Drugs & Mental Health

Understand the impact. Notice the pattern. Know what to do.

WHAT IS IT?

'Drugs' here means non-medical drug use and misuse of prescription or over-the-counter medicines. Effects vary by drug, dose and person.

Concern grows when use affects safety, mental health or daily life, or becomes difficult to reduce or stop.

5 WAYS DRUGS CAN AFFECT SOMEONE

01 Mood & anxiety

Some drugs or comedowns can increase anxiety, panic, irritability or low mood—creating a cycle of using to cope.

02 Thinking & perception

Memory, concentration and judgement may change. Some drugs can cause confusion, paranoia, hallucinations or psychosis.

03 Sleep & recovery

Stimulants can prevent sleep; other drugs can cause drowsiness. Poor sleep affects energy, focus, mood and recovery.

04 Safety & daily life

Risk-taking, secrecy, money worries, conflict or missed commitments can affect relationships, work, education and sport.

05 Tolerance & dependence

Cravings may grow and more of a drug may be needed for the same effect. Withdrawal varies and can sometimes be dangerous.

A coach notices and supports—a coach does not diagnose.

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Notice. Respond. Connect.
SIGNS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN SPORT

What a volunteer coach may notice—and what to do next.

- Unusual drowsiness, agitation, confusion, unsteadiness or behaviour.
- Missing sessions, arriving late, becoming unreliable or leaving unexpectedly.
- Cravings, anxiety, shaking or poor sleep when not using.
- A drop in concentration, coordination, recovery or performance—or more injuries.
- Mood swings, anxiety, paranoia, secrecy, aggression or withdrawal from others.
- Using before or during sport, using to cope, or saying they cannot cut down.

Look for change, patterns and context. These signs can have many explanations.

01 NOTICE

Spot Changes in behaviour, mood , attendance or performance.

No obvious sign?
Check in anyway.

02 TALK

Say what you have noticed, or simply remind them you care. "Ive noticed.." "I'm checking in.."

Follow safeguarding procedures.

03 LISTEN

Give them time. Ask open questions. Do not interrupt, judge or rush to try and fix everything.

Take notice and care to listen.

04 CARE

Stay calm, kind and non-judgmental. Repeat back what they tell you. Respect privacy within the safeguarding limits e.g. Coach, Parent and Safeguarding Officer.

Ask what would help.

05 CONNECT

If anything worries you follow the safeguarding procedures and connect them with the right lead, trusted person, GP or support service.

Immediate danger call 999.

URGENT / MEDICAL

Do not let anyone under the influence of drugs play, drive or supervise children. Call 999 for unconsciousness, slow or irregular breathing, seizure, severe confusion, serious injury or suspected drug poisoning. Stay with them. If dependence is suspected, do not advise sudden unsupported detox.

WHERE TO GET HELP IN NORTHERN IRELAND

GP / LOCAL SERVICE

NI SERVICES DIRECTORY

drugsandalcoholni.info

TEXT "TEAMMATE" TO 85258

LIFELINE 0808 808 8000

HELP!

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5 WAYS TO SUPPORT SOMEONE

01 Talk early—without judgement or labels

Choose a suitable moment when the person is not intoxicated. Use what you have noticed: "You don't seem yourself, and I'm concerned you may be using more.

How are things?" Non-judgemental, motivational conversations are recommended over confrontation or lecturing.

02 Understand what the drug is helping them escape

Ask what happens before they use and what relief it provides: stress, trauma, anxiety, low mood, pain, sleep or loneliness.

Then explore what happens afterwards. The underlying mental-health difficulty and the drug use both need support—the person should not be bounced between services.

03 Agree one realistic change and clear boundaries

Help them identify triggers and choose one next step: contact a service, delay using, avoid a high-risk situation or use another coping strategy. Clubs must also be clear that intoxicated participation, driving, supplying drugs or unsafe behaviour cannot be accepted.

Do not demand that a dependent person suddenly stops certain drugs; withdrawal may require medical support.

04 Reduce immediate risk while change develops

The safest option is not to use unprescribed drugs. If someone continues, advise them not to mix drugs with alcohol or other substances, use alone, drive or participate in sport while impaired.

Naloxone can reverse an opioid overdose and is available through Northern Ireland harm-reduction services.

05 Connect them with help and keep checking in

Offer to help them contact their GP or a local service through the Northern Ireland Drug and Alcohol Services Directory.

Go with them if appropriate and continue checking in after the referral. For someone under 18, follow safeguarding procedures and involve the appropriate safeguarding lead and parent/carer.

Signs that coping may be spiralling: using more often, needing more for the same effect, secrecy, mood or sleep changes, financial problems, missing training, declining performance, withdrawal symptoms or being unable to cut down.

TAKE 5 FOR WELLBEING

Five evidence based everyday actions to help maintain and improve wellbeing.

CONNECT

Spend time with people who help you feel supported.

BE ACTIVE

Walk, run, cycle, play sports and games.

TAKE NOTICE

Pause & take notice of the world around you. Chill & relax.

KEEP LEARNING

Try something new or build a skill your value.

GIVE

Offer time, kindness or encouragement to help others.

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