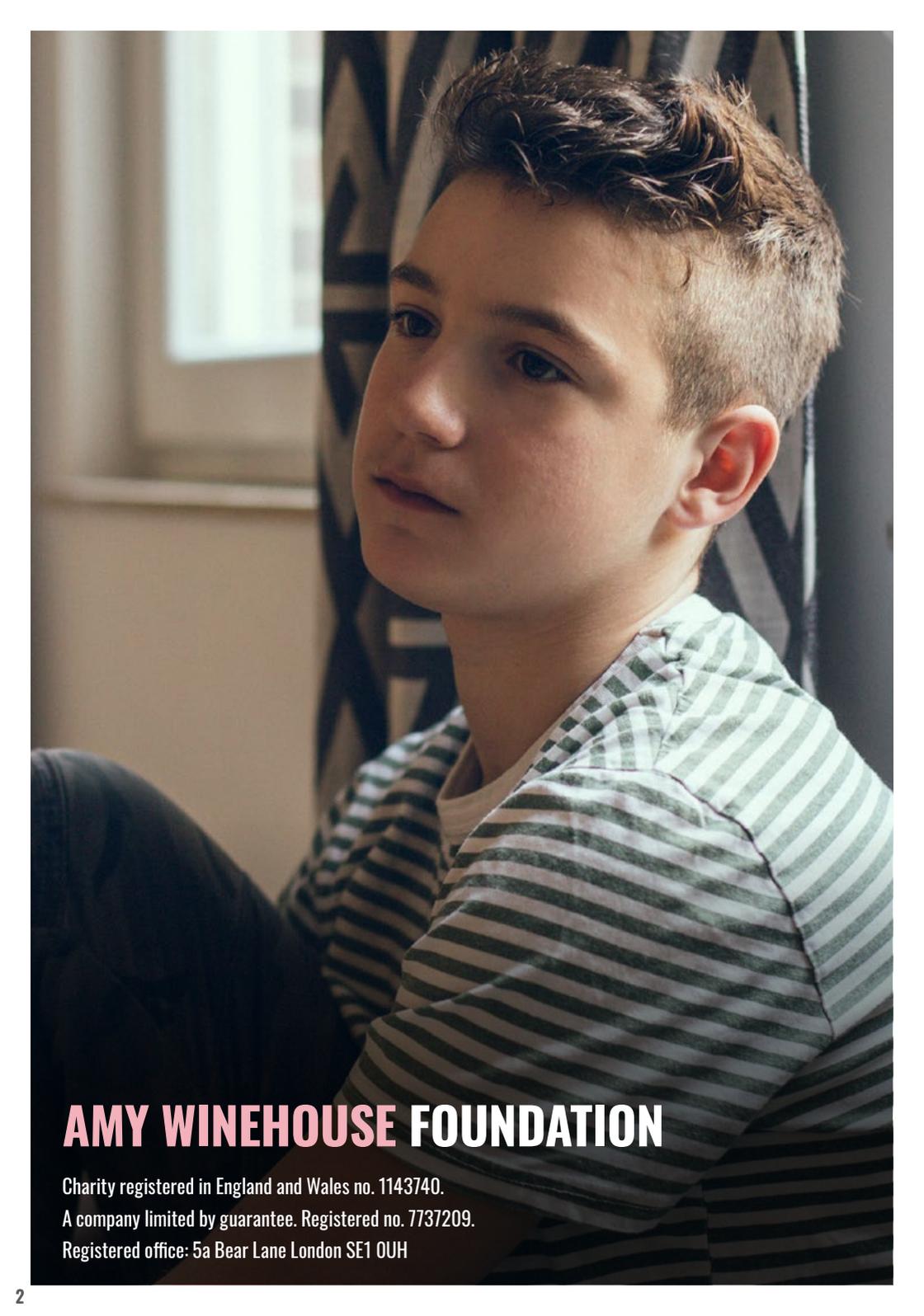


TALKING TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT DRUGS AND ALCOHOL

**A useful guide for parents, teachers and anyone
looking out for a child or young person.**



AMY WINEHOUSE FOUNDATION

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HOW TO SAY THE RIGHT THING

It can be difficult to talk about issues such as drugs and alcohol, especially if you aren't sure about the facts. Yet with the right kind of advice you can play an important role in keeping young people safe and you can help them to make safer decisions as they grow older.

This guide won't turn you into an expert overnight, but it will help you to hold useful and worthwhile conversations. It will help you to become someone a young person can confide in, and talk to about drugs, alcohol and any other concerns they may have.

This guide can also help if you're a teacher, or someone who looks out for young people as part of your job or responsibilities. It's been written with experts from the Amy Winehouse Foundation Resilience team, who work in secondary schools, colleges and community settings across the country. With many years experience of working with young people, this team knows what works (and what doesn't work) when it comes to talking with young people about drugs and alcohol.



