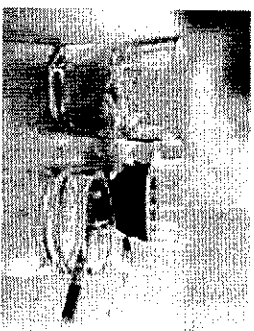


ALCOHOL & DRUGS

The use and misuse of alcohol and other drugs is one of the more controversial issues in our society and often a source of conflict between generations and between sections of society. Alcohol and other drugs are powerful substances with a potential to harm users or to tempt them into over-indulgence, so we do encourage students to take care of themselves when considering using them and to avoid taking any risks which they might regret later.



No universal classification of what constitutes unhealthy use exists. Many classifications ignore the fact that alcohol and drug use is an accepted part of many social sets. What is seen as risky behaviour by one group is accepted as normal by another.

Use of drink & drugs

The use of drink and drugs can be classified as:

- Abstinent - No use is made
- Controlled - People have made a conscious decision, have evaluated the risks and can stop if they want
- Impulsive - Use is unpredictable and can lead to unexpected accidents and harm. However, there is not continual use or dependency
- Habitual - The use of alcohol or drugs has become a significant and important part of the person's life-style. Stopping would not be easy
- Dependent - There is a high degree of physical and psychological addiction. Alcohol and drug use disrupts or rules the person's life. Stopping is not possible without considerable support

Consequences

If you are wondering about your drink or drug use, have you considered the following?

Psychological consequences

Are you using drink or drugs to escape from a problem which you might be able to solve if you faced it? If so, you may be perpetuating your shyness, anxiety, depression, unhappiness etc. rather than dealing with it for once and all.

Drink and drugs don't permanently change our world. They allow us to feel a temporary confidence or happiness, but the effect is usually one of borrowed time. Often the unhappiness or anxiety returns even more strongly once the effects wear off.

Drink and drugs can cause psychological problems by themselves. Alcohol can commonly cause depression; drugs can also cause depression, or can trigger anxiety or even psychosis (loss of reality).

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Social consequences

Drink and drugs are often seriously expensive, so uncontrolled use can lead to financial problems.

You can quite easily end up in trouble with the law. Although drinking alcohol is legal, it can lead to assault and driving when drunk which are not. Similarly, although the law may turn a blind eye to personal use of certain drugs, this attitude is not consistent. Sentences for any supplying can be heavy and unpredictable. Any conviction for drink or drugs offences may severely limit the opportunities open to you in the future.

Pronounced use of drink or drugs tends to rigidly define social groups, so it may limit your circle of friends.

Continual or large scale use of alcohol has a bad effect on most people's sex-life.

Physical consequences

Drink definitely lowers people's ability to resist harming themselves when they have problems.

Drink can lower people's inhibitions against hurting others.

Drink greatly lessens people's ability to say no to unwanted sexual encounters which they would have definitely avoided had they been sober.

Many serious accidents are drink and drug related.

There are long-term health risks.

All these things will not happen to everybody. You may be lucky and avoid any serious mishaps. However, all these consequences are seen routinely enough by anyone involved in welfare work to suggest they are not exaggerated or unusual.

Taking control

If you want to take more control of your use of drink or drugs the following suggestions may help:

- Make a list of the advantages and drawbacks of your alcohol and drug use which are personally significant to you. The above list of possible consequences may help focus your mind. Then decide whether you would like to lessen the disadvantages
- Keep a diary of your consumption over a week. Be honest about the amounts you are using. Consider whether you could limit your intake by changing your routine so as not to put you in tempting situations

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- Talk to someone whom you trust about your use. See if they feel you have cause for concern
- Consider what you are using. In particular, note when you use concentrated or particularly dangerous forms of drink and drugs. Can you substitute a less potent alternative?
- Consider the social pressures to consume. Can you limit your exposure to these - e.g. stop buying in rounds, meeting in pubs, partying late etc.?
- Consider what emotions trigger consumption. Are you using drink and drugs to help deal with certain feelings - frustration, anxiety, shyness, boredom etc. Can you find alternative means of dealing with these feelings? Try a month of abstinence. See whether you can do it, and if you can find different ways of dealing with problems. There may be distinct advantages to being able to bring your sober and unstoned self to look at various problems!

Useful contacts

Alcoholics Anonymous	(029) 2037 3939	www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk
Cardiff Community Alcohol Counselling Service	(029) 2037 2244	
DrugScope	(020) 7520 7550	www.drugscope.org.uk
Know Cannabis	0800 776 600	www.knowcannabis.org.uk
University Student Counselling Service	Cathays Park Campus: (029) 2087 4966 Health Park Campus: (029) 2074 2070	www.cardiff.ac.uk/counselling