

# A Parent's Guide to Substance Abuse and Addiction



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SAMPLE ONLY**

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## Introduction

My husband and I were confident that we were prepared for the day when our children came to us asking questions about alcohol and drugs. However, the first time that our 13 year old started pummeling us with questions, about 15 minutes into the conversation, we discovered how much we didn't know.

“Is pot addictive, Mom? And is it really that bad for you? I've heard that it's healthier for you than alcohol. Is it? And what causes meth mouth? Will you go to jail if you're caught with a small amount of pot? What if it's not yours and you just happen to be around it? If you get pulled over after smoking pot but you haven't had anything to drink, can you still get a DUI since they can't test your breath? What happens if you refuse to submit to a drunk driving test? How does addiction change your brain? What causes one person to become an addict but not another? If you get a DUI or drug conviction, does that mean that you can never get into college or get a good job? Is it true that cigarettes are more addictive than heroin?”

We didn't know the answers to any of these questions. My son's disappointment in our evasive answers and shrugging shoulders was clear. He already knew that he was not supposed to abuse alcohol or use drugs but he was curious and wanted facts and we were doing a lousy job of providing them.

I ran to the computer and diligently looked on the Internet for answers, only to discover just how scattered this seemingly basic information is. Nowhere did I find a single comprehensive source that simply provided basic and necessary facts about substance abuse and addiction. Instead, I found plenty of misinformation, overwhelmingly large books that focused on either alcohol or drugs but not both, lots of books on how to recover from addiction, and articles that came across as preachy while advocating complete abstinence. It became clear that in order to obtain the answers to my son's questions, a significant amount of time and research was in order. With as much difficulty as I was having searching for answers, I knew that other parents had to be experiencing the same frustration.

Because we believe that that it is essential for all parents and teens to have a solid education in this area, my husband and I decided to create our own comprehensive guide. Extensive research was conducted under my direction and the result is this book, full of basic information that all parents should know and share with their teens. Every teenager and parent that has read this book has expressed surprise about how much they learned and dismay at how misinformed they were. Arming your kids with knowledge about substance abuse and addiction will not only enable them to make better choices but will also open a vital pathway of communication between you and your kids as they navigate their teenage years and beyond.

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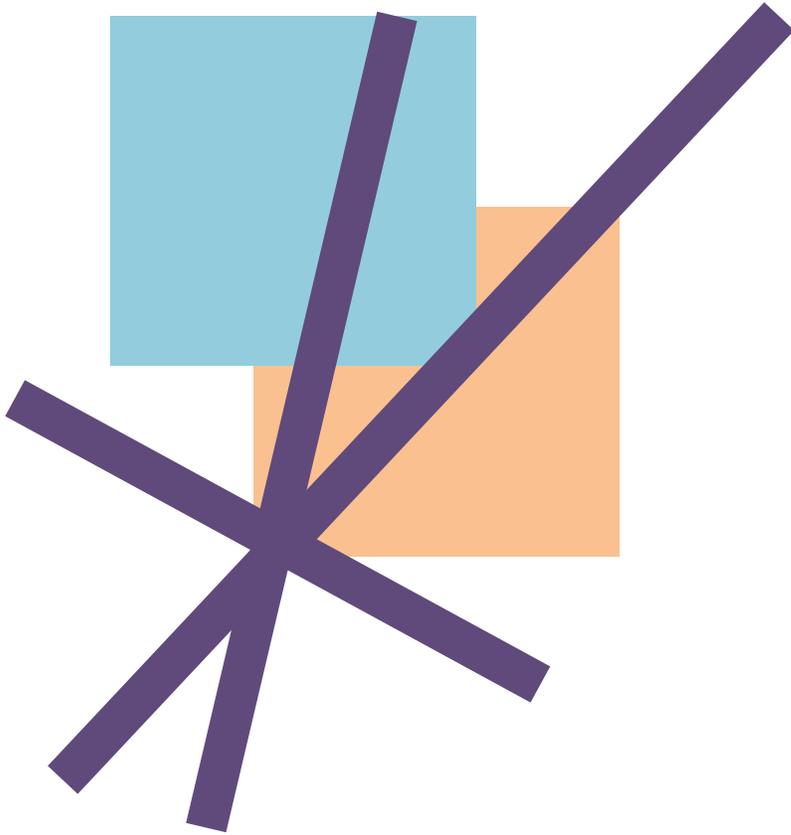
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**Part One**  
**Overview of**  
**Drugs of Abuse**  
**Sample Only**

# Alcohol

- Ethyl alcohol, or ethanol, is the intoxicating ingredient found in all types of alcohol.
- Alcohol is produced by the fermentation of yeast, sugars, and starches.
- A standard drink equals 0.6 ounces of pure ethanol or the equivalents below.

