



# Asha Fowells

## Head of Education and Engagement



Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs

# Today's training will include:

- Current context for young people
- Effects and risks of drugs
- Drugs, alcohol and the law
- Adolescent brain development, motivation and decisions
- Risk and protective factors
- **Understanding addiction**
- Practical staying safe strategies
- Talking, supporting and signposting





What % of 15 year olds  
said they'd been offered  
illegal drugs?

What % said they'd tried them?

What about 13 year olds?



# Be aware...



## 13 year-olds:

23% have been offered drugs

9% have tried drugs

## 14 year-olds:

30% have been offered drugs

13% have tried drugs

## 15 year-olds:

43% have been offered drugs

23% have tried drugs



**63%** of 13-18 year olds have seen drug-related content on social media

**32%** have seen adverts for illegal drugs

**83%** of ads appeared without searching

*Fuller, UCL 2024*

*Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People in England 2021 (NHS Digital, 2024)*



# Be aware...

## Young people in treatment

- 87% of under-18s in treatment are there for cannabis use disorder, 44% for alcohol.
- The most common vulnerability was early onset of substance use (79%) *i.e. started using substances before the age of 15.*
- Nearly half (48%) of young people who started treatment said they had a mental health treatment need (*up from 32% in 2018-19*).
- 10% were involved with social care services as a looked after child, 12% were a child in need and 8% had a child protection plan.

*Young people's substance misuse treatment statistics 2022 to 2023 (OHID, pub 2024)*



# Be aware....

## School exclusions in England

In Spring term 2022-23 there were

- 309,713 fixed term school exclusions (8,309 for drugs and alcohol)
- 4,161 permanent exclusions (190 for drugs and alcohol)

Both have increased from the same period in 2021-22

*Permanent and fixed-period exclusions in England 2022-23 (gov.uk 2024)*

**Tom Wall**

Tue 29 Aug 2023 06.00  
BST



## Hundreds of children thrown out of school in English county lines hotspots



## County lines

Police officers "reported a strong link between school exclusion and becoming a target for county lines criminals"

