Alcohol & Drug Use

The use and misuse of alcohol and other drugs is one of the more controversial issues in our society, and often a source of conflict between generations and between sections of society. It’s not the purpose of this page - or of the Student Counselling Service - to tell people how to behave or to seek to label them as alcohol or drug abusers. Alcohol and other drugs are powerful substances with a potential to harm users or to tempt them into over-indulgence, so we do encourage students to take care of themselves when considering using them and to avoid taking any risks which they might regret later.

To give you basic information we have reproduced the sections of the Student Union Handbook on alcohol and other drugs. Our thanks to the Student Union for allowing this use.

No universal classification of what constitutes unhealthy use exists. Many classifications ignore the fact that alcohol and drug use is an accepted part of many social sets. What is seen as risky behaviour by one group is accepted as normal by another.

Use of drink and drugs can be classified as:

- Abstinent - No use is made.
- Controlled - People have made a conscious decision, have evaluated the risks and can stop if they want.
- Impulsive - Use is unpredictable and can lead to unexpected accidents and harm. However there is not continual use or dependency.
- Habitual - The use of alcohol or drugs have become a significant and important part of the person’s life-style. Stopping would not be easy.
- Dependent - There is a high degree of physical and psychological addiction. Alcohol and drug use disrupts or rules the person’s life. Stopping is not possible without considerable support.

Obviously abstinence and controlled use is the least worrying category and dependency the most problematic. However many people making impulsive or habitual use of drink and drugs are not totally happy with their situation.

Consequences

If you are wondering about your drink or drug use, have you considered the following?

Psychological consequences:

- Are you using drink or drugs to escape from a problem which you might be able to solve if you faced it? If so you may be perpetuating your shyness, anxiety, depression, unhappiness etc. rather than dealing with it for once and all.
- Drink and drugs don’t permanently change our world. They allow us to feel a temporary confidence or happiness, but the effect is usually one of borrowed time. Often the unhappiness or anxiety returns even more strongly once the effects wear off.
• Drink and drugs can cause psychological problems by themselves. Alcohol can commonly cause depression; drugs can also cause depression, or can trigger anxiety or even psychosis (loss of reality).

Social consequences:
• Drink and drugs are often seriously expensive, so uncontrolled use can lead to financial problems.
• You can quite easily end up in trouble with the law. Although drinking alcohol is legal, it can lead to assault and driving when drunk which are not. Similarly, although the law may turn a blind eye to personal use of certain drugs, this attitude is not consistent. Sentences for any supplying can be heavy and unpredictable. Any conviction for drink or drugs offences may severely limit the opportunities open to you in the future.
• Pronounced use of drink or drugs tends to rigidly define social groups, so it may limit your circle of friends.
• Continual or large scale use of alcohol has a bad effect on most people's sex-life.

Physical Consequences:
• Drink definitely lowers people’s ability to resist harming themselves when they have problems.
• Drink can lower people's inhibitions against hurting others.
• Drink greatly lessens people's ability to say no to unwanted sexual encounters which they would have definitely avoided had they been sober.
• Many serious accidents are drink and drug related.
• There are long-term health risks.
• All these things will not happen to everybody. You may be lucky and avoid any serious mishaps. However, all these consequences are seen routinely enough by anyone involved in welfare work to suggest they are not exaggerated or unusual.

Taking Control
If you want to take more control of your use of drink or drugs the following suggestions may help.
• Make a list of the advantages and drawbacks of your alcohol and drug use which are personally significant to you. The above list of possible consequences may help focus your mind. Then decide whether you would like to lessen the disadvantages.
• Keep a diary of your consumption over a week. Be honest about the amounts you are using. Consider whether you could limit your intake by changing your routine so as not to put you in tempting situations.
• Talk to someone whom you trust about your use. See if they feel you have cause for concern.
• Consider what you are using. In particular note when you use concentrated or particularly dangerous forms of drink and drugs. Can you substitute a less potent alternative?
• Consider the social pressures to consume. Can you limit your exposure to these - e.g. stop buying in rounds, meeting in pubs, partying late etc.?
• Consider what emotions trigger consumption. Are you using drink and drugs to help deal with certain feelings - frustration, anxiety, shyness, boredom etc. Can you find alternative means of dealing with these feelings?
• Try a month of abstinence. See whether you can do it, and if you can find different ways of dealing with problems. There may be distinct advantages to being able to bring your sober and unstoned self to look at various problems!

Books

A Little of What You Fancy - Richard Mackarness - Fontana A thorough and practical look at how to control all forms of dependency including smoking.

Freedom From Addiction - Joe Griffin and Ivan Tyrell - HG Publishing The secret behind successful addiction busting.

The Demon Drink - Jancis Robinson - Penguin A balanced and readable consideration of all aspects of alcohol use which has been praised by both brewers and doctors.

Adult Children of Alcoholics - Janet G Woititz - Health Communications Inc The title is self-explanatory. A carefully written book to help you deal with the consequences of heavy drinking in your family history.

Further Help and Information

The Student Counselling Service is very able to help with drug and alcohol related problems. We work in a non-judgemental way to help you achieve the goals you have set yourself. As you will see from our confidentiality statement we do not normally inform anyone of any illegal activity we hear about in counselling. The only exception to this rule is when there is a clear and immediate risk to someone's life.

SADAS (Surrey Alcohol and Drug Advisory Service) offers confidential counselling, befriending, advice and support groups. They have an outpost in Staines. Ring 01483 590150 or e-mail: info@sadas.org.uk They also run The Engage Project (a street drugs agency providing accessible drug & alcohol service for a wide range of drug and alcohol misusers, their families, carers or partners). For more information ring 01784 453512 or visit their website www.sadas.org.uk

AA - (Alcoholics Anonymous) for help and advice ring their helpline on 0845 769 7555 or visit their website www.alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk

Alcohol Concern For help and advice ring their helpline on 020 7264 0510 or visit their website www.alcoholconcern.org.uk

NHS - www.nhs.uk/Livewell/drugs/Pages/Drugtreatment.aspx

FRANK offers friendly, confidential advice on any subject related to drugs. Available in 120 languages, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Calls are free from landlines and some mobiles. You can talk to FRANK confidentially:

• on 0800 77 66 00
• by textphone (for the hard of hearing) 0800 917 8765
• by emailing frank@talktofrank.com
• or further information visit their website www.talktofrank.com

Surrey Drug Care 24/7 totally confidential and non-judgemental helpline 01483 300112 For further information visit their website www.surreydrugcare.org.uk

NHS - www.nhs.uk/Livewell/alcohol/Pages/Alcoholsupport.aspx