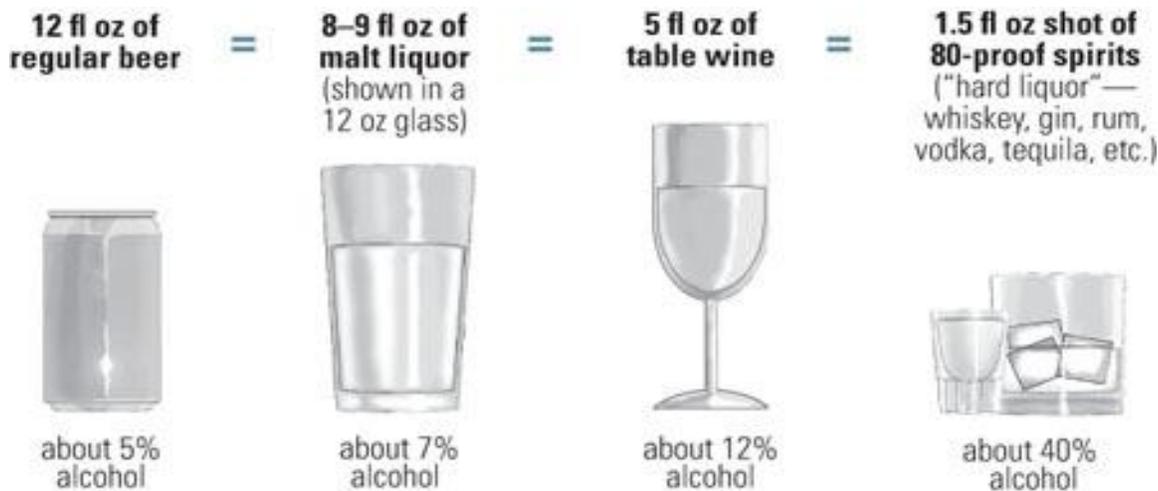


Figure by the  
NIAAA

## Effects

**Low doses:** Dilates blood vessels in skin, which creates skin flush and a decrease in body temperature; euphoria; mild stimulation; relaxation; lowered inhibitions

**Higher doses:** Drowsiness, slurred speech, nausea, emotional instability, loss of coordination, visual distortions, impaired memory, sexual dysfunction, depression, delusions, hallucinations, blackouts, loss of consciousness

## Health Risks

Stroke; seizures; brain hemorrhage; decreases in brain mass; deprives brain of oxygen; cognitive impairments; dementia (Korsakoff's syndrome); heart disease; heart infections; rapid heartbeat; heart arrhythmias; high blood pressure; heart failure; heart attack; lung infections and diseases; liver damage, failure, and disease; cancer of the tongue, mouth, throat, voice box, and liver; increased risk of injuries, violence, and motor vehicle accidents; fetal damage (in pregnant women); depression; addiction; overdose

## Overdose Effects

Nausea, vomiting, extreme sleepiness, unconsciousness, difficulty breathing, dangerously low blood sugar, seizures, death

# Marijuana (Cannabis)

- Marijuana is a mind-altering (psychoactive) drug, produced by the cannabis sativa plant.
- It contains over 400 chemicals.
- THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) is believed to be the main chemical ingredient that produces the psychoactive effect.
- It is the most commonly used illegal drug in the U.S.
- It is made up of dried parts of the cannabis sativa hemp plant.

## Street Names

Pot, Weed, Ganga, Grass, 420, Aunt Mary, BC Bud, Blunts, Boom, Chronic, Dope, Gangster, Ganja, Grass, Hash, Herb, Hydro, Indo, Joint, Kif, Mary Jane, Mota, Pot, Reefer, Sinsemilla, Skunk, Smoke, Weed, Yerba

## Appearance

Dry, shredded green/brown mix of flowers, stems, seeds, and leaves from the cannabis sativa plant;

Green, brown, or gray in color;

May resemble tobacco.



