

STUDENT GUIDE: THE HARMS OF STUDENT SUBSTANCE MISUSE



Addiction
ADVOCATES

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- 1 Introduction **Page 3**
- 2 What Is The Cause Of Student Addiction? **Page 5**
- 3 Facts and Statistics About Student Addiction **Page 6**
- 4 Dangers Of Addiction and Excessive Drug Use **Page 8**
- 5 How Students Can Protect Themselves and Others **Page 10**
- 6 What Role Can Teachers Play In This? **Page 13**
- 7 Who Can Help? **Page 15**

1. INTRODUCTION

Across the United Kingdom, the number of students struggling with drug and alcohol addictions has soared in recent years, with approximately 33% binge drinking and one in five consuming drugs.

As the number of students becoming reliant on substances continues to increase, demand for treatment does too...

“Each year, the NHS treats more than 20,000 young adults who find their lives impacted by alcohol.”

Additionally, the NHS reports that up to 4,000 adults between the ages of 16 and 25 are admitted to hospital due to drug poisoning. A further 1,600 adults between the ages of 16 and 24 require drug-related mental health treatment.

With a significant number of students misusing substances and struggling with addictions, it has never been more important to raise awareness surrounding the readily available treatment. In a bid to do so, we have launched this campaign to offer greater insight into addictions among students, the consequences of substance misuse and the support that can be accessed across the United Kingdom.

To ensure that immediate help and advice can be sought, here at Addiction Advocates, we have launched a free and confidential service that enables those struggling with or affected by addiction to secure the support they need.

From providing a drug and alcohol addiction helpline to referring clients to rehabs across the country, we take great pride in our ability to help students from all walks of life take the first step in addressing and overcoming substance misuse.

If you find your life impaired by substance misuse or are hoping to help a student struggling with an addiction, we are certain that this guide will assist you. We also urge you to contact us directly by calling 0800 012 6088.

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2.

WHAT IS THE CAUSE OF STUDENT ADDICTION?

Drug and alcohol addictions are severe psychological disorders that arise from a wealth of different factors.

While students are at greater risk of becoming addicted to substances when drugs and alcohol are consumed recreationally over a prolonged period, several other underlying factors can essentially influence whether a student is at risk of developing an addiction.

In addition to stating that social influence has contributed to the number of students struggling with addictions, a study conducted by the University of Cambridge concludes that students use and abuse substances for the following reasons:

- **To relax after a hard day**
- **As a result of peer pressure**
- **To overcome anxiety**
- **Being away from family**

Further causes of addictions among students include boredom, genetics, burnout, low self-esteem, depression, trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

3.

FACTS AND STATISTICS ABOUT STUDENT ADDICTION

As drinking alcohol and consuming drugs is perceived as somewhat normal among students, it can often be difficult to distinguish whether an addiction is present. Yet, studies highlight that 37% of students use drugs and alcohol and subsequently become reliant on substances such as cannabis, ecstasy and cocaine.

Irrespective of gender, race and demographics, all students are at risk of developing a drug or alcohol addiction. However, studies show that among the student population...

Men consume twice as much alcohol as women.

When considering race, research determines that Caucasian students are more likely to engage in harmful substance use.

Though students consume a range of Class A, Class B and Class C drugs, a survey conducted by Release found that cannabis is the most widely consumed drug, with more than 94% of students admitting to using the drug. Furthermore, approximately 10.4% of adults between 20 and 24 take class A drugs.

While cannabis is popular among students, smart drug abuse has increased across the nation. Including prescription drugs and illegal stimulants, such as amphetamine drugs and methamphetamine, smart drugs are associated with improved focus and increased cognitive function. As a result, many students believe that they are beneficial. However, this is not true. Smart drugs severely impact an individual's physical and psychological well-being.

Alcohol use and abuse is additionally a widespread issue among the student population. Though the NHS advises against drinking more than...

14 units of alcohol a week, 70% of students binge drink at least once a week.

Regrettably, binge drinking sees 358,000 adults require medical treatment.

4. DANGERS OF ADDICTION AND EXCESSIVE DRUG USE

While many students think drug and alcohol use is harmless, frequently using substances leads to a wealth of physical and psychological health complications.

Though the problems caused by ongoing drug and alcohol use vary greatly, a large proportion of students experience the following:

- **Persistent headaches**
- **Nausea**
- **Breathing difficulties**
- **Reduced cognitive function**
- **Anaemia**
- **Hallucinations**
- **Paranoia**
- **Drug or alcohol poisoning**
- **High blood pressure**
- **Stroke**
- **Heart attack**
- **Malnutrition**

In addition to the above, mental health disorders, such as depression and anxiety, frequently surface when substance addictions develop, with at least one-third of students claiming that using drugs and alcohol aggravates their mental health.

Though some of the physical and psychological problems that arise from drug and alcohol addictions alleviate naturally within as little as 15 minutes, repeated substance use and addictions gradually lead to numerous irreversible long-term effects. These particular side effects include organ failure, cancer and HIV.

While the physical and psychological side effects of addiction and excessive drug use have the most significant impact on the individual struggling, behavioural side effects impact the lives of those around them. For example, behavioural side effects of addiction often cause relationships to break down. Behavioural side effects, such as uncontrollable urges to consume substances, can also lead students to encounter financial difficulty.

Regrettably, when students encounter financial difficulty, they often attempt to secure financial support elsewhere rather than turning to family members for support. Sadly, this often leads to debt.

An increasing amount of debt combined with addiction and excessive drug use reduces students' mental health, leaving one in eight considering suicide each year.

