Richard Boxer – Parents’ Seminar on Drugs and Alcohol - 27 June 2017

- Pupils overestimate what they know and parents probably underestimate.
- Incidents are rare
- Every school faces drug issues
- Most young people don't smoke, take drugs.
- Alcohol drinkers are falling in number (though binge drinking increasing)
- Fewer young people smoke nowadays
- Cannabis is the most commonly used drug by 16-24 year olds, ecstasy 2nd, powder cocaine 3rd
- Use of Mephedrone, Ketamine, LSD and steroids has fallen
- School policy very sensible
- What is a drug? "Substance which changes way you feel, think, behave". So include medication, alcohol, caffeine, chocolate...
- What sort of a role model are we as parents?
- Young people need skills and info to make a good decision.
- Drug use versus misuse.
- Influences - TV progs centre around a pub, celebrate in a pub, chat about problems over a drink, rare to see non-drinkers in soaps, sports sponsorship (used to be alcohol or tobacco but now caffeine drinks etc), The Wire, Breaking Bad, Weeds, The Hangover, media coverage of celebrities and drugs, advertising for cheap alcohol in supermarkets.
- Energy drinks named after PlayStation games (e.g. Resident Evil). Games industry keen to keep people playing longer so they want a new game sooner. Note game health warnings say "take 15 minutes out of each hour to stop playing..." unlikely to be observed.
- Asked pupils to imagine/draw a picture of a drug user. All were negative images, homeless, scruffy, down and out, piercings etc.
- Most teenage fatalities linked to solvents, 2 teenagers a fortnight. Not widely reported, not glamorous!
- Drug Education is development of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Best hope is to minimise harm, perhaps will not take in first place.

- Some teenagers will have tried some drug once. Most not a big deal, anti-climax, slight affect, may be a bit negative eg feel sick, most don't bother again. A few enjoy it and think good, low level, fun, not detrimental, biggest risk is legality (downgrading of cannabis confused everyone and some drug taking at festivals seems to be ignored). Tiny minority dependent.
- Three types of drug taker : Experimental (around a third of 16 year olds), Recreational, Dependent (majority also have something horrible happening or has happened, used to cope with the day).
- Pupils do not really think about health risks (eg mental illness from cannabis) as seem far in future
- Drug conviction IS possible for possession of cannabis and could affect job prospects (medic etc). Pupils DO know this but do they care about later life? They tend to listen more to threat of not being allowed to travel to many countries.

- Drug problem really a misnomer. Other problems underlying usually, such as abuse or bullying, and drug becomes a crutch.
• Alcohol. Parents probably have a collection of unusual drinks around the house, just because you have tried it once, doesn't mean you will ever drink it twice, let alone become a regular user.
• Disposable income has affected ability to buy. Cheap alcohol tempting so can get some and still go to cinema for example.
• Advertising aimed at young people

• New on the scene... Psychoactive substances or "Legal Highs" which are NOT LEGAL now and now called New Psychoactive Substances (NPS) Aimed to get people high, sold under false advertising eg Miaow Miaow (Khat, Mephedrone). Marketed as bath salts, plant food etc. does say "NOT for human consumption". Over 500 recorded in Europe. Nobody has any idea what it does to you in the long run. Nasal membranes eroded by sniffing, nose bleeds, heart attacks, affecting urinary system. Need far less than of cannabis. 3g about £15. Cannabis 1.5 to 2g approx £15-20.
• Nitrous Oxide (laughing gas) in small canisters, snap top off. Not good for lungs especially when cannot control amount taken.
• Amyl Nitrate (Poppers) marketed as room odourisers.
• NPS became popular, thought legal, other drugs dropping in purity etc.
• Use to be bought from Head Shops advertising eg Incense products, but now mostly online.
• Cocaine is now usually about only 23% cocaine, bulked up with caffeine for example. May be paracetamol, baby milk powder, dog worming tablet etc. In dealers interests to be safe and keep customer coming back.
• Most tags occur when drugs are mixed, especially dangerous with alcohol.
• Internet safety. Age restrictions not stopping access on the whole.
• Surface web, deep web and dark web.
• "No prescription websites" selling things, might not be what think it is, eg Viagra, cannabis seeds (not illegal to buy or eat, but illegal to plant)
• "The Silk Road" website on the Dark Web, now on third version as first two shut down. Can buy many illegal things including drugs.
• Bongs, hookahs for shisha readily available in towns.
• New product which says it is a legal version of cannabis. Banning takes a while. UK may follow Australia by new category D for all new and untested drugs. These new drugs are synthetic not natural products.
• E-cigarettes. No idea what it will do to health long term. Some ending up smoking more! New nicotine free vapour cigarettes.
• Lots of stimulant plant extracts in energy drinks.

• Overview for students. Alcohol the most available. There is a lot of pressure on teenagers these days to conform.

Advice to parents:
• More approachable the better, investigate together. Talk about facts, reasons not to drink and ways to avoid drinking in difficult situations.
• Keep tabs on activities, contact friends' parents and agree common policies
• Have your own family rules - teenagers feel valued by boundaries
• Set a good example with your use of alcohol and even language like "I need a drink"
• Encourage healthy lifestyle
• Physical signs: rash around nose, mouth might be solvents. Sudden weight loss may be stimulants, weight gain might be cannabis. Enlarged pupils could be ecstasy or MDMA. Alongside paraphernalia found, more secretive, money missing, change group of friends,
work suffers then worth investigating. Ripped up bits of packet and ripped up cigarettes more like you to be rolling cannabis in.

- Risk is important and teenagers do take risks. Recognising difference between positive and negative risk important. Positive - desired outcome is beneficial to the wellbeing of the risk taker and or others and failure could be turned to advantage. Negative - undesired outcome is detrimental to wellbeing and effect of success is transient or illusory Psychological vs Physical addiction.

- Seek out knowledge

- Promote activities that capitalise on their strengths of the developing brain. Assist with challenges that require planning.

- Encourage them seeking advice from you and other adults. Educate about risk taking and negative consequences

- Never underestimate alcohol and drug effects on developing brain

- Tolerate mistakes and behaviours common to teens who will make mistakes, try not to overreact, discuss why and possible outcomes. Let them know you still love them.

- Not helpful to search rooms.

- Scare tactics, preaching, moralising, judgemental, one off speech, using drugs yourself do not work.

- Harsh rules/no rules do not work.

- Talk regularly, ask opinions, make it clear you understand.

- Get involved in their lives, attend events, praise.

- Point out examples of irresponsible behaviour in others including on TV.

- If rules are broken enforce consequences

- Demonstrate ways to solve problems, have fun, manage stress without alcohol.

- Help children feel comfortable in social situations.

- Be a positive role model.

- Listen.

Good website for parents and children: “Talk to Frank”
National Health Drugs Helpline, frank@talktofrank.com, www.talktofrank.com
0800 776600. Or text 82111