*Both sides of the coin (HMICFRS, 2020)*



# What are drugs?

**Drugs interfere with the brain's communication networks.**

**They might speed messages up, slow them down or alter what they do in some way.**

**This can affect people's feelings, thought processes, perceptions and behaviour.**

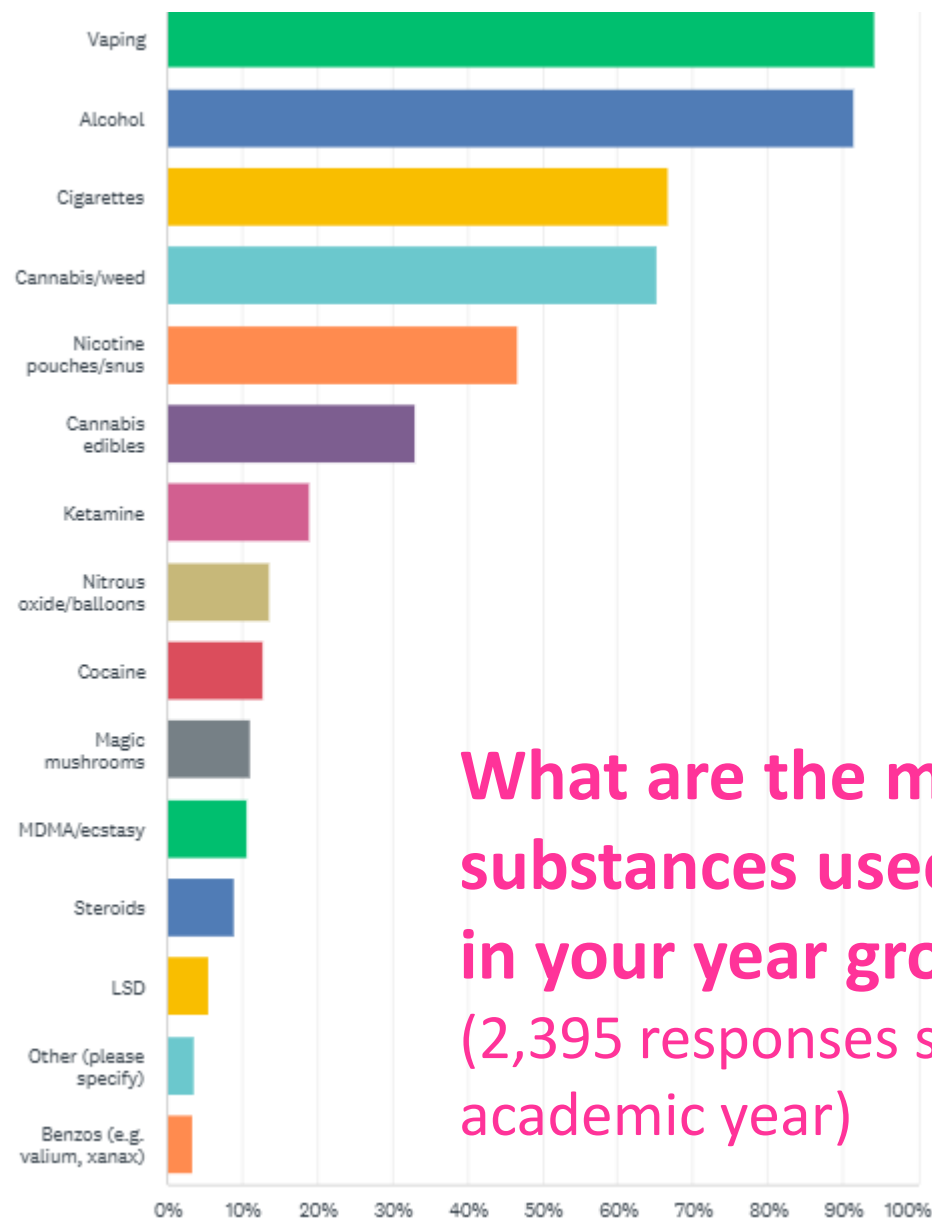




# What's around for your young people?



1. Vaping – 94%
2. Alcohol – 91%
3. Cigarettes – 67%
4. Cannabis (weed) – 65%
5. Nicotine pouches/ snus – 47%
6. Cannabis (edibles) – 33%
7. Ketamine – 19%
8. Nitrous oxide – 14%
9. Cocaine – 13%
10. Magic mushrooms – 11%
- MDMA/ecstasy – 11%
12. Steroids – 9%
13. LSD – 6%
14. Benzos - 3%
- Other – 4% (ketty beers, pink cocaine)



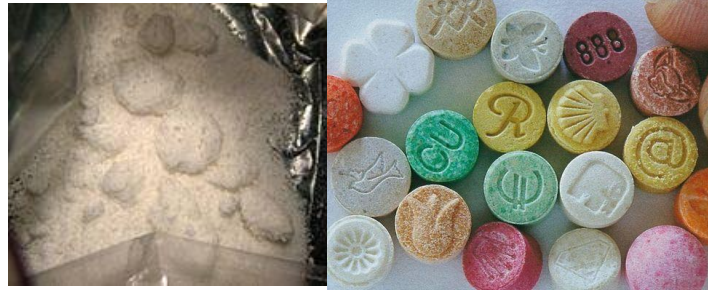
**What are the main substances used by people in your year group?**  
(2,395 responses so far this academic year)