5.

HOW STUDENTS CAN PROTECT THEMSELVES AND OTHERS

Although addictions and excessive drug use require professional treatment if they are to be overcome, there are many ways that students can essentially protect themselves and others against addictions and substance misuse.

Below, we have outlined just several ways that the risk of substance abuse can be mitigated.

1. Understand The Dangers of Addictions and Substance Misuse

To protect themselves and others, students must understand the dangers that addictions and substance misuse has.

As touched on above, the dangers of addictions can have a catastrophic effect on an individual's physical and psychological health. Addictions can also impair relationships with others.

2. Avoid Peer Pressure

Among the student population, drinking alcohol and recreationally consuming drugs is considered normal. As a result, avoiding peer pressure and ignoring the urge to try substances can be extremely difficult.

However, as peer pressure is one of the leading contributing factors to addiction, strategies must be developed to avoid it.

In some instances, befriending those who do not drink or consume drugs can be beneficial. Students must also be open and honest and decline substances if they are offered.

3. Pay Attention To The Signs and Symptoms of Addiction

Although addictions can be difficult to distinguish, many signs and symptoms surface when an individual develops an unhealthy relationship with substances. Paying attention to these signs and symptoms essentially enables students to secure any help they may need as early as possible.

As an addiction arises, signs and symptoms to look out for include intense cravings, reduced focus, an inability to cope without drugs or alcohol, drowsiness, fatigue, reduced alertness and headaches. Many also experience a reduced appetite and will isolate themselves from others.

4. Seek Help From A Teacher Or Loved One

Across the United Kingdom, the number of people who secure help for drug and alcohol addictions remains minimal. Sadly, struggling with an addiction alone can cause several problems, such as mental health disorders, to emerge.

Although those who struggle in silence do so to protect others, when an addiction arises, help must be supplied. Whether students seek help from a teacher or a loved one, confiding in someone they trust will enable them to take the first step in addressing an addiction.

5. Create A Better Work-Life Balance

Combined, stress, burnout and a reduced work-life balance contribute to the risk of addiction. Unable to cope, many students turn to substances in a bid to relax and unwind. However, doing so is dangerous.

Instead of using substances to alleviate stress, students must create a better work-life balance.

For some, creating a daily routine is extremely helpful. For others, reducing commitments at work and prioritising their time, for example, is beneficial. In turn, stress reduces, leaving many able to cope better.



6.

WHAT ROLE CAN TEACHERS PLAY IN THIS?

Leaving home and starting university leaves students experiencing a wealth of emotions. Whilst many feel extremely excited, others feel overwhelmed, nervous and anxious. Unfortunately, as noted above, these emotions can contribute to the risk of substance misuse and addiction.

However, teachers and other university staff members can help reduce substance misuse and addictions among students. Below, we have outlined several ways that teachers can minimise the risk of addictions among students.

1. Learn About The Signs Of Substance Misuse

Understanding the signs of substance misuse is vital if addictions are to be addressed. Due to the very nature of addiction, many signs of substance misuse are psychological. However, as these signs escalate and control a student's life, changes in their behaviour will be observed.

Common behavioural signs of substance misuse include mood swings, reduced attendance, anti-social behaviour, poor grades and failure to complete assignments.

Physical changes will also gradually arise. These often include lack of pride in their appearance, changes in their complexion, bloodshot eyes, fatigue and slurred speech.

2. Let Students Know You Are There To Support Them

If you suspect that a student has developed an addiction, it is important not to make assumptions or confront them in a way that may seem judgmental. This could cause them to become defensive and could cause their addiction to intensify.

Instead, if you believe a student is struggling with an addiction, we recommend ensuring that they know you are there to support them.

By offering your support, students will realise that they do not have to struggle in silence. Instead, they will eventually recognise that they have someone to confide in.

3. Give Help To Students Feeling Under Pressure Or Stressed

As discussed earlier in this guide, addictions commonly arise due to increased stress and pressure.

As a teacher, understanding and offering additional help to students who feel under pressure or stressed could reduce the probability that an individual will turn to substances to cope better during their time at university.

4. Educate Students On The Harms Of Substance Misuse

While the harms of substance misuse may seem somewhat obvious, students frequently overlook the consequences of consuming large quantities of drugs and alcohol. Instead, they take advantage of the short term side effects provided.

In a bid to support students better, educating them on the harms of substance misuse outlined throughout this guide is vital. Not only will doing so encourage students to reconsider their substance consumption, but it will raise awareness of the short and long-term side effects that recurring substance misuse could have on their life.

7. WHO CAN HELP?

Securing appropriate help can be challenging due to a lack of information surrounding who can help. However, across the United Kingdom, many drug and alcohol charities and helplines can assist students who find themselves struggling with substance misuse and addictions.

To ensure that students can secure appropriate help when needed, we have outlined several charities and helplines that can be contacted below.

FRANK

FRANK is a helpline dedicated to supporting those affected by drug misuse and addictions.

withyou

We Are With You offer help and guidance to those who are worried about substance misuse. We Are With You also provides mental health support.



Alcoholics Anonymous can support you if you find yourself struggling to cope without alcohol.

Narcotics Anonymous hosts online and in-person support meetings for those struggling with drug addictions. They also provide a helpline that offers immediate and confidential support.



Providing various services for drug, alcohol and mental health issues, Turning Point offers one-to-one support and advice to those in need.

Furthermore, various charities and helplines have been designed to support family members, friends, teachers and others affected by someone else's substance misuse. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Adfam**
- **Forward Trust**

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