

Bridge



Department of Health

This Newsletter aims to promote communication between schools and the Student Health Service of the Department of Health

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Editorial

You may be aware of the increasing number of young people taking drugs recently. The adverse consequence of youth drug abuse is a problem not to be ignored. We care about students' healthy growth and we are highly concerned about the issue. Drug abuse is not as simple as "incorrect use of medication", and is not a party game. It is "taking poisonous substances" that endanger health. The feature article in this issue of Newsletter, **Drugs Destroy Lives**, hopes to give our readers greater understanding in the problem. Drug abuse not only harms our physical and mental health, but also affects our study, work, family and social life. On one hand, we combat against drugs, on the other hand, we have to understand what contribute to youth drug abuse, from which we look for solutions. We would also explore how parents and teachers could handle the situation when they found their children/ students abuse drugs; and what preventive measures to take. Also important is the "Three Don't Principles", which students could

use to refuse drugs and finally lead a life with no drugs and no regret. Are students in the new school year having new goals for themselves? Here we suggest that "cherish life, refuse temptations and stay away from drugs" to be one of them.



Drugs Destroy Lives

Adolescent Health Programme
Student Health Service, Department of Health

Introduction

Adolescence is a period that young people experience new things and look for one's identity. Adolescents are more willing to try out new stuff and are easier to be influenced by peers than adults. Youth may take drugs out of curiosity, or wish to identify with their peers. However, taking drugs has huge impact on health, family relationship, social life, academic as well as work performance. We should help young people combat drug problem and help them stay away from drugs.

In the past few years, there has been a significant rise in the number of young people (aged below 21) abusing psychotropic substances. According to the statistics from the Central Registry of Drug Abuse (CRDA), the average age of first time drug abuse in young people was 15. Among all reported cases, the number of young abusers aged below 21 had increased by 50.6%, from 2278 in 2005 to 3430 in 2008. Recently, incidents of secondary school students taking drugs around school area or the public places had been reported. As students, parents, teachers or general public, how can we work together to fight against drugs in Hong Kong?

From the Editor

Feature Article 1

What is “Drug Abuse”?

To reflect the seriousness of psychotropic substance abuse, the Government since 2008, has re-named the Chinese terms of drug abuse 「濫藥」 or 「濫用藥物」 because these terms literally mean “excessive use of medication”, which seemed to be misleadingly neutral. The terms 「吸毒」 or 「吸食毒品」 (literally means taking drugs) are preferred. In this context, 「精神科藥物」 (psychotropic substances) should be referred to as 「危害精神毒品」, or the more colloquial usage, 「丸仔毒品」, 「K仔毒品」 or the like, instead of just 「精神科藥物」 which literally means “psychiatric medication”.

There are many types of psychotropic substances, including hallucinogens (e.g. ketamine, cannabis); stimulants (e.g. methamphetamine (“Ice”), MDMA (ecstasy), cocaine); tranquillizers (e.g. benzodiazepines: midazolam, zopiclone) etc. Some of them, such as tranquillizers or cough medicine were formerly used for medical purposes. However, if such drugs are taken without following medical advice or prescription or for non-treatment purposes, it is considered as drug abuse.



Why Do Young People Take Drugs?

👉 Individual Level

According to CDRA in 2008, peer influence/ to identify with peers were the most common reasons for the first drug taking among current drug abusers (about 61.4%); followed by curiosity (49.9%) and relief of boredom/ depression/ anxiety (40.5%).

Young people treat their friends’ recognition seriously; through their friends, they know more about the values and living styles outside their families. However, if some of their friends are drug abusers, they might be influenced to take drugs in order to identify with them. Some of their “friends” might be drug dealers and take every opportunity to lure young people to try drugs.

When young people face their developmental changes and family problems, they might mistake that taking drugs is a “good way” to forget their unhappiness. Or they might have the fallacy that occasional drug taking is trendy and non-addictive. Moreover, youth drug abuse is closely linked to their problems in growth and development as well as coping skills, for example, lack of self-esteem and self-confidence, lack of competencies in coping, underachievement, non-engagement in school or work, inadequate aspiration, etc.