WHY MIGHT A YOUNG PERSON TRY DRUGS OR ALCOHOL?

To be very clear, not every young person will choose to try drugs or drink alcohol. And if they do, they won't necessarily come to direct harm as a result. But if they do try, it could be for a variety of reasons. It might be down to simple curiosity as these substances can appear to be cool or fun. Or it could be a way to fit in with new friends or a particular peer group.

Or maybe it's because they have some personal issues that they're struggling with. Every year we speak to thousands of young people who tell us they feel under pressure to succeed in exams, maintain relationships or to look or act in certain ways. It's clear that each of these stresses can have a significant impact on their physical and emotional health.

For some young people, the effects of drugs and alcohol may appear to offer an escape from their troubles and a way to stop worrying about things, if only for a short time. If we understand these reasons, we can talk with them about more positive ways to cope with life's challenges.



THE HELP YOU CAN OFFER

We can all play a role in supporting young people to have stronger emotional wellbeing and to be better informed around the issues of drugs and alcohol. By building their resilience, they can become emotionally stronger and better able to deal with the challenges that can come with life.

Some protective examples are:

- Having positive relationships and open communication with parents/carers and teachers
- Being made to feel like they belong somewhere
- Having positive experiences and achievements
- Maintaining positive relationships with friends/peers
- Feeling respected and cared for



HOW TO START A CONVERSATION

It may feel as if you're the last person a young person would want to speak to about drugs and alcohol - especially if you're worried about giving the wrong information or saying the wrong thing. Yet we know that many young people want to talk to a trusted adult about this subject, and to share the concerns they may have.

SO HERE ARE SOME SIMPLE STEPS YOU CAN TAKE



DON'T PRESUME THIS ISSUE CAN'T AFFECT ANY CHILD

We know from experience that people from all walks of life will experiment with drugs and alcohol. And just because someone is from a certain class, background or religion, it doesn't mean they won't experiment. So rather than ignore the issue, it's always better to have a frank and supportive discussion about it.

LEARN FROM A TRUSTED SOURCE

This will help you to answer any questions that your child may have and ensure they are getting up-to-date and accurate information. It might be a useful conversation starter to review some information on drugs and alcohol together and ask them for their thoughts and reflections. We recommend that you visit talktofrank.com or the many useful organisations listed on our website at amywinehousefoundation.org/find-help



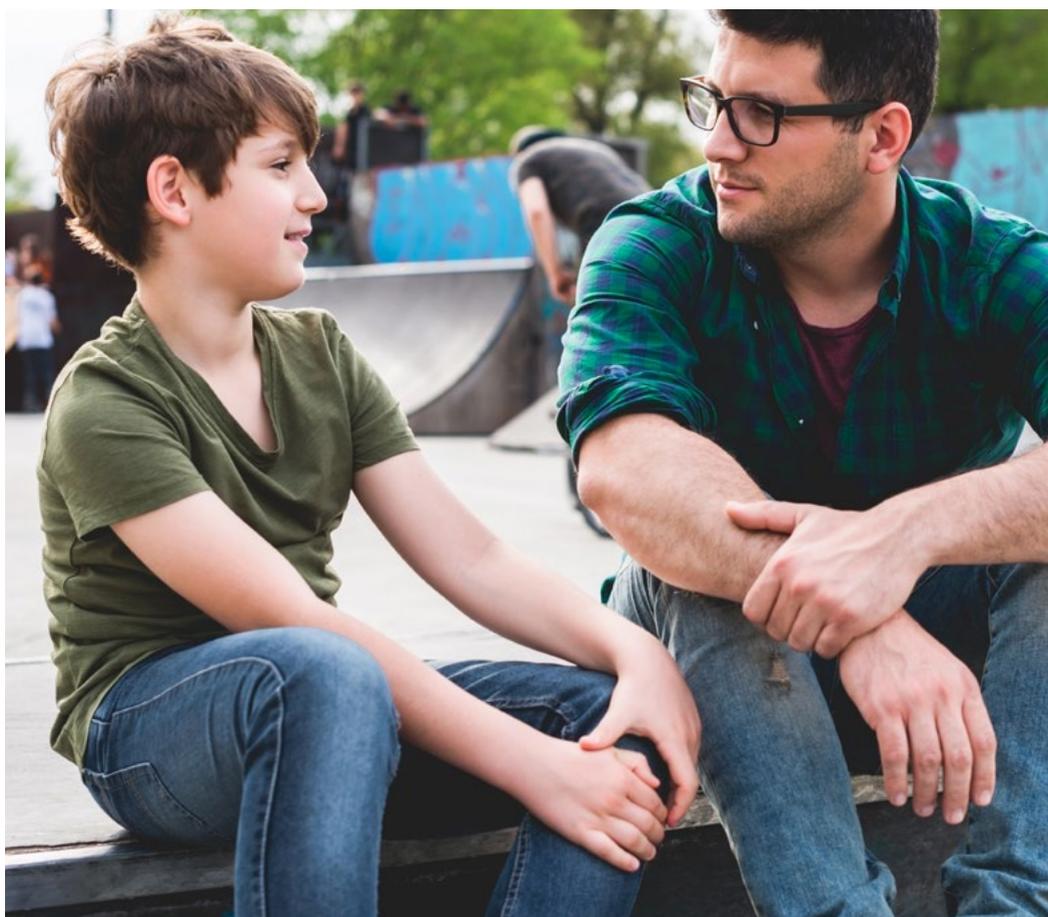
SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS WITH OTHER PARENTS

