

Coping with Difficult Behaviour: Do's and Don'ts¹

Alcohol and street drugs

- ✿ Alcohol can be taken in small amounts, not more than one or two drinks a day, depending on the individual.
- ✿ Drugs such as marijuana, LSD, amphetamines (“speed”) and PCP (“angel dust”) and the new synthetic drugs such as “crack” and “ecstasy” are like poison to a person with schizophrenia. They can make symptoms worse and trigger a relapse.

DO

- ✿ Remind him/her firmly that the drugs are harmful.
- ✿ Remind him/her of the safe limits of alcohol that can be taken.
- ✿ Calmly give him/her a pamphlet about the effects of drugs and alcohol.
- ✿ Ask their reasons for taking drugs or excess alcohol (if it is to lessen tension or obtain acceptance by other people, other alternatives may be found).
- ✿ Discuss with doctor or therapist.
- ✿ Look for any stresses that may lead to drinking or drug taking (e.g. fights with the family, job pressures) and discuss ways of solving these.
- ✿ Discuss alternative ways of being “happy” or “getting high”, e.g. making new friends, music, sport.
- ✿ The person may need to learn new things, e.g. socialising with people who don't drink or take drugs, take up a new and satisfying hobby or do some voluntary work to give a sense of achievement.

DON'T

- ✿ Don't nag or criticise – this may make things worse.
- ✿ Don't get into arguments about it.
- ✿ Don't set an example of heavy drinking or drug taking yourself.
- ✿ Don't let the family encourage heavy drinking or drug taking by making it sound good (“Boy I had a great night – got really drunk”)
- ✿ Don't allow yourself to be talked out of enforcing the rule – it's important to be consistent.

- ✿ Make an agreement about no drug taking or excessive drinking.
 - ✿ Keep this agreement at a level they can achieve.
 - ✿ Support this by:
 1. Giving rewards or special privileges, perhaps each week, if your relative keeps the agreement (e.g. a trip to the movies, a special meal, money or anything else he/she values).
 2. If your relative breaks the agreement:
 - Don't give the reward you promised if the person had kept the agreement.
 - Take away the drugs or drink if possible, and
 - Take away a privilege immediately, e.g. reduce pocket money or refuse to buy any more music cassettes for the person or other things she/he values. Make sure you choose something they can't get some other way (e.g. from a friend).
- Ensure that the loss of privileges is reasonable – don't go overboard.

¹Schizophrenia: A Self-Help Guide for Relatives and Carers by Olga Piatkowska and Maria Visotina (1989)