# How do drugs work?

## Stimulants



**Nicotine**



**MDMA/ecstasy**

## Depressants



**Alcohol**



**Xanax/ benzos**



**Cocaine**



**Steroids**

**Cannabis**



## Psychedelics



**LSD/acid**



**Magic mushrooms**



**Ketamine**

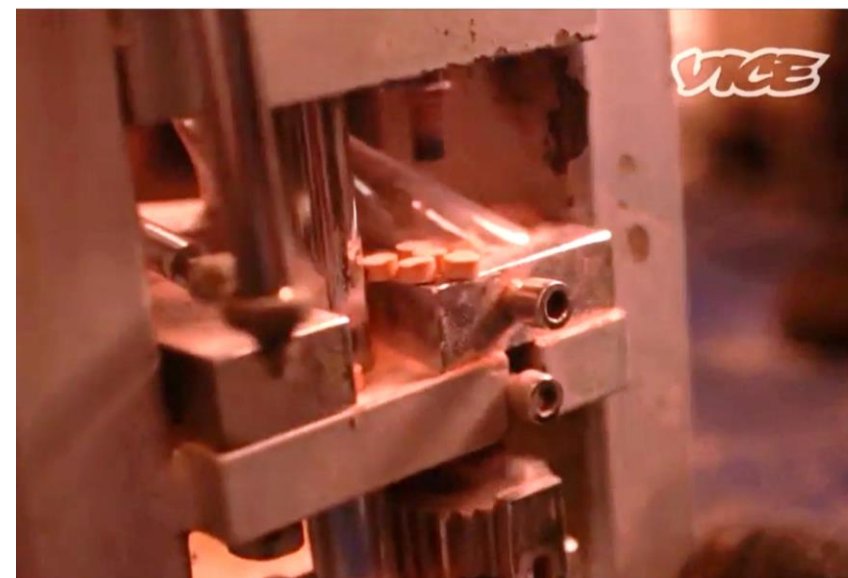
## Dissociatives



**Nitrous oxide**

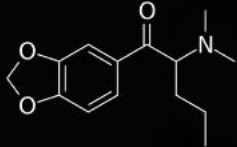






Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs

## ALERT: Dipentylone at Lost Vill



Dipentylone

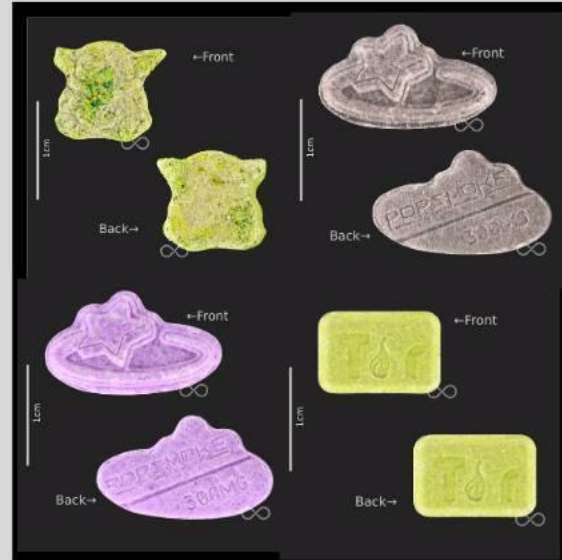


Fiona Measham, Jon Drape, Chill Welfa

## CAUTION: High strength MDMA pills in circulation at Parklife festival 2024

Detected MDMA content in milligrams (mg)

**MOTTLED GREEN** **GREY POP**  
**BABY YODA, ~260mg** **SMOKE, ~290mg**



**PURPLE POP**  
**SMOKE, ~300mg**

**GREEN TOR,**  
**~290mg**

Caution Advised: All these pills contain  
>250mg MDMA = **at least 2x** a  
common adult dose

**#TakeQuarterSipWater**

Wait **>90 minutes** before considering  
re-dosing

MDMA can raise your body  
temperature, so **take regular breaks**  
from dancing.

**Seek medical help** if you experience any  
of the following: *significantly raised  
temperature, excessive sweating, muscle  
rigidity, non-responsiveness or seizure*



**DSM** foundation  
The drug education charity

...



ntly raised  
agitation or seizure.



comfort.



 **@WeAreTheLoopUK**

 **@WeAreTheLoopUK**

 **@TheLoop\_UK**



Supporting young p





# Drug Person Place

## ...the three dimensions of risk

Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs

# Drugs, alcohol and the law

Possession/ with  
intent to supply  
Supply  
Production  
Import/export  
Class A/B/C?  
'Social supply'



**NSPCC**  
Learning

News ▼ Key topics ▼ Research and resources ▼ Training ▼ Services

You are here: [Home](#) » [Child abuse and neglect](#) » Protecting children from county lines

## Protecting children from county lines

Last updated: 12 Jul 2023

Introduction

Risks

Recognising

### What is county lines?

County lines is a form of criminal exploitation where urban gangs persuade, coerce or force children and young people to store drugs and money and/or transport them to suburban areas, market towns and coastal towns (Home Office, 2018). It can happen in any part of the UK and is against the law and a form of child abuse.

