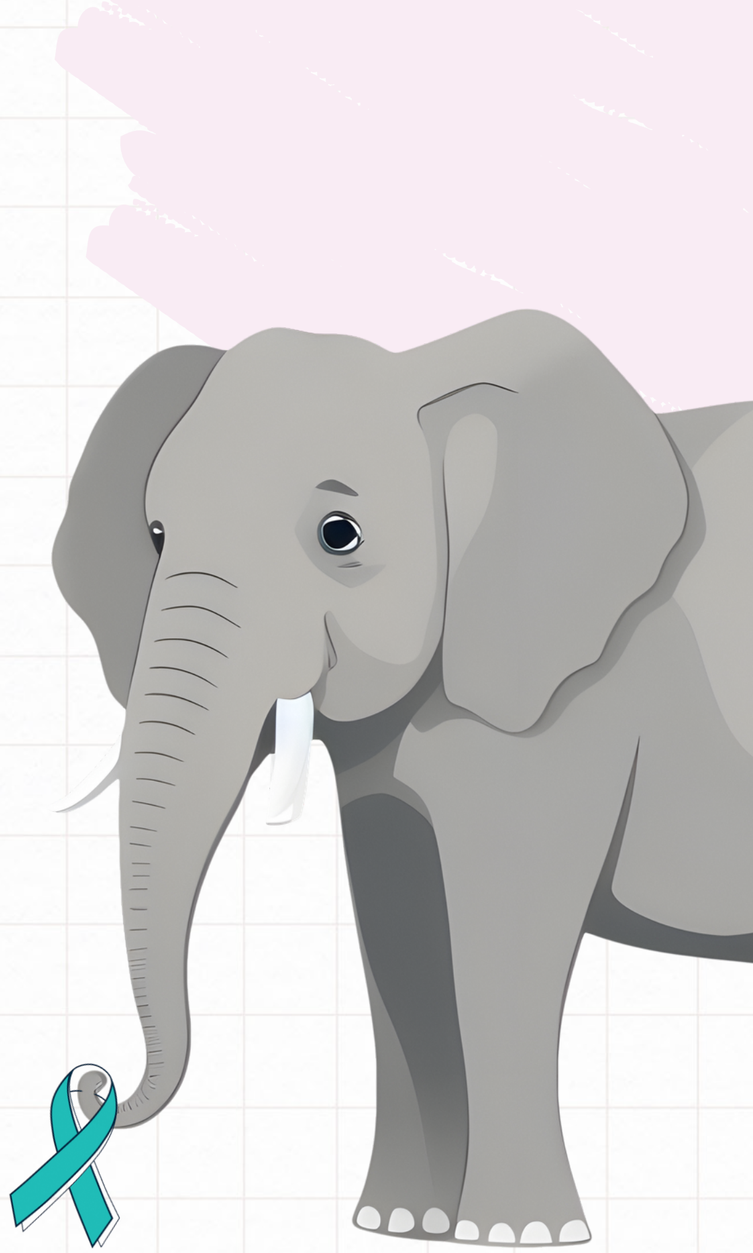
SHAPING YOUNG MINDS

Behavioural Science Tips to Nudge Youths Away from Drugs



MESSAGE

Dear DrugFreeSG Champions,

Thank you for your support in the fight against drug abuse. To help you in your important work of shaping young minds, we have specially created this resource.

Inside, you will learn more about the context and motivations of drug abuse in Singapore, as well as tips to strengthen your effectiveness in steering youths away from drugs. These tips are grounded in evidence-based insights into how people think and make decisions.

Together, we can nurture the next generation with the right values and character, informed by an understanding of behavioral science.

Brought to you by
The Inter-Ministry Committee on Drug Prevention for Youths
with the support of the Ministry of Home Affairs Behavioural Insights Unit

DRUGFREESG Champion

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CONTEXT AND MOTIVATIONS FOR DRUG ABUSE IN SINGAPORE

In 2022, the Institute of Mental Health conducted a nationwide Health and Lifestyle Survey to establish the prevalence of drug consumption and associated factors in the general population of Singapore among other addictive behaviours. The survey consisted of a representative sample of 6,509 Singapore residents aged 15 to 65 years.

PREVALENCE OF DRUG CONSUMPTION



0.7%

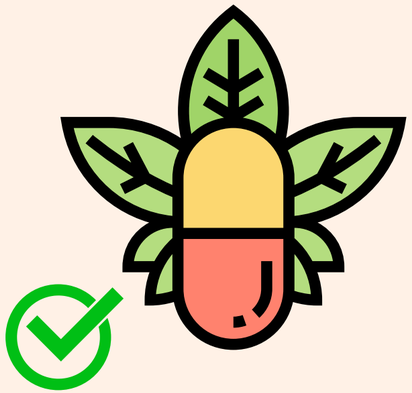
of respondents had consumed drugs at least once over a one-year period

