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Seminar Notes

Good morning, I am Anne-Marie. Today I would like to share with you a Youth Work seminar which is aimed at parents and carers, which will educate them and help them to support their young people through substance mis use.

I would begin the presentation by introducing myself and the topic of conversation I would then let the parents and carers know that some of the content in the seminar may be triggering for some, if this is the case, they would be welcome to leave the room at any time, alternatively, they are welcome to stay behind after the seminar to have a chat.

I would then open the session by letting them know that any Youth Work intervention is on a voluntary basis and as such, they are able to leave at any time, the same as the young people that engage with Youth Workers.

Slide- 2

Here is the content list that I would like to present to parents and carers, which will include-

- What are drugs?
- Side Effects
- Promoting Health and Wellbeing

- Why do young people use substances?
- Sue Palmer's- Toxic Childhood
- Statistics
- Class A Drugs
- Class B Drugs
- Class C Drugs
- Name the Substances
- Risk Factors
- Protective Factors
- 5 Ways to Wellbeing
- Contact information
- Reference List

Change slide- 3

I would begin with what are drugs?! Kidshealth (2023) describe drugs as being substances or chemicals that change the way that our bodies react and respond and function. These drugs can be prescribed by a medical professional, or often the drugs hold no real purpose. Kidshealth (2023) go on to explain how there are different ways that drugs can be taken, explaining that they can be inhaled, injected or swallowed, with differing effects, from enhancing or dulling a person's senses, they can also change the way that a person thinks and responds to surroundings and situations.

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I would explain that these are some of the side effects that Positive choices (2021) suggest that young people will experience when using or experimenting with substances. It is clear that the brain is affected when the young person experiences a 'high', which is when the young person feels euphoric, they can also become hostile and confused, they could even experience seizures. These would be classed as the immediate effects; however, it is important for parents and carers to understand that these effects can become long term effects too.

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I would explain to the parents and carers that Youth Work can promote health and wellbeing for young people, by educating them on important topics such as substance mis use, helping them to gain an understanding of these effects. I would explain that this would be in accordance with The Wellbeing of future generations (Wales) Act (2015), where Youth Work can provide collaboration, integration and involvement with young people, ensuring that they have long term support to prevent any risk or harm to their future. I would explain that Youth Work is based on building meaningful relationships with young people, so they can access support as well as build positive friendships with others.

Change- 6

I would begin by reiterating the question on the slide, why do young people turn to substances?! There could be very many reasons as to why young people might turn to substance mis use, so I would say that, according to drug free (2024), there are 8 main reasons why young people turn to substances. I would go on and explain that

the first one is because they are influenced by others, they see other people doing it first, this could be their parents or other adults that they see drinking, smoking or trying other substances. It could also be because of the young person's friendship circle, peer pressure, or because it's easy to get hold of and they have seen their friends trying it and want to fit in and be the same.

I would go on to say that the second one is because of 'youth culture', which means that they may have seen it on TV, in films, on social media, at parties or raves, they might know that influencers or people that inspire them are using substances and therefore see it as acceptable and "cool".

When discussing the third one, I would remind parents and carers of all the changes that their young people will still be going through, some that they will know about, so for example puberty and all the changes that their bodies will be going through, I would then discuss the changes in the brain, specifically the prefrontal cortex which is responsible for decision making, however this is not fully developed until the age of around 25 years, explaining that this is one of the reasons that young people make poor decisions and engage in risky behaviours. I would then explain to the parents and carers that with this in mind, and when considering that the prefrontal cortex is in fact less developed than the amygdala, which controls the emotions, it is no wonder that when a young person is feeling unhappy, anxious or stressed that they might turn to substances as a coping mechanism, where they might want more energy, or to feel happier, or to feel more confident. I would also advise parents and carers how Drugfree (2024) go on to explain that some young people will mis use prescribed medication, an example of this is when a young person is taking prescribed medication for ADHD or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, they might

do this because they have exams for example and are anxious and will mis use their medication as a means of ensuring they will be able to focus.

Moving on to the fourth one, parents and carers should also understand that using substances can also be for reasons as simple as boredom, they are trying to fill their time and decide to do this by experimenting with various drugs, alcohol, cigarettes or even vapes. If they are trying to make friends while out and about it can also give young people the confidence to approach new people, along with, potentially having something in common with them, if they too are known for taking substances.