👉 Family and Social Levels

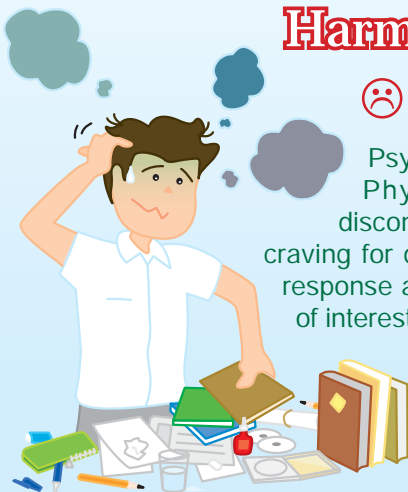
At the family level, the risk factors that might associate with youth drug abuse include loose parental supervision, relationship problem in family, ineffective communication, and lack of family cohesion. At the societal level, one may identify risk factors like easy accessibility to drugs, growing drug addiction culture, peer pressure, abnormal emphasis on achievement, etc.

Harmful Effects of Psychotropic Substances

☹️ Physical and Psychological Damage

Psychotropic substances cause both physical and psychological dependence. Physical dependence is manifested by withdrawal symptoms upon discontinuation of drugs. Psychological dependence refers to the psychological craving for drugs characterized by repeated and excessive use. There may also be response and memory problems, unstable mood and temper, poor memory and loss of interests in activities used to be fond of.

Psychotropic substances affect the brain cells causing lots of harm. Apart from hindrance on normal function of the brain leading to temporary memory loss, disordered sleeping habit and general fatigue; harmful effects may also include long-term damage to the brain like deteriorating memory, cognitive impairment, movement disorders and mental problems (depression and early psychosis). Furthermore, psychotropic drugs may



cause harmful effects to internal organs such as the heart, liver and kidney. Worse still, an impaired state of the mind may make one more vulnerable to accidents and senseless behaviour, endangering not only himself but also other people.

Abuse of psychotropic substances causing short-term and long-term memory loss would give rise to cognitive and learning problems. Emotional fluctuations and poor health resulting from drug abuse would also affect academic performance. If youths are affected by peer pressure and become addicted to drugs, they might lose motivation in their study, then their precious learning period at school might be missed and youthfulness wasted, resulting in regrets. Besides, the abuser might have motor coordination problems which would also cause difficulty in work arrangements affecting work performance.

☹ Family and Social Aspect

In addition to physical harm, drug abuse also causes or aggravates other problems to the abuser, including poor family relationships, family conflicts and disconnection from relatives who may be afraid of getting into troubles. Habitual drug abuse and addiction would cause confused daily routines, absenteeism, and lowering of self-esteem and self-image.

☹ Conviction of Crime

Drug abuse not only cause harm to the body and mind, but also cause criminal offence.

- According to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap.134, Chapter 4): Trafficking or manufacture of dangerous drugs is subject to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$5 million and life imprisonment.
- According to the Dangerous Drugs Ordinance (Cap.134, Chapter 8): Possessing or consuming a dangerous drug is subject to a maximum penalty of a fine of \$1 million and seven years' imprisonment.

Besides affecting oneself, the drug abusers might also harm others. In order to get money to buy drugs, they might commit crimes such as theft or robbery. These are criminal offences which will result in imprisonment and tarnish their life.

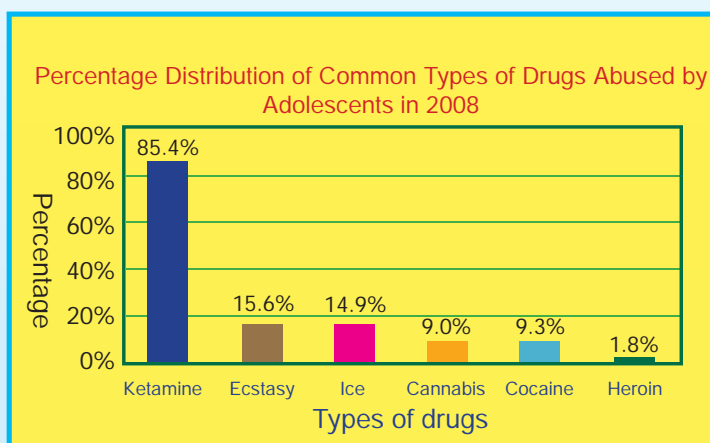


Three Most Commonly Abused Drugs among Youngster

According to the statistics of 2008, the most commonly abused psychotropic substances by adolescents in Hong Kong were ketamine, ecstasy and "ice".

