

# Drugs/ Drinking/Smoking

Adolescence is a difficult time. It covers the teenage years from 13 to 19 years and is a period when young people experience many changes and are faced with various issues including:

- Hormonal changes—these can contribute to mood swings, irritability and depression
- Worries about the future—for example, what career to choose
- A time of change—physical, emotional, social and mental
- Issues of love, identity, belonging, independence etc
- Changes in the relationship with your parents
- New responsibilities—financial, family, education etc

Because it is a difficult time with many highs and lows, it is a time when many young people experiment with drink and drugs for the first time.

Give out **WORKSHEET 1** and explain that they do not have to put their names on these sheets. However, it is important that they answer the questions as it will give the facilitator an insight into the drinking, smoking and drug habits of the group as a whole.

Show **INFOSHEET 1** and give out **WORKSHEET 2**. Explain that the decisions we make affect many aspects of our lives as outlined on slide 1. Can they think of any other areas to add to the list?

Go through the various reasons why some young people drink or take drugs. Read through 'Think About You!' and ask for comments. Can they think of any other ways they can be personally affected?

Give out **WORKSHEET 3** and explain that they can fill it in when they are alone. The aim is to make them think about their own attitude to drink and drugs. Please make sure they hand them in. They do not have to put their name on the sheet if they wish to remain anonymous.

# WORKSHEET 2

## Why Drink Or Take Drugs?

When a group of young people were asked why they smoked, drank alcohol or took drugs, they gave the following reasons:

To forget their problems and worries

To feel powerful and strong

To be independent

Peer pressure

They were bored

They wanted to rebel against parents, teachers etc.

To 'belong'—everyone is doing it

To relieve stress, to relax and unwind

To experiment—to understand what everyone is talking about

## Think About You!

Before you drink, smoke or take drugs, think about:

- The effect on your mind
- The effect on your long-term health
- The effect on your body
- The effect on your ability to function, drive, communicate etc.
- The effect on your career/goals/job prospects etc.
- The effect on your family and friends
- The effect on YOU!

# The Effects Of Drugs And Alcohol

We all react differently to alcohol and drugs, and our reaction to a mixture of alcohol *and* drugs is even more unpredictable—no two people react the same way.

Alcohol depresses the central nervous system (CNS) which means your motor coordination decreases (motor coordination is the way the brain controls your bones, muscles and limbs which controls how your body moves, reacts, interacts with your surroundings etc) and your breathing and digestive system slow down. If alcohol is mixed with a variety of drugs including prescription drugs, the effect can be very dangerous. If alcohol (a CNS depressant) is mixed with another CNS depressant such as heroin, morphine, opium, and barbiturates, it can cause the body to completely shut down. In other words, the effects can be fatal!

Give out **WORKSHEET 5** and explain why our reactions are different.

Explain how it is vital that we get all the facts before we take any of the substances mentioned. It is extremely important to get across the point that many factors are involved in our reaction to drugs and alcohol, particularly when we mix them.

We cannot assume that we will react the same as someone else who took a similar level of drink and drugs. It is also true that our own bodies will react differently to the same substances for a variety of reasons depending on how we feel at the time, or what we have been eating, or whether or not we feel tired or ill.

The bottom line is—we just don't know what will happen when we mix alcohol with drugs—we are basically taking our life in our hands and the consequences can be disastrous! Even an expert such as a doctor cannot say for certain what the effects of mixing alcohol with drugs will be.

Explain to the group that the way we react to drugs and alcohol depends on many things including:

- Our body make-up
- Our family life
- Our emotional state
- Our diet
- Our social life

Go through the worksheet and discuss the various things that affect the way we react as outlined above.