

UNDERSTANDING DRUG ABUSE: RISK AND MAINTENANCE FACTORS

To understand drug abuse, we need to explore when people are more likely to engage in it and why they maintain it.

Risk Factors:



- Internal: Antisocial behavioural patterns that increase susceptibility to drug abuse
- External: Negative influences from key areas of life, including friends and peer groups, family dynamics, educational environment, and leisure activities



Maintenance Factors:



- Internal: How a person learns and processes experiences, their attitudes towards drug abuse, and underlying personality traits that make it harder to stop
- External: The social environment (e.g. people and relationships around them) and physical environment (e.g. places and situations that trigger or enable drug abuse) that reinforce continued abuse



Risk Factors

INTERNAL

EXTERNAL

There are 7 areas that may increase the likelihood of someone abusing drugs. Broadly, we view them as internal and external factors.

Antisocial Patterns



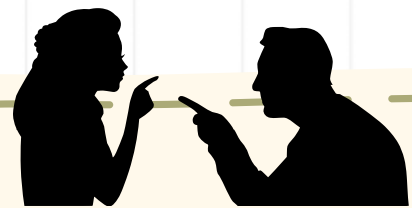
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Past antisocial behaviour (e.g. bike theft) can significantly increase the risk of drug abuse by signaling underlying issues with impulse control, emotional regulation, and social adjustment.

2

Antisocial thinking, like attitudes that support drug use (e.g. "abusing drugs do not harm anyone") distorts the reality of possible harms of drug abuse, making it easier for individuals to justify or rationalise their behaviour.

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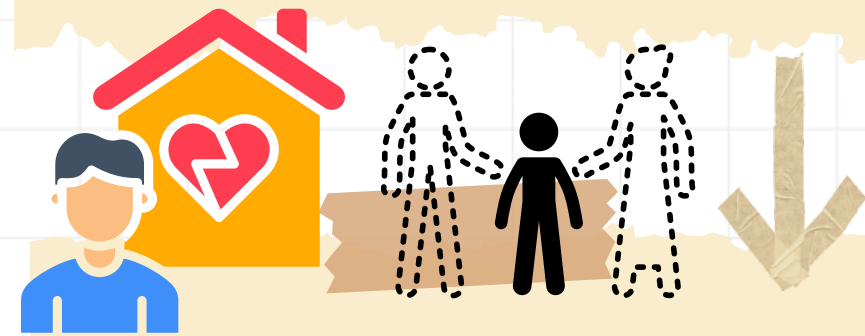


A hostile, impulsive, and thrill-seeking personality drives reckless decisions. Hostility may lead to defiance of rules, impulsivity fuels risky choices, and thrill-seeking encourages the pursuit of intense experiences, including drug abuse, without considering the long-term consequences.

People



Having delinquent friends and few to no friends of positive influences can lead individuals to feel pressured to conform to drug abuse. Without supportive and positive friendships, they are more likely to turn to drugs to cope with stress or isolation.



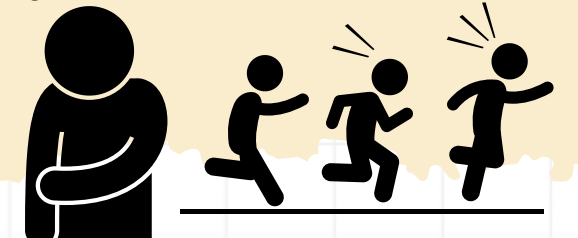
Low support and care from family, along with low parental supervision can lead to feelings of neglect, isolation, and lack of guidance, making individuals more vulnerable to drug abuse.

Routine

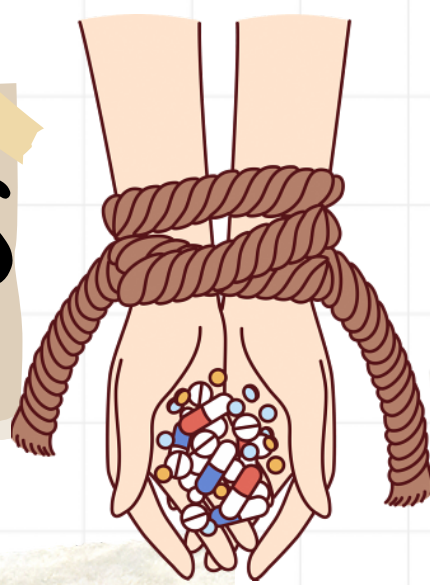
Low involvement, performance, and satisfaction at work or school can lead individuals to turn to drugs to cope with stress, boredom, or a sense of failure.



Low involvement in prosocial activities leave individuals with more free time and fewer positive outlets. Without constructive activities, they may turn to drugs for excitement or escape.

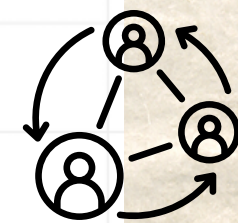


WHAT MAINTAINS DRUG ABUSE?



Drug abuse is maintained through a combination of internal and external factors.

