

It's not just about the drug

Effects and harms of drugs

Drugs affect everyone differently and people's experiences when using alcohol and other drugs will not be the same. Rather, the effects and possible harms of drug use vary enormously and are determined by a combination of factors that are connected:

- the **individual** using the drug (Age? Experience with this drug? State of mental and physical health – feeling low, stressed, unwell? Alone? Tired? Dehydrated?)
- the **drug** that is taken (What drug? How much? Purity? Taken orally, inhaled, injected? In combination with other drugs? Availability of more of the drug?)
- the **environment** in which it is being used (At home? On the Beach? When planning to drive? At an unfamiliar venue? Who are they with?)



Drug use triangle

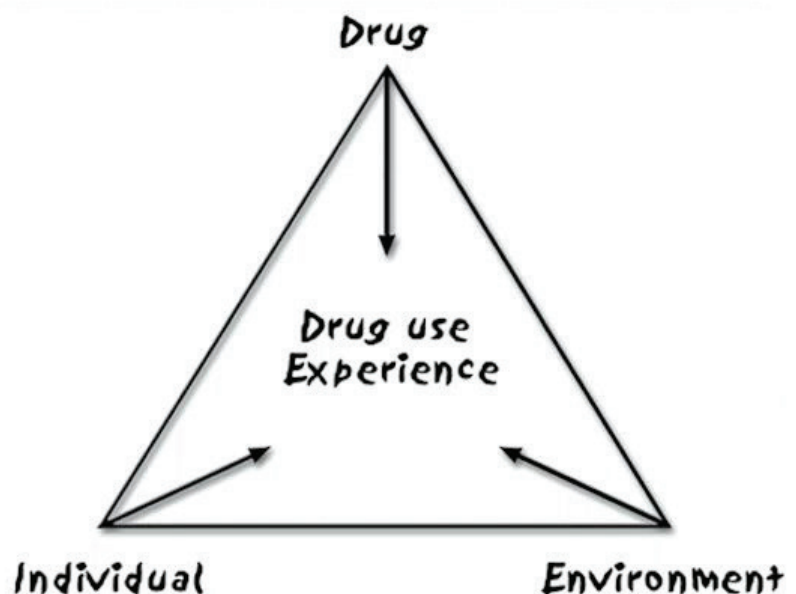
The Drug Use Triangle shows how the effects and harms of drug use are determined by the combination of factors connected to the individual, the drug and the environment.

Understanding this helps us to see that while one person's experience with a particular drug might be good – they may feel in a good place and the drug use makes them feel more confident, more relaxed or elated – another person who may be in a different environment and feeling low or stressed to begin with, could use the same drug even in the same quantity but have a negative experience and end up feeling anxious, unable to concentrate or depressed.

It is clear to see then why drug use is complex. Different places, moods, experiences, social groups or situations, and varying availability of drug types, will influence a person to decide to take a drug or not to take a drug. These factors may also influence how much they will use and how they feel if they do use a drug. The factors surrounding this choice will also vary from one day to the next. Because of these inter-playing factors, what happens when people take drugs can be hard to predict and the impact of a specific drug is much more variable than is often understood.

So, hopefully now it is clear that drug use is not just about the drug. It requires understanding of the broader picture and particularly of the person engaging in drug use. When talking with your children about drugs and providing support to them should you feel concerned about their drug use behaviour, it is important to focus on how they are and to explore this as well as to talk about your concerns and raise awareness of possible harms they could experience.

While most young people will not have problems with alcohol or other drugs, there is so much to be gained by providing a supportive family environment where questions can be asked and answered, issues raised and talked through, openly - just as you would for any other health issue. All of this reassures young people that you are interested in understanding them, not judging them, and that you will be there for them even if they do end up in a difficult situation.



For more information

For information on resources and support services in your area that can help if you think your child may have a drug use issue, call the Alcohol and Drug Support Line or your local Community Alcohol and Drug Service, or talk with your doctor. Click on the Who can help? tab on the SDERA website for contact details and options.

Contact SDERA

T: (08) 9402 6415

F: (08) 9402 6399

W: www.sdera.wa.edu.au

E: sdera.co@education.wa.edu.au

Parent and Family Drug Support Line

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: (08) 9442 5050

T: 1800 653 203 (country callers)

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Alcohol and Drug Support Line

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: (08) 9442 5000

T: 1800 198 024 (country callers)

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

Meth Helpline

24/7 free and confidential counselling, information and referral

T: 1800 874 878

E: alcoholdrugsupport@mhc.wa.gov.au

W: alcoholdrugsupport.mhc.wa.gov.au

