



## How drug use can impact your life

### **Making an informed decision**

When making a decision about whether to take drugs it is important for you to know the facts about the drug you choose, and understand the risks related to taking that drug. Feeling confused about whether or not taking drugs is the right choice for you is not unusual.

Drugs can appear initially to have positive effects – lifting your mood, relaxing you or even giving you more energy. However, they can also have negative impacts on your mental and physical health, your relationships, and your life in general.

When you are making your decision, consider the following points:

- Do you know what you are really taking? For example, most ecstasy is not actually MDMA.
- What do you know about the person who's selling you the drug?
- Are you taking anything else (alcohol, illicit drugs, over the counter or prescribed medication) that might interact with the drug?
- How likely is it that you will have a positive experience?
- How do you know that the next experience is also going to be a positive one?
- Do you know that you will be able to control your drug usage and that it will be safe?
- Can you really afford it?
- Do you know the safest method of use?
- Are you in the right environment – is there someone to help if something goes wrong?
- Do you know what the risks are, and what to do if something goes wrong?
- It is your choice to decide whether or not the risk of taking the drug is worth it for you.

### **Consider the long-term effects**

If you are taking drugs, it is possible you believe that you can manage the effects of the drugs and that you can deal with the impact it has on your life. Taking drugs might make you feel good, and there may not even appear to be any immediate consequences to taking the drug.

Sometimes some of these impacts might appear over time and as circumstances in your life or your use of drugs changes. It may be useful to stop and re-examine the impact of your drug use on your life now and see whether the negatives are outweighing the positives.

You may find it useful to go through the list of possible life impacts below as a prompt. It may also be helpful to talk with someone you trust, for example, a friend, counsellor or family member.

**In general** – your drug use might have impact on your life in ways you might not expect. What were things like before you started using? How does using affect your life now? How would you like things to be different in the future?

**Your relationships** – are you finding that there has been any negative change in your relationships? When drug use is an ongoing problem, conflict between friends and partners, and family breakdown can be more common.

**Safety** – do you ever find yourself in situations where you do not feel entirely in control of your actions? Being under the influence of drugs could put you at risk of being in danger in certain circumstances. Buying drugs or trying to get the money to buy them can also put you at risk of harm.

**School / TAFE / university** – do you feel you are managing your study commitments? You might not immediately notice the impact that your lifestyle is having on your study. Keeping up with your assignments and concentrating in class are two examples of how your study can be affected by drug use.

**Employment** – have you or a friend lost a job recently as a result of not being able to do your job because you were drug-affected? The after effects of using drugs (coming down or feeling scattered) can reduce your ability to work in a job, they often place you in danger of hurting yourself or others at work, and can reduce your job prospects too.

**Financial pressures** – have you found yourself struggling to pay bills or buy necessities because you have spent your pay or allowance on drugs? Have you ever thought about just how much you would save if you didn't use drugs?

Using drugs regularly can become really expensive. In the extreme, when people are highly dependent on drugs, funding their habit can be their top priority and can lead to crime, or risking everything on gambling, only to end up losing.

**Dependence** – are you finding it difficult to function without taking drugs? When you take drugs there is a risk that you will become dependent on them. This means that you might feel like you can not operate without it or that you are spending a lot of time and energy finding and using the drug. Another sign of dependence can be when you start taking more of the drug as a way to cope, or avoid, the symptoms related to the comedown.

**Violence** – have you done something you would not normally do when not taking drugs? Some drugs, like amphetamines, can increase the likelihood of acting in a violent way, or being the victim of violence.

**Homelessness** – have your parents threatened to kick you out of home, or are you finding it hard to pay your rent? If you are spending your money on drugs you might find that there is not much money left for living (paying rent, buying food, or having the money to see a doctor or buy medicine when you get sick).

**Stress** – feeling stressed instead of relaxed after taking drugs? You might think that using certain drugs will help you relax and forget about the things that are causing you stress. However, changing the way the body and mind work with drugs is a stress in itself, and you could experience tension, anxiety, paranoia and other symptoms which only increase the feelings of stress.

**Psychosis** – have you or anyone you know ever lost touch with what is real? A number of drugs can trigger psychosis, which is a mental disorder where you lose touch with reality.

**Depression** – have you ever felt depressed after taking drugs, or felt that taking drugs worsens existing depression? Feeling low after using some drugs is common (including alcohol). This can be due to the effect of the drug itself or because of things that happened when you were using them.

**Injuries and accidents** – ever had an accident after taking drugs? When you are under the influence of drugs you might find yourself doing things that you would not normally do, which can increase your chance of getting hurt or having an accident.

**Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI's) or unwanted pregnancy** – ever forgotten to use a condom when you were under the influence of drugs? Under the influence you are less likely to remember to use protection which can result in you or the person you have sex with contracting an STI or getting pregnant.

**Damage to internal organs** – have you considered the impact on your body? Heavy use of some drugs can damage the liver, brain, lungs, throat and stomach.

**Risk of infectious disease** – have you considered the risk of disease through drug paraphernalia? Sharing needles is a major risk for getting diseases like hepatitis B or C, or HIV, which are all spread through blood-to-blood transmission.