



We provide fun, challenge and adventure to over 400,000 girls and boys across the UK

Substance use and misuse

Legal and illegal drugs can cause problems in Scouting. They raise a number of issues for leaders.

The guidance below is a general guide to dealing with substance abuse and misuse in a Scouting context.

If you suspect that a young person or adult is in possession of illegal drugs then you must contact the appropriate reporting procedures. If you are concerned that a young person or adult's behaviour is being affected by drug use you should follow the Yellow Card ('Young People First') reporting procedures.

Illegal Drugs

Under UK law it is a crime to possess, deal or produce what is termed an illegal drug. The penalty depends on the amount you have, and whether you are also involved in dealing or producing the drug. The most serious penalty is a fine and life in prison.

You may be charged with possessing an illegal substance if you're caught with drugs, whether they are yours or not.

If you're under 18, the police are allowed to tell your parent, guardian or carer that you've been charged with a crime.

Legal Highs

Just because a drug is classed as legal does not mean it is safe. So-called 'legal highs' can produce similar effects to illegal drugs; they are termed 'legal' simply because they are not yet covered by legislation such as the Misuse of Drugs Act.

It is becoming ever more apparent that 'legal highs' are far from risk free and can have similar health risks to illegal drugs such as ecstasy and speed.

Like all illegal drugs, the risks associated with 'legal highs' can include reduced inhibitions, drowsiness, coma, seizures and death. These risks can be increased if used in conjunction with alcohol and other drugs.

It is quite probable that drugs purchased as a 'legal high' may in fact contain substances that are illegal. A commonly-found drug that can be contained in a legal high is in fact a class B drug.

Over the counter drugs and prescription drugs

Many people use over the counter drugs (OTC) and prescription drugs safely and responsibly, but some become addicted to the drugs that were meant to help them.

People often think that prescription and OTC drugs are safer than illegal drugs, but that's only true when used as prescribed and for the purpose intended. When abused, prescription and OTC drugs can be addictive and cause adverse health effects, including organ damage, psychotic conditions and overdose.

A range of resources are available to help leaders, commissioners, trainers and parents find out more about drug use.

Always read publications or watch videos before using them with young people. This will enable you to tailor the message to your target audience and prepare you for potential questions.

Where to get help

Your first port of call should be your local health promotion centre. Ask your local NHS Trust for information. Health Promotion Centres stock booklets and leaflets and many of them are free. Several also have loan copies of cases.

Then talk to your local drug agency. They too have informative leaflets. They will often be able to refer you to your young people.

- [Talk to Frank](#) – a national drug education service jointly established by the [Department of Health](#)
Telephone: 0800 77 66 00
- [NHS](#) – official website of the National Health Service.
- www.bbc.co.uk/radio1/advice/drink_drugs – information about a range of drugs, their effects and how to avoid them.

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