I would then explain that drugfree (2024) suggest that young people wanting to rebel is the fifth one listed, they explain that all young people are different and will often seek substances that support them to behave in accordance with their emotions, they use alcohol as an example, saying that alcohol can help them to release anger. While hallucinogens can help young people escape from reality.

This leads on to number six, which is a quick satisfaction, which might be appealing to young people who live with anxiety, depression, or may be upset. The substance works fast, and the first impact makes them feel good.

It is important for parents and carers to understand that many young people can be introverts who rely on substances for confidence purposes, so taking substances can lower inhibitions and lessen their social awareness.

And lastly, drugfree (2024) explain that young people being misinformed about substances can also be another reason as to why they might take them, perhaps a friend has told them that they are harmless, and they will make them feel good with no nasty effects.

Change slide- 7

I would explain to the parents and carers that many of these points are what Palmer (2006) raised concerns about when talking about the social changes that lead to toxic childhood. Palmer (2015) discussed how there is no longer enough outdoor play for children, and their childhood is too commercialised, the 'schoolification' of early childhood where children are put into school settings earlier to prepare them for school. Palmer also raised concerns about the lack of skills to include listening and communication, and how there was too much time spent watching a screen, along with school expectations often being overwhelming for children, in particular if they do not enjoy an academic setting, with focus on tests and targets.

So, this is where I would further discuss Youth Work and the positive effects that it can have for young people. I would start by explaining that in accordance with the Youth Work National Occupational Standards Functional Map (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019), Youth Workers can informally educate young people on substance mis use, this can be done in the form of having an open and honest conversation, either as a group or one to one, playing games that are age relevant to the young people, along with other activities that can also be educational and informative. As Bisset (2010) discusses how Youth Workers will always conduct such conversations in a non-judgemental manner, whereby young people are reminded that their contribution is important. I would explain by that by doing this, Youth Work

is empowering, for young people, which is in accordance with Youth Work in Wales: Principles and Purposes (Youth Work in Wales Review Group, 2022) (YWWRG), where we are teaching young people how to make responsible decisions as well as supporting young people to be good problem solvers. I would go on to mention how the Principles and Purposes support Youth Work with the five pillars of Youth Work in Wales which mean that Youth Workers have a responsibility to educate young people, to encourage them to be expressive and to participate, while being inclusive and empowering them. I would explain that all of these can be done while the young person is enjoying themselves, spending time with friends, it can even be outdoors either playing games or exploring nature. This will also show young people how they can better look after their wellbeing, while also finding enjoyment in activities they might never have experienced before.

I would then go on to show the parents and carers some statistics on substance misuse, as a means of showing them how important Youth Work intervention can be.

Change slide- 8

So I would begin with showing this chart, which are stats provided by the Office for National Statistics (2024), where it shows that around 971,000 of young people aged 16- 25 in England and Wales reported using drugs between April 2023 and March 2024, while there is no record of specific drugs, they did report that 5.5% of young people in this age category, which is around 327,000 young people reported that they had used class A drugs. They went on to report that 2.5% of the young people had confessed to frequently taking drugs, which is around 150,000 young people between the ages of 16 and 25 years. I would explain to the parents and carers that while the percentages sound relatively low, when you consider the amount of young

people actually using substances then does become a worry, and certainly more reason to encourage young people to access support from Youth Workers, who will work with them, without judgement or expectation, but rather meet them where they are, in accordance with the Youth Work National Occupational Standards Functional Map (CLD Standards Council Scotland, 2019).

Following on from this conversation I would explain the difference between the types of drugs.

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A Class A drug according to UK Government (2025) would include cocaine, crack cocaine, ecstasy (MDMA), heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, methadone and methamphetamine (also known as crystal meth).

Change slide- 10

Class B drugs which they list as amphetamines, barbiturates, cannabis, codeine, gamma hydroxybutyrate (GHB), gamma-butyrolactone (GBL), ketamine, methylphenidate (Ritalin), synthetic cannabinoids, synthetic cathinones (for example mephedrone, methoxetamine).

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Then I would go to show them this slide which shows Class C drugs, which the UK Government (2025) describe as being anabolic steroids, benzodiazepines (diazepam), khat, nitrous oxide (laughing gas), piperazines (BZP). I would also add that the guidelines go on to say that anyone found to be taking drugs, carrying drugs, making drugs or supplying drugs is at risk of receiving a fine or prison sentence. Again, reiterating the need for Youth Work intervention.

This would lead me to my activity, where I would invite parents and carers to partake in a little quiz, where I would explain to them that it is not a test, but rather a little bit of fun, to see how many substances they can recognise from the sheets that I have prepared. Is everyone happy to have a go?