## How it's used/abused

Smoked, swallowed

## Effects

**Low doses:** Euphoria, relaxation, slowed reaction time, distorted sensory perception, impaired balance and coordination, difficulty in thinking and problem solving, increased heart rate, decreased blood pressure, impaired learning and memory, sedation, blood shot eyes, coughing from lung irritation, increased appetite, anxiety, panic attacks

**High doses:** Mental confusion, panic reactions, hallucinations

## Health Risks

Suppression of the immune system; cough; bronchitis; emphysema; bronchial asthma; cancers of the head, neck, lungs and respiratory track; mental health disorders such as depression, schizophrenia and other psychotic disorders; amotivational syndrome (apathy; impairment of judgment, memory and concentration; loss of motivation, ambition and interest in the pursuit of personal goals); addiction

# Hallucinogens

- Hallucinogens are found in plants and fungi or are synthetically produced.
- They are among the oldest known group of drugs used for their ability to alter human perception and mood.
- Examples include LSD (lysergic acid diethylamide), mescaline (better known as “peyote”), psilocybin (better known as “mushrooms”).

## Street Names

**LSD:** Acid, Blotter, Blotter Acid, Cubes, Doses, Fry, Mind Candy, Dots

**Mescaline:** Buttons, Cactus, Mesc, Peyote

**Psilocybin:** Magic Mushrooms, Shrooms, Purple Passion, Little Smoke

## Appearance

Hallucinogens come in a variety of forms. LSD may be sold in the form of impregnated paper (blotter acid), typically imprinted with colorful graphic designs.

Photos by the DEA



Blotter Acid (LSD)



LSD Capsules



Mushrooms (Psilocybin)



Peyote “Buttons” (Mescaline)

## How it’s used/abused

Swallowed, smoked

For blotter acid: absorbed in mouth

## **Effects**

Altered states of perception and feeling, hallucinations, inability to discern fantasy from reality, nausea, vomiting, muscle weakness, lack of coordination, elevated heart rate, increased blood pressure, dilated pupils

Also, for LSD and Mescaline: Increased body temperature, heart rate, and blood pressure; loss of appetite; sweating; sleeplessness; numbness; dizziness; weakness; tremors; impulsive behavior; rapid shifts in emotion

Also, for Psilocybin: Nervousness, paranoia, panic

## **Health Risks**

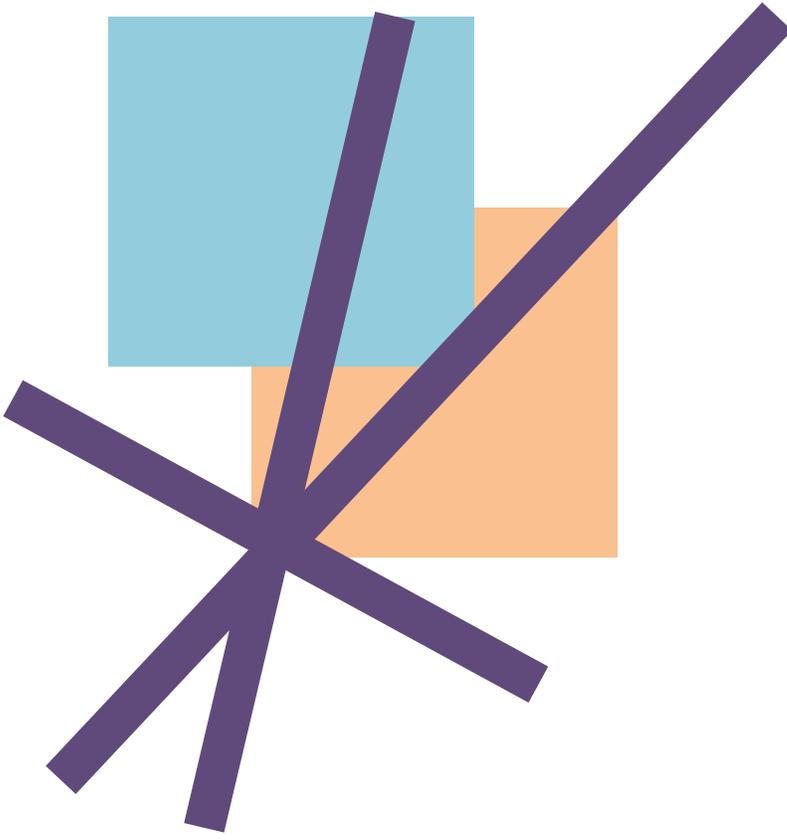
For LSD: Flashbacks, Hallucinogen Persisting Perception Disorder

## **Overdose Effects**

Longer, more intense "trip" episodes.

