

7 MINUTE BRIEFING SUBSTANCE MISUSE



1. Definition:

Substance misuse is when someone's use of alcohol or drugs drinking or drug use becomes harmful or dependent.

By 'harmful' we mean when someone puts themselves or others in danger. They might continue to drink or take drugs even if it puts them at risk of illness, psychological problems or physical accidents.

Dependent drinking or drug use is when someone craves alcohol or drugs and continues to use them even though it causes them social, health or even financial problems.

2. Using Alcohol or Drugs

Anyone who misuses drugs or alcohol can be vulnerable, however, some population groups are seen to be more high risk than others e.g. a person with care and support needs, who's circumstances can hinder recovery and increase inequality.

When people agree to use substance misuse services they may need extra support temporarily or long-term, this can be for a number of reasons including health conditions, personal circumstances or other needs and complexities. Some people are particularly vulnerable to complications during detoxification and withdrawal.

3. Signs someone might have a problem with alcohol:

It can be hard to spot if someone's drinking too much. It's common for things to look fine on the surface when in reality, someone is struggling behind the scenes. Some warning signs to look out for:

- a smell of alcohol
- loss of balance
- slurred speech
- poor hygiene
- Missing work or losing their job
- blood tests that indicate issues with liver function
- issues in their personal life and relationships
- making bad choices that mean they get hurt or get into trouble.

4. Signs someone might have a drug related issue:

Physical signs of addiction can manifest as side effects of use, during an overdose, or as a result of withdrawal. It is important to understand that withdrawal symptoms arise when the body adjusts to the absence of familiar quantities of a drug. It is a natural process, but withdrawal can be dangerous. General physical signs of addiction include but are not limited to:

- Enlarged or small pupils
- Sudden weight loss or gain
- Bloodshot eyes
- Insomnia
- Unusual odours
- Poor physical coordination
- Looking unkempt
- Slurred speech

7. Where to find help / further support:

CGL Change Grow Live [Change Grow Live | Charity | We can help you change your life](#)

Alcoholics Anonymous Help and emotional support through AA meetings for people experiencing problems with alcohol:

[Alcoholics Anonymous Great Britain \(alcoholics-anonymous.org.uk\)](#)

FRANK Friendly, confidential advice on drugs and details of local and national services. [Honest information about drugs | FRANK \(talktofrank.com\)](#)

Drinkaware: [Drinkaware Home | Drinkaware](#)

6. Help in a crisis:

If it's an emergency, please call 999 or go to A&E.

Here are some options:

- Call the Samaritans on 116 123 (free, open 24/7)
- If you or someone you know needs urgent care but it's not life-threatening, call 111
- Visit the [NHS website](#) and find crisis support services near you
- If you already have a Crisis Line number, give them a call
- Contact your GP surgery and ask for an emergency appointment.
- Find [helpline numbers](#) for Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous and Cocaine Anonymous

5. Effects on children:

Living in a household where a parent or carer misuses substances doesn't mean a child will experience abuse, but this can be a risk. Substance misuse can have negative effects on children at different stages in their lives.

During pregnancy, drinking and drug use can put babies at risk of birth defects, premature birth, being born underweight and withdrawal symptoms. In later years, substance misuse can put children at risk of:

- physical and emotional abuse or neglect
- behavioural or emotional problems
- having to care for their parents or siblings.
- experiencing poverty
- being exposed to drugs or criminal activity
- being separated from parents