Change slide- 12

You can work as a team if you want, or if you prefer, you can have a go on your own. I will give you a couple of minutes.... Hand out the activity...

I would then provide the answers, which are on the next slide....

Change slide- 13

As shown, the first one is cocaine, the second one is crack cocaine, the next one is methamphetamine, followed by methylphenidate, benzodiazepines are next, then we have cannabis, followed by khat and lastly, we have nitrous oxide. These are just a few substances available to young people, I have brought a kit along with me, which contain models of substances, I would invite the parents and carers to have a look and to look at the back of each one for more information. You are welcome to have a look, or if you would rather wait until the end, you can do that too.

I would then look at some of the risk factors that parents and carers should be mindful of, if they have concerns that their young person may be considering or engaging in substance use. These risk factors, as Nawi et al (2021) suggest, might include

Change slide- 14

Being impulsive, if a young person is impulsive, they are more likely to experiment with substances.

Emotional dysregulation, young people who find it difficult to control their emotions are more likely to turn to substances as a way of controlling their emotions.

Abuse, if a young person has been the victim of, or exposed to any form of mistreatment in earlier childhood, they are more likely to find comfort in using substances.

Children and young people in care, are more at risk of taking substances, sometimes as a means of rebelling because they are unable to be with their family or loved ones.

Poor mental health in childhood, this can mean that young people who have experienced poor mental health in childhood will use substances as a coping mechanism.

Difficulties in school, when young people struggle in school it can be upsetting and cause anxiety, or if young people decide to skip school altogether, it can be an opportunity for them to engage with individuals who take or sell substances.

Parental influence, if young people have been exposed to substances from a young age, they might consider this to be normal and acceptable.

As I said, these are just some of the risk factors, I would then explain to the parents or carers that should they have any concerns at all, they would be welcome to contact the Youth Work team for advice and support, where we might be able to put some interventions in place to support the young person, as well as advise the parents and carers how they too might be able to support their young people at home.

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I would then discuss protective factors with the parents and carers. Public Health Wales [PHW] (2021) suggest that protective factors include Finding enjoyment in attending school, this means that they are far more likely to attend school, with a possibility of attending after school clubs. While Tyler and Ray (2019) found that young people who had good and positive family relationships were less likely to experiment with substances, Tyler and Ray (2019) also mentioned that a protective factor for young people is also having positive relationships with adults who are not family members, so for example, Youth Workers, teachers and so on.

Interests and hobbies, young people who keep themselves busy through activities that they enjoy and find pleasure in, generally do not have an interest in using substances.

I would then go on to discuss how Youth Workers can be protective factors, explaining that they can provide young people with a safe environment, where they can feel supported and access information and advice, in the event that the Youth Worker is unable to provide enough support, they will have the resources to sign post them accordingly. Where completely necessary, and if the young person is at risk, the Youth Worker can act as an advocate or engage with multi agency teams to ensure safety for the young person.

As Elias (2025) discussed, 'professional curiosity' is important when working with young people, in particular where substance mis use is concerned, because a young person might not recognise the risk that comes with what they are doing, or it could

be that they are being exploited, so being given drugs as an incentive to engage in unlawful activities.

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Youth Workers also have a responsibility to promote ways in which young people can live healthy lives. As explained by Mind (2025), the five ways to wellbeing can support young people to engage with like-minded people, it can support young people to stay active and remind them to take notice of the world around them, either by visiting new places or enjoying nature, for example. Mind (2025) suggests that learning new things can be good for wellbeing, as well as giving, for example giving something back to the community, or helping a friend.

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To bring the session to an end, I would thank the parents and carers for attending and provide them with some contacts in the event that the session had affected them or they wanted to discuss any concerns they might have. I would also provide them with my details so that they could contact me directly with any questions they might have, alternatively I would also invite them to leave feedback, or stay behind at the end of the session.

To conclude, when discussing substance mis use, I believe that it is quite obvious to parents and carers that Youth Work intervention is a very positive factor for any young person. Regardless of whether the young person is considering experimenting with substances or they might already be using them, it is important that we meet them where they are, with no judgement, but simply to offer support and guidance in a way that they might not be able to have at home. It is also important to ensure that the young person's parents and carers feel supported enough that they will seek

advice if they are not confident in how to approach the subject of substance misuse.

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Thank you for Listening, are there any questions?

Change slide- 19- reference list

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