If you're a parent or carer, talk with friends who have discussed drugs and alcohol with their children to find out what did or didn't work for them. This can also help you to feel supported and reassured.

FIND A GOOD TIME AND PLACE TO CHAT

Think about when it might be best to talk, and how you might bring up the subject of drugs and alcohol in a natural and unforced way. For example: there may be a relevant storyline in a film or TV show that you're planning to watch, which you then could use to break the ice and begin a discussion.

Also think about good places to have a chat. Ideally you want to be somewhere your child feels safe and comfortable, as this can encourage them to open up to you. For example; while going for a walk or sharing a favourite pastime.



DON'T MAKE IT A BIG AND SCARY THING

In our experience, having a 'big talk' doesn't work and instead it can be quite intimidating (for everybody involved). So rather than planning a serious one-off conversation, think of having a series of small chats instead. Such regular conversations can really help, and they're far less likely to make your child (and you) feel uncomfortable.

Young people often tell us that they'd happily talk to their parents about drugs and alcohol, but they're concerned that they might get into trouble, or that their parents may overreact. Some even worry that their parents will think less of them. So try to avoid scare tactics, judgments, or making ultimatums when you speak and instead stay calm.

And while you should always be clear in setting out your own values and expectations, make sure to also ask for your child's views and opinions. Because by feeling listened to, they are far more likely to open up and ask for your help and advice.

DON'T GIVE UP

If the conversation doesn't go the way you hoped or if things feel forced and awkward, then take a break and wait for a more suitable time. Remember that one small chat can lead to another, and that young people often benefit more from a continual conversation than a 'big talk'.

So take your time and don't push your child into a discussion they're not ready to have. Instead, let them know you're not going to react badly, and that you're happy to talk when they are.





HOW WILL I KNOW IF A YOUNG PERSON IS DRINKING OR USING DRUGS?

It's normal for children to show signs of change as they develop into adults. Here are just a few examples that may be signs of drug or alcohol use, or that they may be dealing with pressures and worries:

- Finding paraphernalia around the home, such as smoking equipment, empty packets, bottles or containers
- Frequent absences from school or a decline in their performance
- Displaying mood swings, tiredness or having angry outbursts
- Becoming anxious or withdrawn
- Changes in their eating, sleeping or social habits.

If you recognise any of the above signs, it's really important that you do not jump to conclusions and overreact. There may well be a perfectly rational explanation for their behaviour, that doesn't involve any drug or alcohol use.

For example, if your child is tired or irritable it could be that they haven't been sleeping well or are preoccupied with something that's happening at school.

In all circumstances, the best thing to do is encourage an honest and open conversation. That way your child can feel comfortable and reassured enough to tell you what's going on.



BUILDING A YOUNG PERSON'S RESILIENCE

The Amy Winehouse Foundation Resilience Programme has worked with over 436,000 young people in over 578 schools, colleges and community settings.

Our dedicated staff and volunteers explain the risks associated with substance misuse through sharing their own personal stories. They look at the causes and consequences of using drugs and alcohol, and listen to young people's real life concerns. That way, young people gain a wider, contextual understanding of the issues as well as learning how to make informed choices about their own lives.

"I can learn from this message. It will make me think and make different healthier decisions. It was so much better than when someone just stands in front of you and says "don't take drugs or you'll die". That's not useful to anyone"

After taking part:

- 88% of parents and carers said that their confidence to have informed conversations with their children had increased.
- 90% of pupils felt more confident about the things they can do to make safer decisions if they were to use alcohol, and 89% if they were to use drugs.
- 90% of young people said they would know where to get help if they were concerned about themselves or someone else's substance use.
- 89% of teachers felt that a peer who is trained and in stable long term recovery was an effective way to facilitate conversations (as opposed to a perspective that teachers could lead these conversations for example).

If you'd like to learn how the programme could benefit your child's school or college, then we'd love to hear from you. Visit amywinehousefoundation.org/resilience for more, including a full and independent evaluation of the programme by researchers from the University of Bath (UK) and Harvard University (US).



'In Amy's memory, we work to inspire children and young people to build their self-esteem and resilience, so that they can flourish.'

To learn more about our work, please visit
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