

Children, Young People and Substance use



Somerset
Council



Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service

Summer School Break

The Summer break marks the end of the academic year in the UK and gives children and young people a substantial respite before the new academic year. Unfortunately for some, the Summer break also provides an opportunity to experiment with alcohol and drugs.

As a parent or carer, it's important to talk to your family about substance use and by doing this you can help them to understand the risks and support them to make safe and healthy choices.

This information pack includes information on:

- Why do young people use alcohol or drugs
- Talking about alcohol and drugs
- Resources and services in Somerset

Why do young people use alcohol and drugs?

There are lots of reasons why a young person might start drinking or use drugs:

Experimental or new behaviour

Teenagers will often want to be more independent and make their own choices. This can be the motivation to push boundaries or rebel.

To belong

Drinking or taking other substances is often associated with socialising with other similar aged young people. It can make them feel part of the group or they may want to impress friends or older teenagers that they respect.

Risk-taking

Risk-taking is part of growing up, it is important for teenagers to learn how to make their own assessments of what they are doing and the risks. However, teenagers can have a different perception of risk and are more likely to experiment with alcohol and/or drugs, despite knowing the possible harms.

Why do young people use alcohol and drugs? (Continued)

Easy Access

Unfortunately, drugs are readily available, cheaper and can be easier to obtain than alcohol. Just because you might not know how to access them, doesn't mean your child or young person isn't exposed to them.

A coping mechanism

Alcohol and drugs are often used to relax, feel more confident, or to counteract feelings of anxiety and depression. There is a clear connection between substance use and escapism, from difficult circumstances or experiences. Teenagers and young people undergo a lot of physical and emotional changes during this time which, on its own can feel like a difficult period of life.

Home and family experiences

Growing up in an environment where alcohol and drugs are regularly used, can impact a young person's relationship to alcohol and drug use and be viewed as the 'norm' for their life.

Talking about alcohol and drugs

Knowing how to respond to the needs of children and young people isn't always easy and there are no 'right' answers. As a parent or carer, it's important to talk to your family about alcohol and drugs. This can help make sure they are getting the right information and facts from you rather than peers or misguided online information. Having honest conversations within your family can help to support your children and young people to make better choices and feel more open to talk to you about their concerns.

Keep calm

Try to react calmly to what your child or young person divulges to you, avoid expressing disappointment or becoming angry. Young people are more likely to regulate their emotions and listen to your advice if you are calm. This shows them you are willing to listen, talk, and that you care about them. They're more likely to listen if they know that it's coming from a place of care.

Normalise conversations about alcohol and drugs

Do not make alcohol and drugs a taboo subject, only raised when there may be an issue. Include alcohol or other substance use as part of conversations about everyday life and significant events. If your family's or community's views around alcohol and drugs are connected to faith and culture, include this in your discussions.

Talking about alcohol and drugs (Continued)

Open and honest

Try to have open and honest conversations about how everyone is feeling and what you all may be doing to support yourselves in challenging times. Provide the opportunity for you and them to be open and explore your feelings. Giving young people the chance to discuss their emotions such as anger, fear and anxiety, means they are less likely to show these emotions through challenging behaviour.

Listen without jumping to conclusions

Pay attention to what they know and their experiences. What do they know about substance use in their circles and how they feel about other people's substance use.

Non-judgemental

Try not to judge their choices or behaviours or that of their peers. Try just listening to hear what they are sharing and noticing your own thoughts and feelings about what they are saying before reacting. How are you reacting? If conversations start to get heated, it can be helpful to take a long, deep breath before you respond. Explain your concerns based on facts about substances rather than stereotypes, if you are concerned about their choices, situations for their peers, explain your concerns. Give examples of the risks and why you're worried about them drinking or trying drugs.

Talking about alcohol and drugs (Continued)