☠ Ketamine

- ★ Ketamine, used to be a kind of surgical anaesthetic, has become the most commonly abused drug in adolescents in recent years;
- ★ It would cause slurred speech, generate a "dissociate" effect which is a feeling that the mind seemed to be "separated" from the body. The person then is unresponsive to stimulation in the surroundings or pain, thus hurting himself unknowingly.
- ★ Long-term abuse would lead to adverse health effects on the brain as well as other major organs such as the kidney and liver. Overdose may compromise the heart and lung functions, leading to death;
- ★ In Hong Kong, there were cases of ketamine abusers who developed significant bladder dysfunction. Normally, the bladder capacity is around 500ml. However, an affected bladder could only hold 30-100ml of urine, causing frequent visits to toilet as frequent as every 15 minutes. Daily living is thus affected.



☠️ MDMA (Ecstasy)

- ★ Ecstasy belongs to the amphetamine type of central nervous system stimulant and hallucinogen. It causes convulsive movements (usually arms, legs and neck), teeth clenching and those involuntary “shaking” movements of the head, arms and legs;
- ★ The uncontrollable vigorous movements will lead to excessive sweating, dehydration, over-heating of body, muscle breakdown, etc. In addition, blood pressure and heart rate will shoot up which may result in irregular heart beat, convulsion, lack of oxygen in the brain and even death.

☠️ Methylamphetamine (“Ice”)

- ★ “Ice” is also a kind of amphetamine. It is so called because it appears like semi-transparent crystals similar to real ice;
- ★ It is a potent stimulant leading to rapid and irregular heart beat, high blood pressure and excessive sweating. Hallucinations and feeling of terror and being harmed might lead to violent behaviour;
- ★ Besides, it can cause psychiatric illness, convulsions, coma, brain haemorrhage and even death.

Misconceptions about Psychotropic Substances Abuse

💣 “Soft” Drugs are Harmless?

There are widespread misconceptions that psychotropic substances are “soft” drugs which are less harmful than “narcotics” such as heroin. Young people think that taking “soft” drugs is fun and trendy; they overestimate their self-control ability and underestimate the addictive effect of psychotropic substances. Indeed, all psychotropic substances are addictive and harmful to health. As the withdrawal symptoms are not obvious and the harmful effects may not be recognized immediately, many drug abusers and their behaviour are “hidden” for years before being identified. The damage to the body may have become significant and irreversible.

**Drugs are addictive,
I don't bother to try it!**

💣 Taking Psychotropic Substances Could Lose Weight?

Some teens think that taking drugs would lose appetite, helping them to lose weight and keeping them up with the latest trends of “slim figure”. In fact, drugs cause addiction, jeopardize health leading to serious consequences and even death. One can never achieve “fit and beauty” by abusing drugs.



How to Reject Drugs?

Young people are facing many temptations in their developmental stage. And, the reasons of young people to try drugs are mainly peer influence/ wish to identify with peers; curiosity or relief of boredom/ depression/ anxiety etc. One can see that it is very important for young people to reject drugs when meeting these situations. A good understanding on the serious consequences of drugs help youths refuse drugs firmly without doubt.

Refusal skills are methods that teens should use to refuse drugs or to leave the scene. Refusal skills and their use should be based on youth's own personality and consideration on the situation and personal safety. Here are some suggestions for teens to refuse drugs – say “no” directly: “drugs are addictive, I don't bother to try it” or make other suggestions to divert the focus and then find an excuse to leave – “Sorry, I'm in a rush now, bye bye!”

When young people say “no” to their friends, they may worry about being isolated or losing face. However, abusing psychotropic substances causes long term and serious consequences on both physical and mental health. So, youths should not be hasty to make thoughtless decisions which might make one regret for life.

How to Handle the Situation When You Find Your Children/ Students Taking Drugs?

Parents' Level

- When parents suspect that their children take drug, it would be better to talk to him/her sympathetically, express concern and care while trying to clarify the matter;
- Parents should listen to your child patiently and see if you could spot some cues of drug abuse;
- If your child denies taking drugs, you should not condemn or threaten him/her to admit. This would break your relationship and block the communication channels;
- On the contrary, systematic and patient guidance would help your child talk and reveal himself/ herself more deeply. With further mutual trust built, you then have more idea of what happened and how you could then help him/her solve problems;
- When you find your child taking drugs, it is important to keep calm and control your emotions. Try to share your feelings with your child, avoid using insulting remarks like – “how come you degenerate like this!”, “I don’t have such kind of child!”, “Don’t go home if you don’t quit!”
- It is agony on discovering your children abusing drugs. Some parents might worry about discrimination against their children or cannot accept the failure in parenting; they might refuse to seek help from professionals. In fact, once children have taken drugs, their health might have been damaged. Therefore, for the sake of children’s well-being, parents should encourage and accompany them to seek help from professionals or drug rehabilitation agencies.