Deaths from overdose of LSD, magic mushrooms, and mescaline are extremely rare.

Deaths generally occur due to suicide, accidents, and dangerous behavior, or due to the person inadvertently eating poisonous plant material.



Part Two

Addiction

Sample Only



## ***Questions About Addiction***

Since the beginning of human existence, individuals like Heather have used drugs as a way to alter their mood, thought processes, and behavior – often with significant negative health effects. This part of the book will answer questions about addiction – what it is, what are its causes, and what are some of the psychological effects.

### ***What is addiction?***

It was once believed that addiction was an issue of willpower, that people could simply choose to be or not be addicted to a substance.<sup>4, 13, 16</sup> However, with the help of science, we now know that addiction, whether it is to nicotine, alcohol, or illegal substances, is a brain disease, not a moral fault.<sup>4, 13, 16</sup> In fact, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) defines addiction as “a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences.”<sup>13</sup> Addiction is considered a brain disease because drugs physically change the brain and

how it works.<sup>13</sup> These changes can sometimes be irreversible and can lead to harmful behaviors that are characteristic of drug abusers.<sup>13</sup>

## ***Why do people use drugs?***

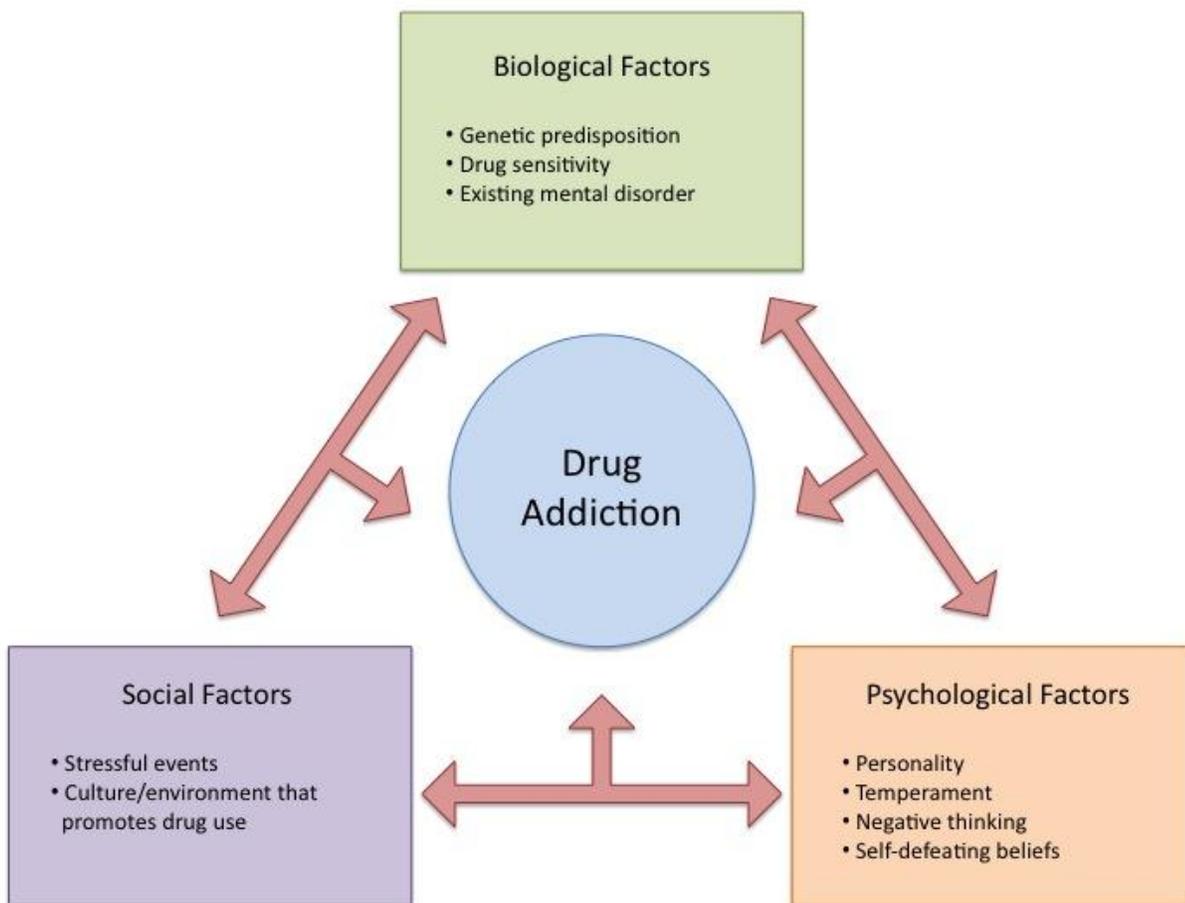
People use drugs for many different reasons. One reason is because drugs initially produce a “high” or pleasurable feeling.<sup>4, 13, 16</sup> Trying to replicate the high that is felt with first-time drug use is often the reason why many people use the drug again.<sup>4, 13, 16</sup> While first-time drug use is largely voluntary, a person’s ability to control their drug use can quickly vanish.<sup>13</sup> Drugs change the brain’s structure and how it works, so important areas of the brain that control judgment, decision-making, learning, memory, and behavior control can be impaired.<sup>13</sup> These changes are thought to cause the compulsive and destructive behaviors that are seen in drug addicts.<sup>13</sup>

