## JUST THE FACTS: BASIC FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL AND DRUGS

Alcohol and drug use are common behaviors that many people engage in.

People who have had a recent psychosis are very sensitive to the effects of substances: even small amounts of alcohol or drug use can trigger symptoms or interfere with functioning. This module focuses on talking about substance use and psychosis. If substance use has been an issue for the relative in NAVIGATE, we want you to know that many people with psychosis and substance use problems have been able to reduce and stop using substances, taking control over their lives and their recovery.

Question:

* + Do family members think the relative in NAVIGATE has been using alcohol or drugs in the past couple of months? What makes you think so? How about before his/her psychotic episode?

**Information about Commonly Used Substances**

Using alcohol and drugs is a common human behavior that dates back for thousands of years. For example, drinking a beer, a glass of wine, or a mixed drink is common in modern society. Similarly, using drugs such as marijuana, cocaine or speed, or ecstasy to get high, and feel energetic or relaxed is also common. These types of substances can make people feel good, but they can also cause problems for people who have experienced psychosis. This handout covers commonly used substances and their effects. It also explores reasons for using substances.

Commonly Used Substances and Their Effects

It is helpful to understand what people commonly experience when they use alcohol and drugs. The following table lists examples of both the positive and negative effects of alcohol and drugs.

### Commonly Used Substances and Their Effects

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Substance Type** | **Examples** | **Positive Effects** | **Negative Effects** |
| Alcohol | Beer, wine, gin, whiskey vodka, tequila | -Relaxation  -Lighter mood | -Slower reaction time, feeling tired  -Socially embarrassing behavior |
| Cannabis | Marijuana, hash, THC | -Relaxation  -“High” feeling | -Reduced reaction time and coordination  -Feeling unmotivated  -Feeling tired  -Paranoia  -Increased anxiety or feeling panicky |
| Stimulants | Cocaine (powder/or crac amphetamines (crystal meth., Dexedrine, Ritali Adderall, ephedrine | - Feeling alert, n energetic  -Euphoria | -Increased anxiety  -Paranoia and psychosis  -Sleeplessness  -Feeling jittery |
| Hallucinogens | Ecstasy, LSD, peyote, mescaline | -Increased sensory experiences  -Feeling of well-being | -Bad “trips”  -Psychotic symptoms |
| Opiates | Heroin, morphine, vicodin, Demerol, opium, Oxycontin | -Positive feeling o well-being  -Relaxation  -Reduced pain sensitivity | -Drowsiness  **-**Highly addictive  -Risk of overdose |

**Other Commonly Used Substances and Their Effects**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Substance Type** | **Examples** | **Positive Effects** | **Negative Effects** |
| Inhalants | Glue, aerosols, paint | -“High” feeling | -Severe disorientation  -Toxic/brain damage |
| Over-the-counter medications | Cough syrup, antihistamines and related compounds (such as Benadryl and other cold tablets) | -“High” feeling,  -Sedation | -Drowsiness |
| Caffeine | Coffee, energy drinks, some teas, some sodas | -Feeling alert | -Feeling jittery  -Interference with sleep |
| Nicotine | Smoking, chewing tobacco | -Feeling alert  -Feels good | -Health problems, such as emphysema, lung/throat/ mouth cancer |
| Benzodiazepines  (Anti-anxiety medication) | Valium, Xanax, Klonopin, Ativan | -Reduced anxiety  -Relaxation | -“Rebound anxiety” when medication wears off  -Loss of inhibition and coordination  -Dulled senses |

Questions:

* + Which of the substances has the relative in NAVIGATE ever tried? Anything he/she has tried (such as over the counter medicines or herbal preparations) that is not on the list?
  + What effects (either positive or negative) have family members noticed in their relative in NAVIGATE experiencing from each of the substances he/she has tried?

**Why do People Use Alcohol and Drugs?**

There are many reasons people use substances. Some of the most common reasons are described below.

Common Reasons for Using

To socialize

Using substances with other people can make you “one of the crowd.” It can make it easier to meet people, to feel comfortable around people, or just give you something to do with friends to have fun or hang out. Using with friends can also be a way of re- connecting with people you haven’t been in touch with for a while. People often use substances together at parties, celebrations, or holidays.

To have fun

Alcohol or drugs can make people feel good, and fight boredom in their lives. Some

substances may make people feel high, relaxed and mellow. Others can cause people to feel alert, energetic, and full of life.

To improve mood

People may use substances to counteract the effects of feeling bad. Alcohol and drugs can provide temporary relief from feeling depressed, anxious, or angry, although it can also contribute to negative feelings. For example, it is common for people to feel bad about themselves for being unproductive if they are spending a lot of time hung over.