### Consequences?



**What were the main reasons 11-15 year olds gave for using drugs?**

Why pupils took drugs most recently	Age		
	11-13 years	14 years	15 years
	%	%	%
I wanted to see what it was like	12	20	22
I wanted to get high or feel good	14	28	32
Because my friends were doing it	7	12	13
I had nothing better to do	12	16	17
I wanted to forget my problems	17	20	16
Just because I was offered	6	12	11
It was a dare	2	1	3
Because it's cool	6	4	6
Other reasons	19	10	9

*Smoking,  
Drinking and  
Drug Use  
Among Young  
People  
England 2023  
(NHS Digital,  
2024)*



# Choice, risk and the teenage brain



**DSM** foundation  
The drug education charity

**Critical period of change from 10 to 25 years**

**‘Developmental mismatch’ between ‘feeling and reacting brain’ (limbic system) and ‘thinking brain’ (pre-frontal cortex)**

**Social influences become stronger**

**Developmental need for independence from care-givers**

**More time spent with peers**

**Heightened sensitivity to social reward and social exclusion**

**Adolescent risk-taking peaks 13-17yrs**

*National Academies Consensus Study Report, 2021*

**In adolescence**

- **Harder to anticipate consequences and regulate emotions**
- **Hypersensitivity to social approval/ exclusion leads to greater risk taking with peers, or when feeling under pressure or if emotions are running high.**



Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs

# Protective factors



Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs



# The drug conversation...

## Preventative/general:

- Start early (10-11yrs) – but it's never too late
- You don't have to be an expert – but keep your knowledge as up to date as you can (use us!)
- Take and make opportunities
- Think about when and where works best
- Little and often...
- Listen! (don't panic...)
- Be prepared for tricky questions

**If it all goes wrong, don't give up!**



*"Try to make talking about drugs a comfortable conversation in your family"*



*"Let me say everything I need to say, let me tell you what I'm thinking, don't jump to conclusions."*

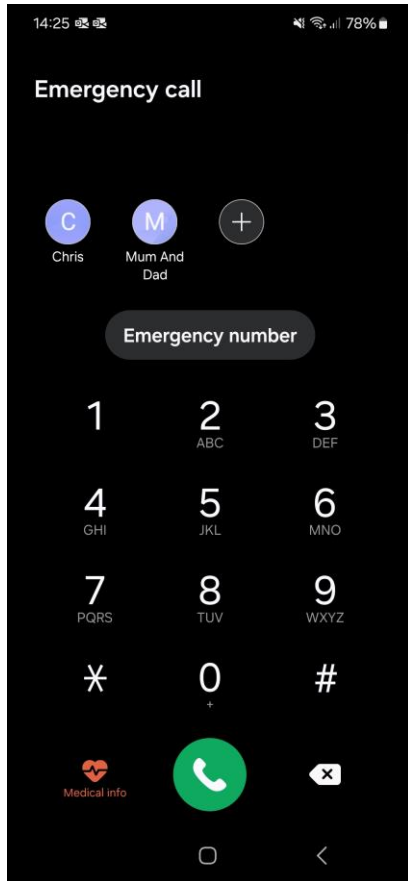


*"Don't catastrophise and say the worst that'll happen but give solutions instead, so then you feel more prepared for that situation."*



*"Try to avoid negativity. It can make someone shut down and go into defensive mode."*