Drugs can also be used to self-medicate.<sup>4, 13</sup> For example, if someone has social anxiety, they may drink alcohol at parties or other social gatherings in order to feel relaxed and reduce feelings of distress. In fact, stress can be a major factor in beginning or continuing to abuse drugs and can often lead to relapse in people who are recovering from addiction.<sup>4, 13, 16</sup> Also, people who feel pressure to improve their athletic or cognitive performance may turn to drugs, such as steroids or stimulants, in order to do so.<sup>4, 13</sup> Another common reason people use drugs is out of curiosity or “because others are doing it.”<sup>13</sup>

## ***What causes someone to become a drug addict?***

Biological, psychological, and social factors are all known to play a role in why someone becomes addicted to drugs.<sup>4, 12, 13, 16</sup> The combination and interaction of these factors increase one’s risk of becoming an addict (see Figure 1 below).<sup>4, 12, 13, 16</sup> Biological risk factors for substance abuse include things like genetics (e.g., having a biological relative who was an addict) or being less sensitive to a drug’s effect.<sup>4, 12, 13, 16</sup> According to

NIDA, "genetic factors account for between 40 and 60 percent of a person's vulnerability to addiction, including the effects of environment on gene expression and function."<sup>17</sup> Psychological factors like one's personality or temperament style (e.g., the tendency to be impulsive, attracted to excitement, or intolerant of frustration) can also play a role in the development of an addiction.<sup>4, 12, 13, 16</sup> Lastly, social factors can also greatly increase one's risk of becoming an addict. For example, stressful life events (e.g., a death in the family, losing a job, or failing a test) or living in an environment that promotes drug use (e.g., living in a neighborhood where drugs are easily accessible or living in a college dorm where binge drinking is commonplace) can all contribute to the development of an addiction.<sup>4, 12, 13, 16</sup>



**Figure 1. A biopsychosocial model of drug addiction.** The combination and interaction of biological, psychological, and social risk factors in the development of drug addiction.



Part  
Three

**Physiological  
Consequences  
Of Drug Use**  
**Sample Only**

## *Questions About Alcohol*

### *What is a hangover?*

Many people, dating back to even Biblical times, have experienced the alcohol hangover.<sup>71, 81</sup> It is known by its common and unpleasant physical symptoms, including headache, nausea, diarrhea, dizziness, dry mouth, sensitivity to light and sound, rapid heartbeat, trouble sleeping, shaking, and fatigue.<sup>71, 78, 81</sup> A hangover may also interfere with the performance of daily tasks and activities, which can increase the risk for injury.<sup>71</sup>