Limitations and boundaries

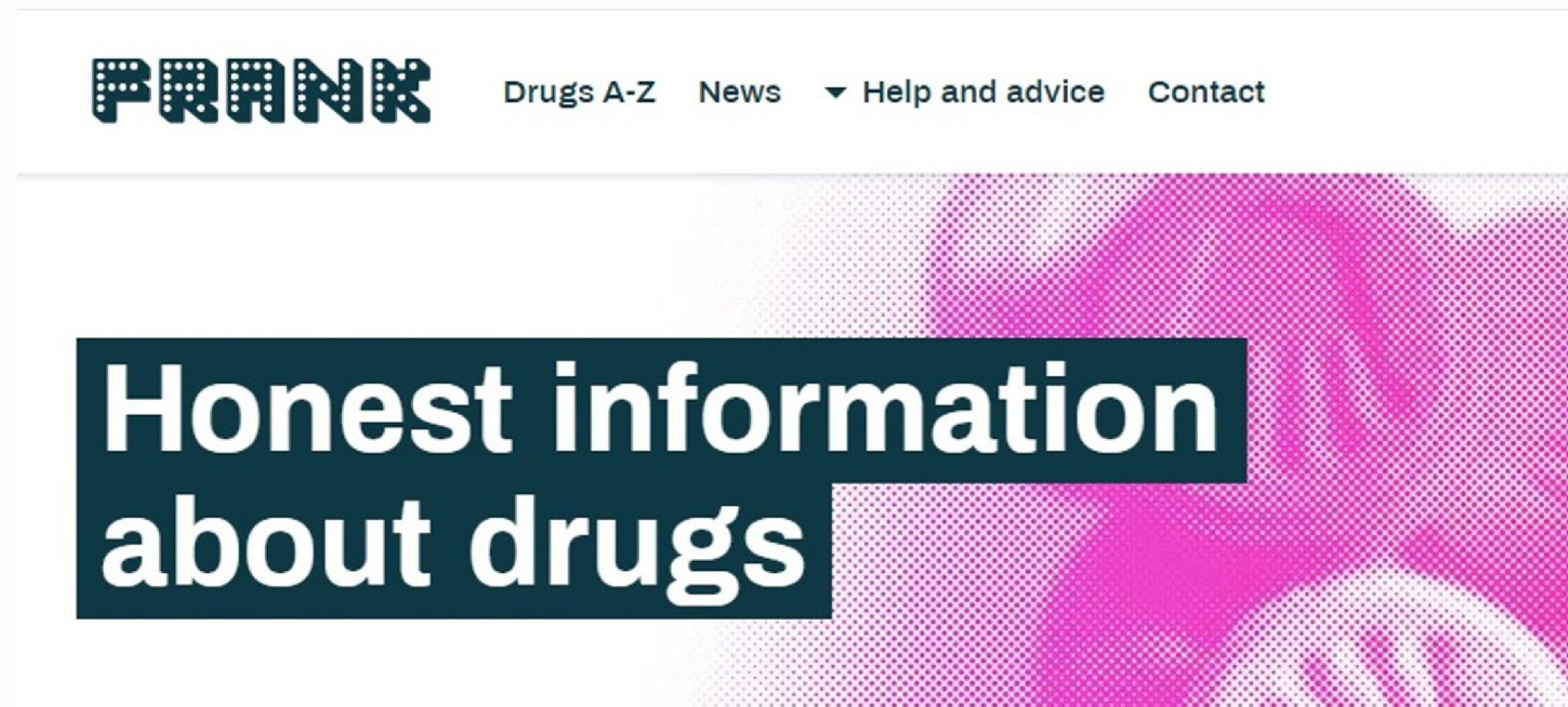
Although they may try to push the limits, teenagers need boundaries. One of the most difficult things about being a parent is knowing when to allow them to make their own mistakes and when it is necessary to step in to avoid disaster. Involve them in the discussion when setting rules or agreements and despite these, always make it clear that they can call you or specialist services if they get into a situation that feels unsafe.



www.talktofrank.com

The FRANK service is free and operated by fully trained advisers. In particular FRANK aims to give young people the skills and confidence needed to reject drugs and offer parents the information they need to bring up the topic with their children. Advice can be accessed through the FRANK helpline, the FRANK website email and text message.

If you wish to find out the facts about specific drugs or substances, www.talktofrank.com is an excellent accurate resource.



Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service (SDAS)



Somerset Drug & Alcohol Service's Young People's team provide a dedicated specialist service for young people up to the age of 18 or 25 for care leavers.

What they offer:

- A non-judgemental service
- 1:1 sessions
- Outreach service - meet where it suits the individual
- Space to talk things through
- Up to date and factual information and advice
- Support to look at drug or alcohol use, how much and how often
- Help with deciding what changes to make
- Access and support to other services
- A support plan that looks at all of needs
- Support for those living with or affected by a family members drug or alcohol use

www.turning-point.co.uk/sdas sdas@turning-point.co.uk

0300 303 8788 (24/7 helpline)

Smokefree Somerset

Smokefree Somerset is the local stop smoking service offering flexible and free support options to those aged 12 and over who are ready to stop smoking.

Advice and support is also available for people who wish to stop vaping.

www.healthysomerset.co.uk/smokefree smokefreelife@somerset.gov.uk
01823 356222



Somerset
Council

Contact Details:

Carl Morrison, Health Improvement Manager (Substance Use)

Email: carl.morrison@somerset.gov.uk