To cope with symptoms

Some people use alcohol and drugs is to cope with symptoms. Alcohol and drugs may provide temporary relief from hearing voices or having other hallucinations. Using substances can reduce paranoid thinking, or being concerned that other people are looking at you, talking about you, or know what you are thinking. Some substances can increase concentration, which can help when one’s attention easily wanders. Using substances to cope with symptoms can provide some temporary relief, but it can also worsen the problem in the long-run.

To help with sleep

Alcohol and drugs can make it easier to get to sleep. However, the sleep is often less restful and you may feel groggy in the morning.

To avoid other problems

People may also use substances as a way of distracting themselves from their problems. For example, people may use alcohol or drugs to distract themselves from problems with work or school, when they are having conflicts with others, because they are lonely, or because they are unhappy with themselves.

For these individuals, substance use may provide a temporary escape from a variety of life problems.

It becomes part of a daily routine

Some people use substances because it becomes part of their daily routine, and gives them something to look forward to. Everybody needs to have things they care about and look forward to doing, and for some people this includes using alcohol or drugs.

For these individuals, using alcohol or drugs is more than just a habit; it is part of their lifestyle and an important part of how they live each day.

Chasing the “good old days”

People who have had a psychotic episode sometimes resume using alcohol or drugs, often with their friends, after their symptoms are under control because they want to experience the same pleasure and enjoyment they previously had from using substances. This may work some of the time, but people often find that they are more sensitive to the effects of substances after their episode, and that the effects aren’t as enjoyable as before.

Questions:

* + Has the relative in NAVIGATE used substances for any of the reasons described above?

Home Practice Option

Between sessions, most people in our program find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here is a home practice option for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

**1.** Family members can consider asking the relative in NAVIGATE what he/she sees as the pros and cons of substance use at this point in his/her life. Keep calm during the conversation. Really try to see the world through your relative’ eyes—you do not need to change his/her mind at this time.

**Substance Use and Psychosis**

Using alcohol and drugs is common. However, substance use can also cause problems. People who have recently experienced a psychosis are especially sensitive to the effects of substances.

Revisiting the Stress-Vulnerability Model

Alcohol and drugs can trigger symptoms and relapses of psychosis. The stress- vulnerability model of psychosis helps explain why using even small amounts of substances can make symptoms worse, and lead to relapses and hospitalizations.

The figure below summarizes the stress-vulnerability model, which is also explained here.

### Stress-Vulnerability Model

***Biological vulnerability***

***Symptoms***

***Stress***

The symptoms of psychosis are caused by biological factors (or vulnerabilities).

* + These biological factors and symptoms can be made worse by:
    - Alcohol and drugs
    - Stress
  + These biological factors and symptoms can be improved by:
    - Taking medications
    - Learning effective strategies for coping with stress and symptoms
    - Good social support
    - Engaging in meaningful activities, such as work or school
    - Avoiding alcohol and drug use
  + Alcohol and drugs can directly affect the biological factors in the brain (brain chemicals or neurotransmitters) that cause psychosis, worsening symptoms.
  + Substance use can interfere with the protective effects of medication on reducing symptoms and causing relapses, leading to worse symptoms and more relapses.
  + Other effects leading to worsening of stress through negative consequences of using substances and/or effects on disrupting protective factors (e.g., loss of social support because of arguments about use, interference with a structured daily activity--missing work or school, etc.).

Psychosis makes people very sensitive to alcohol and drug effects. It is not necessarily that a person is drinking or using more—they may not be—but even a little bit may make him/her anxious or suspicious or make voices get worse. Even one beer can cause some people with first episode psychosis to have a problem, even if it never did in the past.

Question:

* + Has the relative in NAVIGATE appeared to have any change in sensitivity to alcohol or drugs since he/she experienced a psychotic episode? Like getting more suspicious after just one beer?

**Other Problems Related to Alcohol and Drug Use**

In addition to increasing symptoms and causing relapses, drug and alcohol use can lead to other problems.

Interference with work or school

Using substances can get in the way of work or going to school. People may have difficulty focusing at work or school, and doing the best they are capable of. Or they may be late or miss work or school, because they were up late the night before or they just don’t care as much.

Social problems

Substance use often causes conflicts with other people, either family members or friends. Relatives may be concerned about a loved one’s use of alcohol or drugs, and this can lead to arguments and tension in the family. Substances can make people less predictable and harder to get along with. For example:

* + Acting more irritable or moody than usual.
  + Not coming home when expected.
  + Not following through on responsibilities to others, such as chores, cooking, or cleaning.
  + Not being as involved in friends’ lives, such as not returning calls, not keeping up with communication, or canceling plans.