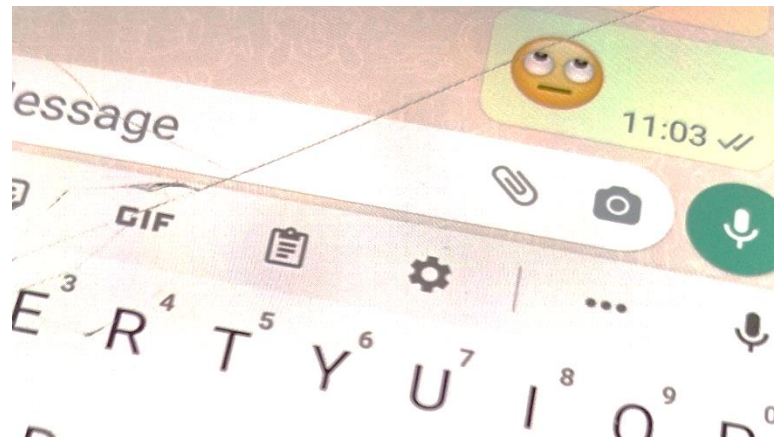
# Phone-related safety strategies



Set up In Case of  
Emergency details

## Have an escape plan!

1. Decide the code
2. Agree the response
3. Plan the excuse
4. Parents have to promise not to ask any questions



what3words:  
Never get lost  
again

what3words

Uninstall

Open

St John  
Ambulance   
**FIRST  
AID**



# Staying safe at parties and gatherings

Alcohol is a depressant, affecting the brain areas controlling balance, memory, speech, and judgment.

Risks include:

- Arguments/ fights
- Accidents/injuries
- Consent/assault
- Overdose

**Know your units**  
**Know your limits**



- Eat carbs before going out
  - Stay together – and check in regularly.
  - Pace yourself during the evening
  - More doesn't mean better!
- Know it's OK to stop or not to start!**  
**39% of 18-24 year olds now don't drink alcohol** (Portman Group, 2024)

# Staying safe at parties and gatherings

If you're with a friend who is using drugs:

- Stick together and check in regularly
- Get informed – including harm reduction.
- Don't mix – anything!
- Start low, go slow...
- Be aware of individual variables, including mood and expectations.
- Factor in risks around them.
- Remember the law!

**The only way to reduce drug-related risk to zero is not to use drugs!**



**If any of these things happen, call 999 immediately**

- Altered breathing pattern or breathing difficulty
- Choking
- Seizures or convulsions
- Unconsciousness

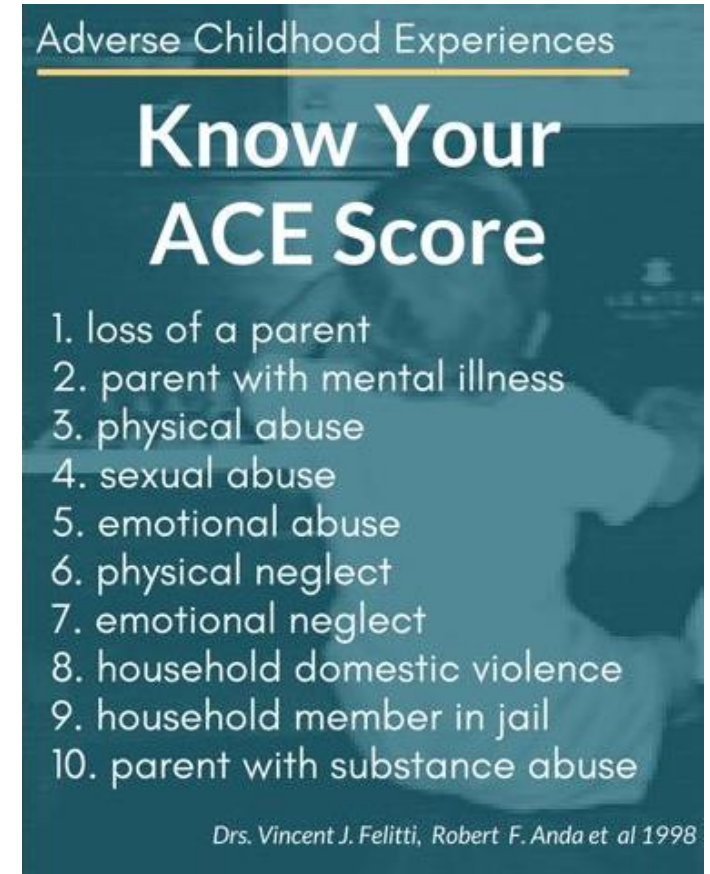


**What factors make  
some young people  
more vulnerable to  
high risk drug use?**

# Risk factors for adolescent high-risk substance use can include:

- Family history of substance use
- Favourable parental attitudes towards the behaviour
- Poor parental monitoring
- Parental substance use
- Family rejection of sexual orientation or gender identity
- Childhood sexual abuse
- Mental health issues
- Association with substance using peers
- Lack of school connectedness
- Low academic achievement