Teachers' Level

- As a teacher, if you find that your students are taking drugs, you should remain calm as well. You should control your emotions, talk to them with patience and understand their situations;
- You may contact the parent and discuss the possible ways to solve the problem; find out the appropriate resources such as school social worker, Integrated Family Service Centre or drug rehabilitation agency for assistance;
- Once parents/ teachers find your children/ students abuse drugs, you should take action immediately to help them quit, so as to prevent further addiction;
- If the children/ students have started receiving rehabilitation and treatment, you should provide continual support and concern until they quit drug successfully.

How to prevent young people from taking drugs?

Individual Level

- There are protective factors which may help protect young people from taking drugs, such as growing up healthily, self-esteem and self-confidence, a positive life goal;
- As young people you should cultivate healthy hobbies and spend leisure time meaningfully by participating in healthy activities such as sports, reading and recreational and cultural activities.
- You should equip yourself with life and social skills such as emotional control, stress management, refusal skills and interpersonal communication skills to enhance your resilience to adversities. Choose friends carefully;
- When facing difficult situations, you should seek help from reliable persons such as parents, teachers, school social workers or health care workers etc;
- “Three Don’t Principles”
 Youths should be responsible persons who hold accountable for their own behaviour, and also treasure lives and value yourselves. Consider the consequences carefully and follow “Three Don’t Principles”, that is: **Don’t hurt others**, **Don’t harm yourself**, **Don’t damage (breaking laws and rules)** before making any decision. Abusing drugs, obviously, violate the “Three Don’t Principles” totally in such way that it will:
 - ★ **Hurt others:** Drugs affect your consciousness and hence judgment and self-control ability, and might lead you act harmfully to others. Moreover, drug abuse is distressing and disappointing to your family.
 - ★ **Harm yourself:** Drugs are addictive, harm your physical body and might cause death.
 - ★ **Damage:** Drugs taking or trafficking are both illegal.



Family Level

- Parents are important role models to their children. Their behaviour has strong influences on their children's development. If parents have habits of smoking or alcohol drinking, their children might have a wrong impression that these health compromising behaviour are acceptable. Therefore, parents should set a good example; help children build up a healthy lifestyle and stay away from smoking, drinking or drug;
- Parents should also encourage their children to have healthy hobbies, so as to minimize their chance of wandering in the street or going to places of temptations. During long school holidays, parents may plan activities with their children and make good use of vacation time so that their children would not resort to take drugs for the purpose of killing boring feelings;
- In order to prevent children from drug abuse, parents should gain knowledge on harmful effects of drugs and keep aware of current news of the drug abuse problem;
- It is important for parents to establish good communication with their children. Close relationship comes from intimate interactions. Parents can make use of daily matters for education, for example, discuss current affairs and those about drug abuse with their children, help them establish positive value systems, critical thinking and refusal skills;
- Parents may also try to get a deeper understanding on their children's thought and standpoint about drug abuse. This is a way to show that you care, thus enhancing mutual trust and support, for facing problems together.

School Level

- School life is an important stage for teens to learn the socially acceptable behaviour. Schools should set up healthy campus policy, initiate caring atmosphere and provide anti-drug education;
- Good counseling system; discipline, reasonable expectations enable the students to learn the positive value systems and the right attitude to deal with various affairs, hence strengthening their ability to refuse drugs;
- Drug prevention is a persistent mission, both family and school should work together and take up the responsibilities in keeping youth away from drugs. Mutual communication would help each other understand what problems youths are facing and what their views are.

Community level

- To tackle the problem of youth drug abuse at root, we need a caring culture. Apart from parents and schools that provide the basic protective net, we need greater community involvement to educate, support and offer opportunities to correct one's mistakes and start a new leaf;
- To empower adolescents in facing challenges of growing up, Department of Health has launched the Adolescent Health Programme (AHP) in 2001 as an outreaching service to secondary schools. Apart from basic life skills training covering problem-solving skills, emotion and stress management etc, AHP also educate students on the harmful effects of drug abuse as well as refusal skills; examples are the "Making decision" programme of the "Basic Life Skills Training" programme and "Be a smart and free person" in the Topical programme.
- In addition, AHP also provides Topical programmes for teachers and parents, such as "Look into the problem together – Youth drug abuse" and "Prevention of youth drug abuse – Start from the family".



