many problems. It's easy to forget about the rest of the family and focus all your energy on the child who is using drugs or alcohol. You could dedicate some time just to check in with your other children to see what they might need or feel. Giving them some attention can help them to cope and survive. They need to feel they

are important to you. Siblings can often feel ignored and angry towards their parents or drug using brother or sister.

### **Things to help you get through this**

'Once I started to take care of myself I was able to be there for others'

### **Don't go through this alone.**

People can be far more understanding than you might think. Get advice and support from a trusted friend, family member, support group, psychologist or counsellor. You can always call the Family Drug Helpline to talk to other people who have been through similar experiences (they can also give you more information). This will help you cope and continue to support your son or daughter.

### **Try to take this one day at a time.**

Try not to lump all of life's events together, as this can make things feel even more overwhelming. Strong emotions can seem overwhelming and frightening, but they will pass. Know that you are not alone. Most people eventually learn to live with this situation. Crystal ball-gazing and imagining a bleak future doesn't achieve anything and can fill you with unhelpful despair. You can get through this and everything will probably eventually work out.

### **Focus on your needs.**

You need to look after yourself so you don't get overwhelmed by everything. Take time out. Do things that you

enjoy or have enjoyed in the past - coffee with a friend, going for a walk, gardening, hobbies, sport – anything that helps you relax or distract yourself. Try to keep to your normal routine.

### **Try not to blame yourself or anyone else.**

People use alcohol and drugs for many reasons. Analysing why this happened gets you nowhere. Understand that addiction is like a disease or a chronic illness. It can happen to anyone.

### **Many families experience drug and alcohol problems.**

For every addicted person there are five other people who are affected. You are definitely not alone.

### **Treatment options and drug advice**

Directline/ADIS, Drug advice –1800 888 236

### **For your support**

Family drug helpline – 'We've been there'. Information, help and referral service especially for families - 1300 660 068