

# Substance Misuse Factsheet

## Substance Misuse

Substance misuse (or substance abuse) is the dangerous or illegal use of any 'mind-altering' substance. Substances are 'mind-altering' because they affect the way the brain and body work. These substances include:

- Alcohol
- Legal prescription drugs
- Nicotine
- Illegal recreational drugs

## Someone might use alcohol or drugs to:

- Forget or escape from problems
- socialise
- feel care-free
- fit in with others
- Cope with mental health issues
- Experiment
- be liked and accepted
- feel something new/different
- relax

## What are the risks?

### Legal risks

It is **illegal** for anyone **under 18** to purchase or use alcohol and cigarettes (nicotine).

Penalties for possessing or supplying illegal drugs include **fines and prison sentences**.

### Addiction

Many substances are highly addictive, meaning it's **hard to stop** using them once you've started. This increases the risk of long-term problems and can impact relationships, work/school life, finances and self-esteem.

### Safety risks

Changes to our state of mind can result in poor **judgement, recklessness and impaired decision** making. If you're under the influence, you may do things you usually wouldn't do, including putting yourself and others **at risk of injury or harm**.

### Mental health problems

Substance use causes both **short and long-term changes** in the brain. The after-effects using them can last days and be very unpleasant and distressing, e.g. anxiety, panic attacks, low mood and paranoia, depending on the type of substance. It can also make existing mental health problems worse.

With regular use, long-term mental health conditions may develop, such as depression, anxiety and psychosis

### Physical health problems

**Short-term** physical effects include: difficulty breathing, changes in heart rate/blood pressure, dehydration, fainting, vomiting. This shows that **no amount of drug use is safe**, because all of these effects can lead to serious illness or even death.

Possible **long-term physical effects** include kidney, liver and brain damage; increased risk of heart disease, stroke, seizures and cancer. Some are irreversible and can impact you for the rest of your life.

## Further help

To find out about in-school support, contact your year leader or email [tasb-wellbeing@sowerby.trinitymat.org](mailto:tasb-wellbeing@sowerby.trinitymat.org)

To find out more about a specific drug, go to [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

To find out more info + get support outside of school, go to [www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk](http://www.openmindscalderdale.org.uk)