≈

42,000

Singapore residents had consumed drugs at least once over a one-year period

PREVALENCE OF PERMISSIVE ATTITUDES



3.4%

of respondents did not view drugs as harmful

→

An even

HIGHER

number of Singapore residents could be at risk of drug abuse

AGE OF ONSET OF DRUG ABUSE

The average age of onset of drug consumption is

16 YEARS OLD



MOTIVATIONS FOR CONSUMING DRUGS



Curiosity



Believe it will help with their problems



Peer influence

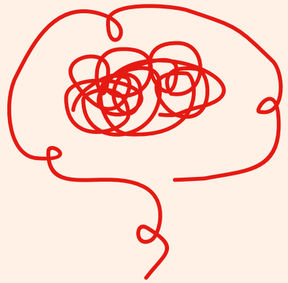
MOTIVATIONS FOR STAYING AWAY FROM DRUGS



Legal Consequences



Chances of Being Arrested

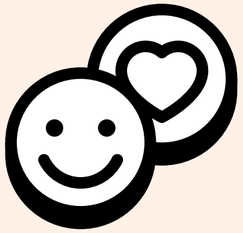


Awareness of Adverse Health Effects

FIRST DRUG CONSUMED



52% Cannabis



19% ‘Ecstasy’

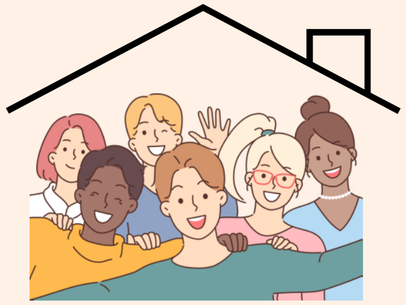


3% Heroin

LOCATION OF DRUG CONSUMPTION



30% Home



19% Friend’s Home



10% Overseas

BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE TIPS TO STEER YOUTHS AWAY FROM DRUGS

Focus: Youths during adolescence and the years leading up to it

Tip 1: Leverage Relevant Positive Identities to Counter Peer Influence

How this works: Tap on the positive traits and identities that define and matter to youths—whether it is being an athlete, a high achiever, a role model to younger siblings, or a responsible son or daughter—to discourage drug abuse.

Why this is important: By bringing these identities to the forefront through messaging, youths may be less likely to succumb to peer influence, as doing so would create cognitive dissonance with the identities they want to identify with (Berger, 2023)[1].



How to Apply This: This tip can be applied across a range of settings, including assembly sessions, classroom discussions, and parent-child conversations.

When facilitating these conversations, consider anchoring your message around the following key talking points:



- **Open with a recent news story** to make the issue feel real and relevant.
- **Poor decisions often start small** — driven by curiosity, the desire to fit in, or peer influence. Help youths recognise these early warning signs.



- **Encourage reflection before action.** Prompt them to ask: "Is this who I want to be?" and "Does this choice reflect the values I stand for?"
- **Frame difficult situations as learning opportunities**, not occasions for judgment. Every choice matters — their identity, values, and future are worth protecting.



- **It takes courage to say no.** True friends will never pressure them into making harmful decisions.

Tip 2: Harness the Generation Effect to Deepen Learning and Internalisation on Why Singapore Needs Tough Drug Laws

How this works: Instead of relying on passive learning, have youths research why Singapore needs tough laws on drugs, generate their own explanations, and share them with their peers through presentations, discussions and social media.

Why this is important: The Generation Effect is a psychological phenomenon whereby people are more likely to understand, remember and internalise ideas when they generate and express those ideas themselves, rather than only receiving information (Slamecka & Graf, 1978)[2]. This approach also helps youths develop a sense of ownership over the perspective, making it more impactful.



How to Apply this: Facilitate an activity where youths explore and articulate why drug abuse is harmful and why intervention is necessary. A useful framing is to present drug abuse as a negative externality — one whose harmful consequences extend beyond the individual to affect families, communities, and society.



Suggested Activity

- Divide participants into groups of 4–5
- Each group researches and presents on why drug abuse is a negative externality requiring government intervention, covering:
    - Social, economic, and health consequences on individuals, families, and society
    - The concept of negative externalities and how drug abuse fits within this framework
- After each presentation, other participants ask questions to deepen understanding



Note: This activity can be adapted to suit different settings — as a structured group activity, facilitated discussion, or informal conversation. Modify the format and scope as needed.

Tip 3: Highlight the Immediate Negative Effects of Drug Abuse

How this works: Highlight the short-term negative effects of drug abuse. For example, Cannabis can distort perception and impair the senses, ‘Ecstasy’ can cause a rapid heart rate and elevated blood pressure, and Heroin may lead to extreme fatigue and difficulty concentrating (refer to CNB’s PDE information package for more examples of such short-term effects)[3].

Why this is important: People often find it difficult to relate to long-term consequences, but they are more responsive to immediate outcomes (Howgego, 2014)[4]. By spotlighting the short-term harms of drug abuse, we can make the dangers feel more real and relatable—helping youths better understand the impact drugs can have on their present lives, not just their future.



How to Apply This: Beyond clinical effects, real-life cases reported in the news can powerfully illustrate the immediate and devastating consequences of drug abuse.



Consider drawing on the following examples when speaking to youths:

On drug-related effects and deaths: "2 young first-time drug users died after using Ice at home in 2025; police rule out foul play"[5], and "Youth, 15, felt like a zombie when fortnightly drug fix became a daily one"[6]



On drug-related traffic accidents: "Half of traffic accidents involving suspected drug or etomidate use from 2023 to 2025 were fatal"[7], and "Singaporean boy, 7, dies in Johor car accident; lorry driver tests positive for meth"[8]

On drug-related abuse and violent incidents: "Couple abused 4-year-old girl for more than a year, burned her body after she died"[9]



These cases bring the consequences of drug abuse close to home, making the message more visceral and harder to ignore for youths.



We hope these behavioural science tips will support you in shaping young minds.

The journey of preventive drug education begins with you and me!

We have done our part. Have you done yours?

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