- **Internal:** Reinforcement learning, along with individual attitudes and personality traits, can maintain the continuation of drug abuse
- **External:** Social circles, peer pressure, and the physical environment play a crucial role in sustaining drug abuse patterns

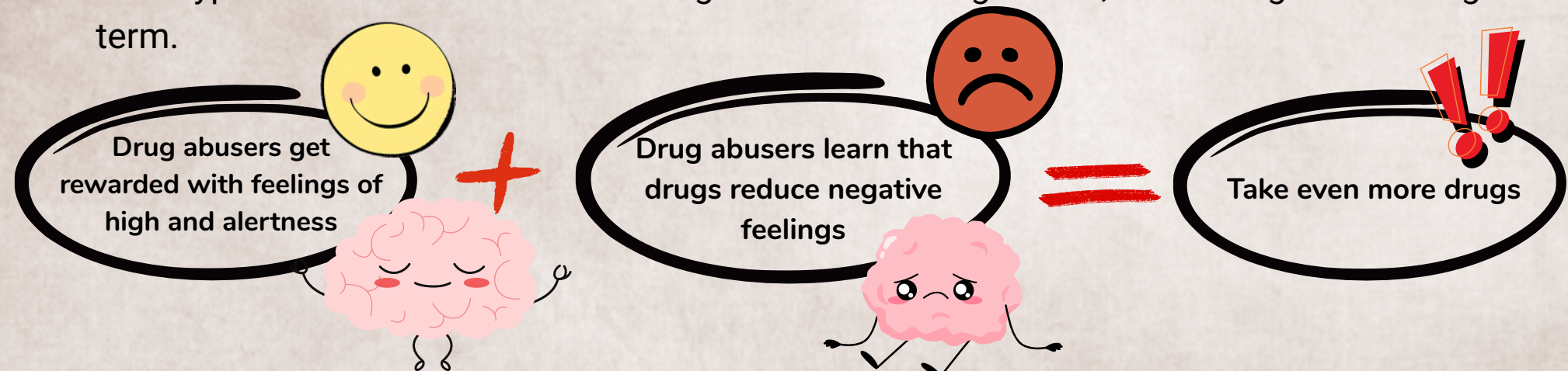


HOW IS DRUG ABUSE MAINTAINED INTERNALLY?

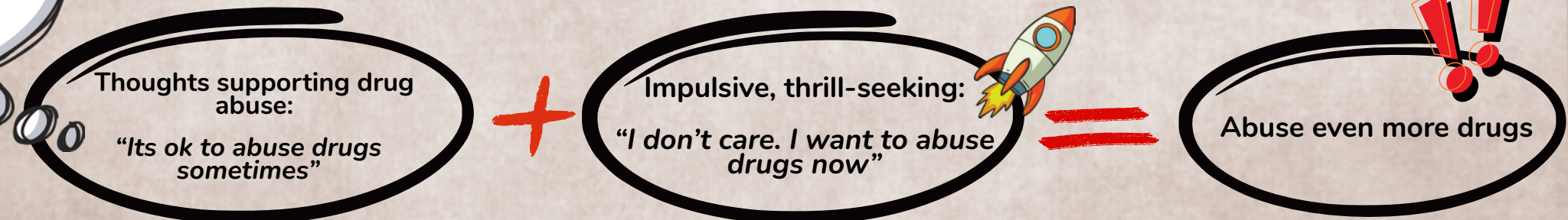
Learning

Attitudes & Personality

Drug abuse is maintained internally through learning and reinforcement. Drug abusers learn that drugs provide rewarding feelings of euphoria and alertness, similar to how praise motivates students. They also learn that drugs alleviate negative emotions like stress and anxiety, much like scratching a mosquito bite relieves discomfort. Over time, both types of reinforcement encourage continued drug abuse, sustaining abuse long-term.



Drug abuse can also be maintained through antisocial thinking and personality. Antisocial thinking includes thoughts like "Abusing drugs sometimes is ok" or "Drugs do not harm anyone." Those with an antisocial personality, being impulsive and thrill-seeking, may think "I don't care, I want to abuse drugs now" or "Drugs are fun." These thoughts can lead to increased drug abuse, maintaining abuse over time.

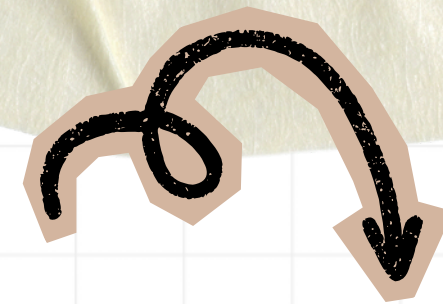


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Social Environment

WHERE IS DRUG ABUSE MAINTAINED EXTERNALLY?

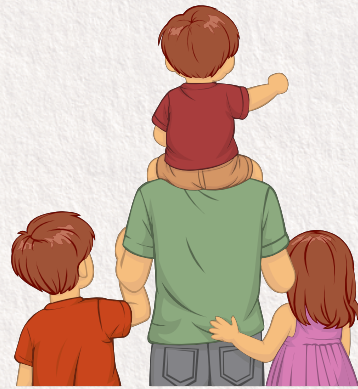


Physical Environment

Social environment refers to the people a drug abuser associates with, including family and friends.

Family

- Level of communication among family members
- Amount of supervision received by one's caregivers
- Drug history within one's family
- Domestic abuse or neglect that is witnessed or experienced



Friends

- Friends can influence drug abuse, either by pressuring an individual to abuse drugs or through constant exposure to drug abuse
- Frequent interaction with those who abuse drugs may make drug abuse seem acceptable



Physical environment refers to situations or places surrounding a drug abuser.

Life Stressors

- Life events that give an individual stress, which can include:
 - Unemployment
 - Loss of loved ones
 - An important upcoming examination




Drug-Inducing Cues or Triggers

- Things that remind them of drugs, which may include:
 - Places where one used to abuse drugs at, such as their residential stairwell
 - Items that remind them of drugs, such as aluminium foil





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- By understanding the risk factors and maintaining factors of drug abuse, you can better spread crucial messages about staying drug-free.
 - Sharing knowledge about the internal and external factors that contribute to drug abuse allows individuals to recognise warning signs in themselves and others.
 - Through education and open conversations, you play a vital role in:
 - Creating a supportive, informed community that encourages healthier choices; and
 - Empowering people to avoid the cycle of drug abuse.