Questions:

* + Have family members told the relative in NAVIGATE they were concerned about his/her substance use?
  + Has substance use ever led to arguments or conflicts in with your family?
  + Substances can also cause problems related to the people with whom one uses. For example: Being impulsive when using, and doing things that are

embarrassing or get one in trouble, such as causing a disturbance, getting into fights, or having sex with someone the person doesn’t know well.

* + Being taken advantage of by other people, either sexually or financially. People may act like they are friends, but only because someone has something they want, such as money or the use of an apartment.

Daily living problems

People may not take care of themselves when they are using substances. They may

not shower, brush their teeth, or keep up their appearance like they ordinarily would. Or they may not eat well, or take care of their room, apartment, or house.

Legal problems

Using substances can cause legal problems. For example, driving under the influence

of alcohol or drugs is against the law and can result in severe penalties. People may be arrested for acting in an aggressive or disorderly way, or for possessing illegal drugs.

Safety problems

People may use substances in unsafe situations, such as driving under the influence,

going to dangerous neighborhoods in order to buy drugs, or hanging out with people who may take advantage of them or harm them. Using substances can also make it easier to get into accidents, such as car accidents or tripping and falling down.

Problems achieving goals

Using alcohol or drugs can get in the way of people achieving their personal goals. It may be difficult to sort out whether psychosis or substance use has interfered with a person achieving his or her goals, because the two problems can interact with each other.

Health problems

Substances can cause a variety of health problems, both short- and long-term. Short- term health problems include weight gain or loss, digestive problems, appetite disturbance, and sleep problems.

Long-term alcohol use can produce many problems, including liver problems such as cirrhosis. Substances such as cocaine, heroin, and amphetamines can cause blood borne infectious diseases such as hepatitis C and the HIV virus if snorting straws or needles are shared between different people. These are blood-borne diseases that can be spread through exposure to an infected person’s blood, such as by sharing needles (injecting) or straws (snorting) for using these drugs.

People may also neglect to take care of chronic health conditions such as diabetes or to keep up with health protective behaviors like exercise because they are doing drugs.

Psychological dependence

Frequent use alcohol or drugs can lead to psychological dependence, such as:

* + Spending a lot of time using substances
  + Giving up important activities in order to use
  + Using more than intended
  + Trying unsuccessfully to stop

Physical dependence

Frequent use of substances can also lead to developing tolerance, so that the person

needs to take larger amounts to get the same effect they used to get. Another sign of physical dependence is experiencing withdrawal symptoms if they stop using, such as feeling shaky or nauseous.

Question:

* + Has the relative in NAVIGATE developed any of these problems mentioned above because of substance use?

**Tips to Help with a Relative’s Sub stance Use**

Substance use is common in persons with a psychotic episode and it make take some time for the person using the substances to recognize there is a problem. There are things family members can do to help the situation. Here are some tips:

* + Continue to use good communication skills about being concerned or worried; prompting and nagging about substance use tends to make it worse.

For example, you can say *“I worry you will relapse when you drink more than a beer. Is there anything I can do to help”* instead of *“You have to quit drinking. Don’t you remember what the prescriber said?”*

* + Provide praise for positive changes (e.g. avoiding substance using friends, even going a few days without using) no matter how small.
  + Do not contribute any money that your relative in NAVIGATE may be using for substances.
  + Set a good example yourself—do not use substances to excess.
  + Give a clear firm consistent message about why you are concerned about what your relative in NAVIGATE is doing that might interfere with his/.her recovery.

Home Practice Option

Between sessions, most people in our program find it helpful to try putting some knowledge or skill into practice at home, so they can see how it works in their own situation. Here is a home practice option for this handout that you can review now or at the end of the session.

**1.** Decide which of the tips outlined above family members are going to use over the next week and try them.

**Summary Points for Just the Facts -Basic Facts about Alcohol and Drugs**

* + *Many people with a first episode of psychosis use substances.*
  + *Common reasons for using substances in psychosis include to socialize, have fun, cope with symptoms, and manage boredom.*
  + *People with psychosis are especially sensitive to substance use effects, so just a little bit can make the situation worse.*
  + *Relatives can help their loved ones with a first episode of psychosis begin to reduce or eliminate use.*
  + *Reducing or eliminating substance use can take a long time in first episode psychosis, but it is possible.*