

Drug and Alcohol Issues

Introduction

The use of drugs and alcohol is a common human behaviour. The vast majority of adults include some form of substance use in their lifestyle. There is, however, a tremendous variation in the amount and type of substances that people use. Substance abuse problems are very common among people diagnosed with mental health problems. Substance use can be categorized into three main groups depending on the effect the substance has on the central nervous system: depressants, stimulants and hallucinogens.

The effects of substance use are:

- altered mood, cognition and behaviour
- feelings of relaxation, reduced energy and slower reflexes (Depressants)
- increased feelings of energy and confidence (Stimulants)
- confused thinking, irritability and paranoia (Stimulants)
- altered perceptions of sensory experiences, time and sense of self (Hallucinogens)

Impact on Study

Students with drug and alcohol issues

- have difficulty with concentration
- have difficulty with motivation
- will often attend sporadically

What is helpful:

- Collaborate with parents, other school staff, physicians and other medical practitioners - they may already have developed a treatment plan
- Engage in a positive and supportive relationship with the student. Most students need a positive adult relationship
- Encourage the student to access the Counselling Centre (take them to make their first appointment)
- Be flexible about work expectations (allow extensions for exams and assignments)
- Understand that relapse is an expected part of the process for people making changes to their drug and/or alcohol use

What is not helpful:

- Putting unnecessary pressure on the student
- Ignoring any changes in mood or behaviour that you notice in the student
- Believing that drug and/or alcohol addiction is voluntary and therefore the student can easily stop
- Believing that legal drugs such as alcohol are less harmful than other drugs

Links:

Australian Drug Foundation www.adf.org.au