"My daughter wouldn’t take drugs. Our family doesn’t have the problems that would make her turn to them."

"Talking to kids about drugs only encourages them to experiment. The later they find out, the better."
in the know, or in the dark?

Watch TV or read a paper and you'll see we live in a world where drugs are a reality. But where your child is concerned, what can you do – especially if you don’t know cocaine from cannabis?

The truth is that you can’t prevent your child from coming into contact with drugs. But your influence can mean they make the right choice if they do – by making sure you know just as much as they do about drugs and talking openly about the risks.

Do you feel you don’t know enough to talk to your child? It’s never too late to get clued up. This leaflet will give you the facts about drugs. And FRANK can give you more information and advice if you need it. Call 0800 77 66 00 or visit talktofrank.com for more details. Being in the know right now could make all the difference to the choices your child faces in the future.

What do we mean by drugs?

- illegal substances such as heroin, cocaine and cannabis
- misused household products – volatile substances like gases, glues and aerosols
- medicinal drugs (which can also be misused)
- alcohol and tobacco

In this leaflet, when we talk about drugs we are generally referring to illegal drugs and volatile substances (including gases, glues and aerosols).

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drugs and young people

Why do young people take drugs?
The truth is, most young people DON'T...
...and most of those who do try drugs don't continue using them. Only a small minority of young people will end up problem drug users. In fact, research shows that a child is far more likely to develop a problem with alcohol than with illegal drugs.

But some do take drugs and they'll do so for different reasons:

- rebellion and the need to fit in. Young people can feel under pressure to do what their friends are doing. Some feel more grown up or part of a group if they take drugs.
- recreational drug use. Some enjoy the pleasant short-term effects. They like to relax, 'get high' or lose their inhibitions.
- experimental drug use. Some are just curious about the effects of different drugs.

All drug use can have an effect on health, relationships and personal safety. However, for a minority of people, drug use takes over and disrupts their life and becomes problem drug use. They can become addicted and some end up getting involved in crime as a result of it, or exposed to risky lifestyles and influences.

"One of my mates took an E at a party without knowing what it would do to her. She was OK that night, but she wasn't expecting the comedown afterwards." Tim, 20

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What drugs do they take?

Although many people believe otherwise, levels of drug use among young people aged 11-15 have gone down in recent years. The number of young people under 16 who take Class A drugs like cocaine and heroin is extremely small.

Remember

Although the risks are real, most young people who take drugs do so safely and without getting into trouble. If you want to talk to your child about drugs, there's no point being heavy-handed as this will probably backfire. You need to take a balanced approach and bear in mind that, when it comes to drugs, information is everything. Giving your child the facts from reliable and credible sources, and telling them in a reasonable manner about the effects and risks of substance misuse, will make them feel empowered and informed rather than chastised. Be sure to talk about specific drugs, rather than lump them all together. Make the necessary distinctions between, say, cannabis and heroin, and discuss the relative levels of harm. If they see that you have a realistic view of the risks, they'll be more likely to listen to you.
Every drug has its highs and lows. But there are general risks involved in taking all drugs. Which of these statements do you think are facts and which are fiction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Fact</th>
<th>Fiction</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>If you’re going to buy drugs, it’s best to buy from someone you know so that you know what you’re taking.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>If you stick to drugs you’ve taken before, you’re safe because you know how you react to them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>It’s hard to know the strength or purity of a drug — this can lead to accidental overdose.</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>It can be dangerous to mix different drugs — this includes taking a drug and drinking alcohol.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Drugs are a slippery slope. Start on the softer drugs and you’ll soon be taking the harder stuff.</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>If you give drugs to friends, you can be charged with supplying.</td>
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<td>G</td>
<td>People with a drug conviction can have problems getting visas to travel to some foreign countries.</td>
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<td>H</td>
<td>Volatile substances (including gases, gels and aerosols) can kill the first time they’re used.</td>
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How did you score?

- If you score 0, you are safe. Common sense is enough to avoid dangerous drugs and some combinations can be toxic.
- If you score 3 or 4, you are at risk. Some people who take similar drugs do not move on to harder substances.
- If you score 5, you are not doing well. Even if you think you can handle the drug, you may not be able to and you could put yourself in danger.

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Other risks

Health
- All drugs can affect a young person's health in different ways.
- Some effects are from long-term use, such as liver, kidney and heart problems.
- There are also immediate risks such as overdose. Perfectly fit young people have died from a heart attack after taking drugs - especially volatile substances (like gases, glues and aerosols).
- If there's a history of mental health problems in the family, taking drugs can be particularly risky.

Financial
- Drugs aren't necessarily expensive. Household products such as glue and aerosols can be used as drugs, for example. The price of an £ can be less than a pint of lager and even cocaine is now much cheaper.
- However, frequent or problem drug use can get people in debt.

Social
- For some people, drugs are a way of bonding with friends and people they meet.
- Drug use can start to take over your life and damage your relationships.
- There is also the risk that friendships based around drug use will make it more difficult for some people to stop taking drugs.

Personal safety
- If your child is 'off their head' or having a bad experience on drugs, they are more vulnerable to assault.
- When they take drugs, young people are also more likely to make decisions they'll regret - such as having unprotected sex. Taking drugs also increases the risk of being involved in an accident.

FRANK facts

It's hard to tell what the effects of a drug will be. It will vary depending on who's taking them, their state of mind, what the drug is mixed with and where it is being taken.