Hangover symptoms are known to follow heavy drinking, but exactly why these symptoms occur is not scientifically understood. Some researchers think a hangover is a type of mild withdrawal from alcohol, while others find that a hangover is quite different from withdrawal.<sup>71</sup> For example, hangovers can occur after drinking for a short period of time, whereas withdrawal typically occurs after drinking consistently, for a long period of time.<sup>71</sup> Research suggests that the direct effects of alcohol, such as dehydration, vasodilatation, electrolyte imbalances, gastrointestinal disturbances, low blood sugar, and sleep disturbances are possible causes of a hangover.<sup>71, 78</sup> For example, alcohol is a diuretic, meaning that it increases the body's urine output, and this can lead to dehydration.<sup>71</sup> In turn, dehydration causes dry mouth and dizziness, which are common hangover symptoms.<sup>71</sup> To provide another example, alcohol intoxication causes vasodilatation, the dilation of blood vessels, which is thought to be one cause of the hangover headache.<sup>71</sup> Other research suggests that some individuals may not be able to break down alcohol efficiently, therefore leaving a buildup of a toxic bi-product of alcohol, acetaldehyde, in the body.<sup>71</sup> This buildup creates symptoms similar to hangovers, which leads researchers to believe it may be one cause of hangovers.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, personality traits associated with alcoholism, negative life events, and feelings of guilt after drinking are related with more intense or greater amounts of hangovers.<sup>71</sup>

Why a hangover occurs is complex, but the best way to prevent a hangover is not complicated at all – don't drink. If you do plan on drinking, drink small, nonintoxicating amounts. This makes hangover symptoms less likely to occur.<sup>71</sup>

## ***Why does alcohol make you puke?***

Alcohol directly irritates the stomach and intestines, causing inflammation of the stomach lining and delayed stomach emptying that can cause stomach pains, nausea, and vomiting.<sup>24, 45, 71</sup> Alcohol may also make you vomit if there is buildup of acetaldehyde, a toxic bi-product of alcohol, in the body.<sup>71</sup> Vomiting after drinking alcohol can be dangerous because it can cause severe dehydration and electrolyte imbalances.<sup>24, 71</sup> Also, because alcohol is a depressant, it makes your gag reflex less sensitive.<sup>45</sup> This can increase your risk of choking on your vomit if you have passed out from drinking too much alcohol.<sup>45</sup> You can also asphyxiate, or suffocate, if you accidentally inhale your vomit while passed out.<sup>45</sup>

## ***Can passing out from drinking too much alcohol damage your brain?***

In short, yes, passing out from drinking too much alcohol can damage your brain. When you pass out or lose consciousness from drinking too much alcohol, it may be due to alcohol poisoning.<sup>24, 45</sup> Alcohol poisoning occurs when the body cannot metabolize alcohol fast enough and then becomes overwhelmed by the amount of alcohol in the system.<sup>24</sup> Alcohol poisoning is a result of binge drinking, or drinking large amounts of alcohol in a relatively short amount of time.<sup>24, 45</sup> Also, alcohol is considered a depressant because it slows down your central nervous system; so, when there is too much alcohol in your system, it slows down your breathing and decreases your heart rate.<sup>24, 27, 45</sup> This results in a lack of oxygen being delivered to

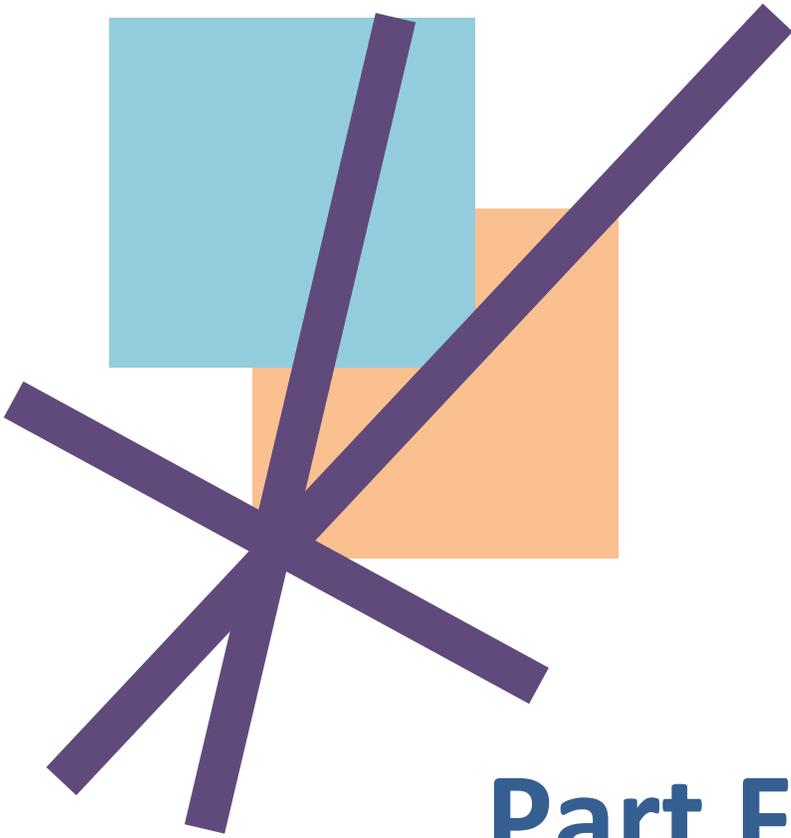
the brain, which may then lead to unconsciousness, coma and even death.<sup>24, 27, 45</sup> Binge drinking is especially dangerous because a lethal dose can be ingested before losing consciousness.<sup>45</sup>