*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (accessed Jan 2023)*



**Approximately 162,000 UK U18s currently live with an opiate dependant parent, while 200,000 live with a parent who is alcohol dependant. (Kings College, London, 2024)**



# Signs to look out for

## Social changes

- Social isolation &/or sudden change in friendship group
- Associating with people who use drugs; drug related conversations
- Drugs or paraphernalia found



## Physical changes

- Changes in appearance, self care &/or mood
- Unexpected changes to weight or build
- Unusual smells on breath, body &/or clothing
- Change in pupil dilation &/or red eyes

## Behavioural changes

- Significant unexplained drop in school performance
- Lethargic &/or increasingly disruptive in class, particularly after weekends
- Persistent lateness, truancy & /or poor attendance
- Unpredictable behaviour/ self harm

# The drug conversation...

If you suspect or know a child is using drugs:

- Check the basis of your suspicions
- Ask them about it
- Listen (and try to understand)
- Talk harm reduction if they're continuing to use substances
- Look at online self-help resources
- Get professional help if needed
- If it all goes wrong, don't give up...

Top tips from teens...

- *"Listen without interrupting and then ask questions about it or empathise."*
- *"Understand and don't judge."*
- *"Don't force them to open up. It might be they're not ready to talk about it, so just give them a place they know they can go to."*

smokefree**teen**

**we are  
withyou**



**Change  
Grow  
Live**

**FRANK**  
Friendly, confidential drugs advice



# YOUNGmiNDS

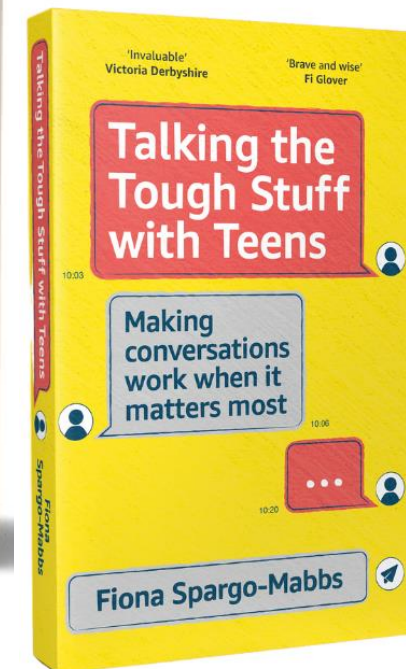
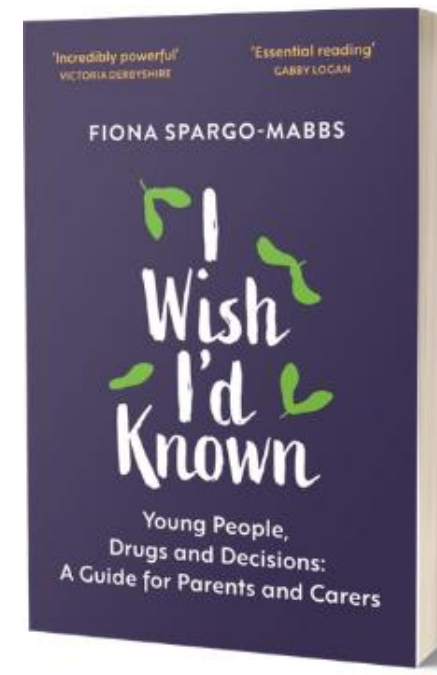
 @danielspargomabbsfoundation

 @dsmfoundation

 @foundationdsm

 @danielspargomabbsfoundation

 [dsmfoundation.org.uk/parents/](https://dsmfoundation.org.uk/parents/)



Supporting young people to make safer choices about drugs



# Any questions?

