



Protect

Worried a young person may develop
a problem with **drugs or alcohol?**

What we know about young people who can no longer live at home, is that they have often had experiences that can affect their development.

Young people may struggle with managing their emotions, have problems connecting with other people, find it hard to trust adults or feel anxious or unsafe. It is these things that can make them vulnerable to using drugs or alcohol to try and cope as they get older.

Knowing this offers an opportunity.

So when we know a young person is vulnerable to drug or alcohol use, are there things that can be done to reduce the chance of this? There sure is!

Reduce Risk and Build Protection

Whilst there is no single cause of problematic drug or alcohol use, there are factors that make young people more vulnerable or can act protectively. These risk and protective factors exist within the young person, their peer groups, at school, within the family, and even amongst the broader community.

When risk factors outweigh protective factors a young person is more vulnerable to developing drug and alcohol problems.

RISK FACTORS

- Absence of family supports
- Homelessness
- Family violence
- Experiences of abuse or neglect
- School exclusion
- Growing up around drug and alcohol use



PROTECTIVE FACTORS

- Positive peer networks
- Safe and secure housing
- Strong, supportive relationships
- Meaningful engagement at school or work
- Sense of belonging
- Strategies to regulate mood



Do 'Scare Tactics' Work?

It is understandable that many carers highlight worst case scenarios, focus on the negative consequences of use or even exaggerate the dangers of drug and alcohol use in the hope of scaring young people off either trying or continuing to use substances.

These typical messages are: "Don't do Drugs!", "Drugs Ruin Lives" and "Drugs will Kill You!"

What we know is that this doesn't really work!

Simply highlighting a primary message that 'drugs are bad' and only talking about the bad things:

- Can leave young people who do try drugs or alcohol unprepared to keep themselves safe
- Can mean adults risk losing credibility with the young person who knows someone who has used and had no apparent adverse effect
- Can glamorise substance use for young people who haven't yet tried, and are naturally interested in risk taking
- Discourages informed decision making, a key skill in adulthood
- Can hinder honest conversations about their substance use

Instead, discussions about drugs and alcohol should be based on accurate and balanced information.

This means conversations that include the "desired effect" or why someone may like or enjoy using drugs.

Despite the fears of many, this approach doesn't encourage drug use but helps promote open communication and an environment where a young person can seek help and support if they need it.

Build Resilience

One of the great ways to reduce the risk of drug problems developing is to help the young person build resilience. With resilience, a young person can cope with problems in their life without turning to substances.

So what builds resilience?

The number one thing that builds resilience in a young person is an engaged and supportive caregiver. That you are reading this information shows that the young person in your care already has that in place!

WHAT A YOUNG PERSON NEEDS:	WHAT WE CAN DO FOR THEM:
Feeling SAFE and being able to protect myself or be protected from harm	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Provide accurate information about drugs & alcohol• Role-model and promote 'help seeking' behaviours• Know where to get support for them (and yourself)
Having STABILITY in my life and being able to meet my basic needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be reliable and consistent to help them feel safe• Create a supportive household environment• Provide the resources they need to thrive
Having CONTROL over my own health and behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support young people to build strategies and skills to manage issues that may lead to substance use• Help them navigate anxiety, sadness or anger• Set a good example around your own substance use• Teach problem solving techniques
PARTICIPATING in activities that I enjoy, are meaningful and allow me to have new experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support a young person to explore their interests• Support meaningful activities and hobbies• Offer ways to take healthy risks
Feeling CONNECTED to and having helpful relationships with supportive people, my culture and the community	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Encourage and facilitate supportive relationships• Ask questions and learn about the young person• Keep communication lines open and honest• Create connections to community and culture
Having a clear sense of myself, my IDENTITY and where I fit in the world	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on strengths and praise good behaviour so they can see a different version of them self• Help the young person explore their values• Facilitate opportunities to broaden their horizons

Don't neglect yourself. You are important too!

Caring for a young person can be extremely rewarding, but also challenging at times. In order to provide the safe and healthy conditions for young people to thrive, you need to be healthy and supported too!

- Surround yourself with supportive people
- Consider seeing a counsellor
- Role-model help-seeking to your young person
- Talk to people who understand, such as other carers
- Take time out for yourself

Taking care of yourself strengthens you for the journey ahead.





Identify quickly and respond effectively

The OoHC Toolbox provides effective and easily accessible information for the supporters and carers of young people (12 - 18) in Out of Home Care.

Use the sections to identify quickly and respond effectively to issues and concerns commonly experienced by young people in OoHC.

OoHCtoolbox.org.au



A ysas.org.au initiative.

For advice call 1800 458 685

Or visit www.yodaa.org.au