When a person becomes unconscious due to alcohol poisoning, it can cause permanent brain damage.<sup>45</sup> Once unconscious, the brain is deprived of oxygen and brain cells begin to die in less than five minutes.<sup>44</sup> When the brain is deprived of oxygen for longer periods of time, coma, seizures, and even brain death can occur.<sup>44</sup> Brain death means that there is no brain activity, but the person's cardiovascular system is still functioning.<sup>44</sup> The only way they can stay alive is to be put on life support to help them breathe.<sup>44</sup> If the person does regain consciousness after passing out, they may suffer from significant psychological and neurological problems such as amnesia, changes in their personality, hallucinations, memory loss, and muscle spasms and twitches.<sup>44</sup> The longer that someone is unconscious, the more likely they are to suffer brain damage and the poorer their chance of recovery.<sup>44</sup>

Alcohol easily crosses the blood-brain barrier and affects how neurons communicate with one another by altering the level of neurotransmitter activity in the brain.<sup>24, 27</sup> The change in neurotransmitter activity is what creates the immediate affects of alcohol including impaired reasoning, judgment, coordination, vision, driving, reaction time, attention, self-control, and problem solving.<sup>24, 27</sup> These impairments increase with rising blood alcohol levels, but are not permanent and will resolve on their own after the drinker's blood alcohol level returns to zero.<sup>24, 27</sup> However, a high blood alcohol level can result in a blackout, where the intoxicated person cannot remember key details of events or even entire events, once they are sober.<sup>24, 27</sup>

Long-term use of alcohol can directly or indirectly cause cognitive impairments. Alcohol can directly destroy nerve cells, which can result in dementia, a degenerative disease that affects many important brain processes like memory and language.<sup>24, 27</sup>

Alcohol can also indirectly cause cognitive impairments, as it can interfere with the absorption of thiamin and lead to thiamin deficiency.<sup>24, 27</sup> This deficiency can produce Wernicke-Korsakoff's syndrome, a syndrome characterized by mental confusion, memory loss, loss of coordination, and rapid eye movement.<sup>24, 27</sup>



**Part Four**  
**Legal and Social**  
**Consequences Of**  
**Drug Use**  
**Sample Only**

## ***Questions About Drug Legalities***

### ***How would a drug conviction affect my life?***

Drug convictions are recorded for some offenses, and these records may exist forever.<sup>18</sup> In other words, you would then have a permanent criminal record. This can affect your life in many ways:

#### ***College Financial Aid***

A college student who is convicted of a drug offense will no longer be able to receive student financial aid (any grant, loan, or work assistance) for a specified period of time (a year to indefinite, depending on the offense) from their conviction.<sup>17, 18</sup>

#### ***Career***

Certain types of work can be closed to someone with a criminal record.<sup>18</sup> For example, some types of jobs require certifications or registrations with a professional association when your academic training is finished, and that association can refuse to accept a person with a criminal record.<sup>18</sup>

#### ***Employment***

Some employers will check applicants for a criminal record.<sup>18, 30</sup> A person may not be able to get a job in the armed or police services, in security or public services, or in business or industry if s/he has a conviction.<sup>18</sup> A person who is convicted of an offense while employed could be fired.<sup>18</sup> In a survey that asked employers to rate their willingness to hire ex-offenders, over 40 percent of employers said that they would “probably” or “definitely” not hire an applicant with a criminal record for a job

not requiring a college degree.<sup>30</sup> In fact, arrest and imprisonment are associated with 10 to 30 percent lower employment and earnings when compared to individuals with no criminal record.<sup>29</sup>

### ***Licenses***

Having a criminal record can prevent a person from getting many sorts of licenses; for example, licenses for driving a taxi, running a liquor store or owning a gun.<sup>18</sup>



A criminal record has far reaching consequences.