Conclusion

Taking drugs not only cause permanent damage to the brain but also harm to other organs and endanger lives. It has devastating impact on individuals, families as well as the society. Tackling the multi-faceted problem of youth drug abuse is not simple at all. As a citizen of the society, we hope all of us in the community work together to build up a harmonious environment for adolescents to maximize their potential. Family and schools should pay more concern to youth who are facing growth challenges, and help them build up positive value systems and healthy lifestyle. We should also encourage them to cope with those challenges in life optimistically and enhance problem solving skills and emotion management, ultimately, become people who cherish life, refuse temptations and stay away from drugs.

Reference:

Report of the Task Force on Youth Drug Abuse
Narcotics Division, Security Bureau
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
(November 2008)

Central Registry of Drug Abuse
Narcotics Division, Security Bureau
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
(April 2009)

Anti-drug teaching kits
Action Committee Against Narcotics
Narcotics Division, Security Bureau
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region

Anti-drug booklet "Understanding Drug Abuse Problem"
Narcotics Division, Security Bureau
The Government of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region
Community Drug Advisory Council Website <http://www.cdac.org.hk/>

Drugs ruin your entire life. Teenagers during development are curious about new things, easily affected by peer pressure and facing challenges from different areas. If they get involved in drug abuse, they are actually paving themselves into the wrong track, with far-reaching consequences. Therefore, apart from knowledge and correct thinking, actions should also come simultaneously. "The determination to Say NO" is the strategy to turn temptations down. The following are the refusal skills suggested by our fellow-students, so let's "Say No to Drug, Say No to Regret!"



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Result Announcement of the Student E-card Design Competition and Student Written Sharing (2008-2009) organized by the Adolescent Health Programme, Student Health Service of the Department of Health

In 2008/09, the Adolescent Health Programme organized two activities namely E-card Design Competition and Student Written Sharing. The aim is to provide a platform for students to express their feeling and learning from our programme so that they can share and promulgate positive health message among themselves e.g. how to control emotion, building up good interpersonal relationship and correct attitude in sex etc. Furthermore, we would also like to encourage students to use e card to send health message to others.

Student Written Sharing

List of student winners:

WONG Shun-man	(2E)	Liu Po Shan Memorial College
SIN Hon-kit Clement	(1E)	St. Joseph's College
CHAN Wing-ho Ronald	(1D)	St. Paul's Co-Educational College
TO Ka-lei	(1D)	PLK Ma Kam Ming College
HO Wai-fan	(1B)	Heung To Middle School
WONG Ka-ying	(1C)	Shau Kei Wan Government Secondary School
HOU Hoi-ni	(1B)	Shau Kei Wan Government Secondary School
LIU Choi-yee	(3A)	CCC Ming Yin College
KONG Ka-po	(1D)	Shau Kei Wan Government Secondary School
HO Chung-yan	(4C)	CCC Kei Long College
WONG Hau-lung	(6A)	TWGH Li Ka Shing College
CHEUNG Yuen-shan	(6A)	TWGH Li Ka Shing College
DAI Ching-man	(2C)	YWCA Hioe Tjo Yoeng College
HUI Tsz-ying	(3B)	PLK Ma Kam Ming College
ZETO Long-him	(3B)	PLK Ma Kam Ming College

List of school winners with highest participation rate:

Our Lady's College
 YWCA Hioe Tjo Yoeng College
 CCC Ming Yin College
 PLK Wu Chung College
 Po Kok Secondary School



Dear readers, please take a look at their learnings and feedbacks about Basic Life Skill Training and Topical programmes.

Student E-card Design Competition

Champion	YIU Tsz-him	(2E)	St. Joseph's College
1st runner-up	CHAN Cheuk-ling	(1B)	Heung To Middle School
2nd runner-up	CHENG Chue-pang	(3B)	HKSYC&IA Wong Tai Shan Memorial College

List of school winners with highest participation rate:

Delia Memorial School (Yuet Wah)
 Heung To Middle School
 St. Joseph's College
 HKSYC&IA Wong Tai Shan Memorial College
 Liu Po Shan Memorial College



Come and vote the entries you like!
<http://www.ahpsht.gov.hk/>



Acknowledgment to the guest adjudicators:

Dr. Sandra TSANG, Head of Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong.
 Mr. Wade L.T. CHAN, School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University
 Mr. LEUNG Kwok Keung, Logus Academy