### ***Travel***

Photo by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

Many countries require that people traveling there get a visa.<sup>18</sup> These countries can refuse to give a person a visa if they have a criminal record.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Social Status***

Many individuals and groups of people discriminate against someone with a criminal record.<sup>18</sup> A criminal record can affect your standing in the community, the attitudes of your co-workers and neighbors and your relationships with your family and friends.<sup>18</sup>

### ***What if I am not using drugs, but I am around friends who are, can I get in trouble?***

Yes. Under a legal theory known as "constructive possession," being in close proximity to drugs can be enough, under certain circumstances, to justify an arrest and result in a conviction for everyone who was close enough to the drugs for

police and a jury to conclude that the drugs could have belonged to them.<sup>24</sup> This means that you may be arrested and convicted even if you're not using drugs and the drugs aren't yours.<sup>19</sup>

Constructive possession cases often occur as a result of traffic stops, during which drugs are located in a center console or other central location that could possibly be reached by more than one person in the car.<sup>24</sup> Arrests for constructive possession are also made when drugs are found in a residence or in a room within a residence, and more than one person is present who could arguably be the owner of the drugs.<sup>24</sup>



Just being around drugs or drug paraphernalia can lead to a drug conviction, even if they are not yours or you're not using them.<sup>19</sup>



Photos by the DEA

Also, depending on the laws in your area, even drug paraphernalia may be cause for arrest.<sup>19</sup> Drug paraphernalia includes things like crack pipes, rolling papers, scales, syringes, roach clips, bongs, and other materials used to manufacture or prepare drugs for personal use or distribution.<sup>5, 21</sup> According to federal law, possession of drug paraphernalia can be punishable by up to three years in jail and a fine.<sup>5</sup> Many states have also enacted their own laws prohibiting drug paraphernalia.<sup>21</sup>

## ***What is medical marijuana and is it legal to use in the U.S.?***

As of January 2012, 16 states (Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, Oregon, Rhode Island,

Vermont, and Washington) and the District of Columbia have enacted laws that remove criminal punishment for the medical use of marijuana, define eligibility for its use, and permit easier availability to the drug.<sup>34</sup> The state of Maryland also has a law that decreases criminal punishment for medical marijuana use for patients who suffer from particular medical conditions, but it does not provide any means of access to the drug.<sup>34</sup> It is expected that more states will adopt laws decriminalizing medical marijuana use; however, federal laws do not currently differentiate between medical and recreational marijuana use.<sup>2</sup> In fact, the federal government classifies marijuana as a Schedule I drug, which means that it is highly addictive and has no valuable medical use.<sup>2, 20</sup> Therefore, according to federal law, it is illegal to possess, manufacture, distribute, consume, or use marijuana, even for medicinal purposes.<sup>2</sup>

With that said, a legal pharmaceutical product, Marinol, whose active ingredient is synthetic THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol), which is the primary psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, has been available through prescription since the 1980's.<sup>15, 20, 23, 33</sup> It has been found to relieve the nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy for cancer patients and to stimulate appetite in AIDS patients.<sup>15, 20, 23, 33</sup> The federal government lists Marinol as a Schedule III substance because it has less potential for abuse than the drugs or substances in Schedules I and II, it has a currently accepted medical use in the U.S., and abuse of the drug may lead to moderate or low physical dependence or psychological dependence.<sup>20</sup>



The prescription drug Marinol, which contains THC, the main psychoactive ingredient in marijuana, is the only legal form of medical marijuana in the U.S.<sup>15, 20, 23, 33</sup>

The Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) strongly discounts the notion that **smoked** marijuana is or can become "medicine."<sup>23</sup> The DEA does, however, support researching the effects of smoked marijuana as medicine.<sup>15, 23</sup> At present, the DEA

stands firm on their position, stating, "The clear weight of the evidence is that smoked marijuana is harmful. No matter what medical condition has been studied, other drugs already approved by the FDA have been proven to be safer than smoked marijuana."<sup>23</sup>