



Understand

Wondering why a young person
is using **drugs or alcohol?**

Why do young people use drugs?

WHAT THEY ARE SAYING:

"I was just bored"

*"You can get away from
all your troubles"*

"Because it makes me feel good"

"It's exciting because it's dangerous"

"Because my friends do it"

"No reason"

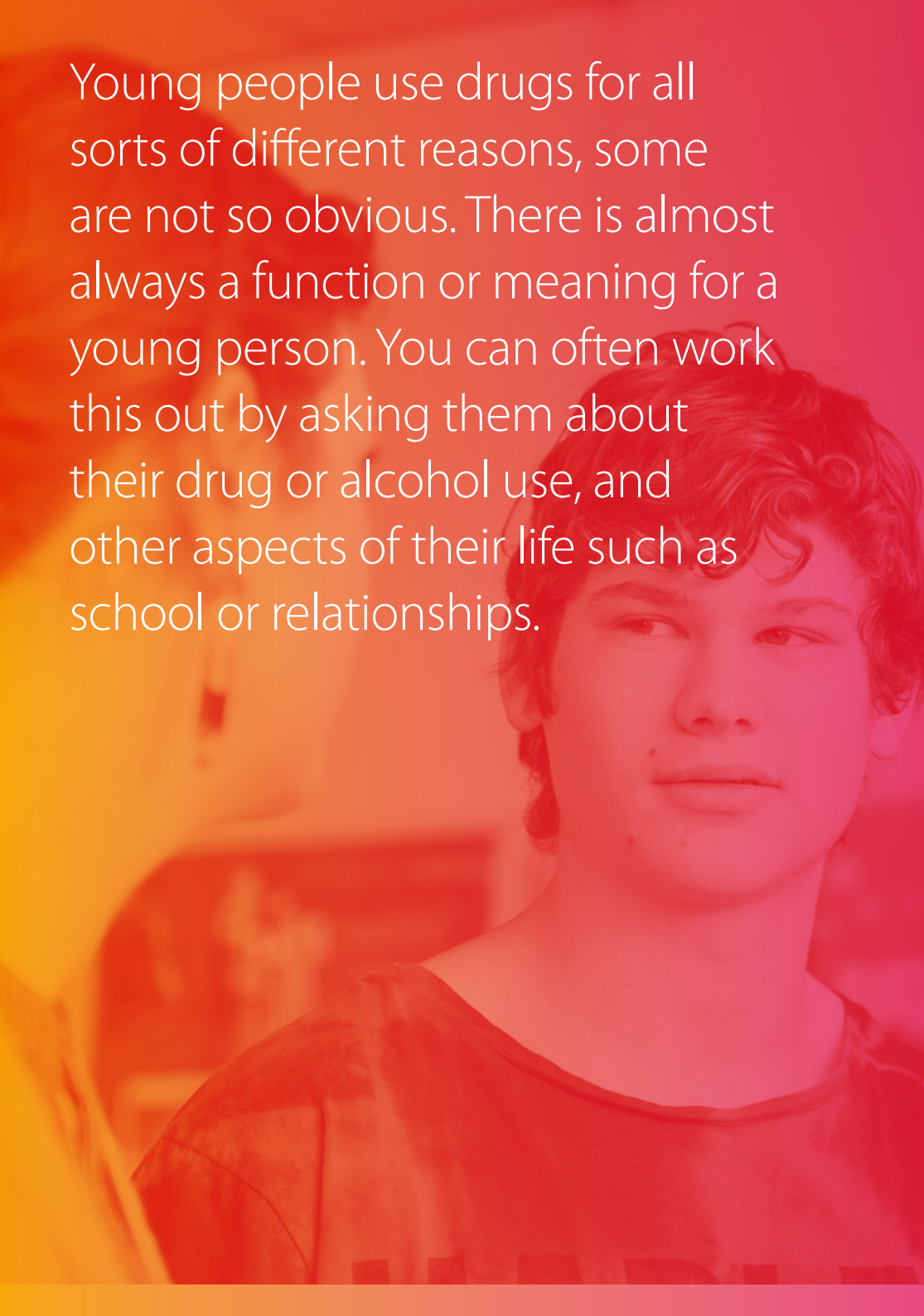
"Because my life sucks"

WHAT RESEARCH HAS FOUND:

- Feel pleasure or take risks
- Be part of a group and feel connected
- Feel more confident or overcome shyness
- Find relief from physical or emotional pain
- Cope with symptoms of poor mental health or trauma such as anxiety, depression, or insomnia



Young people use drugs for all sorts of different reasons, some are not so obvious. There is almost always a function or meaning for a young person. You can often work this out by asking them about their drug or alcohol use, and other aspects of their life such as school or relationships.



The context of Adolescent Development

Adolescence is a huge period of growth and change. During this time young people need structure and containment as well as opportunities to take risks, have new experiences and learn about themselves. Some of the things young people need to do as they develop into adults make them particularly vulnerable to drug and alcohol use.

During this period, young people want to:

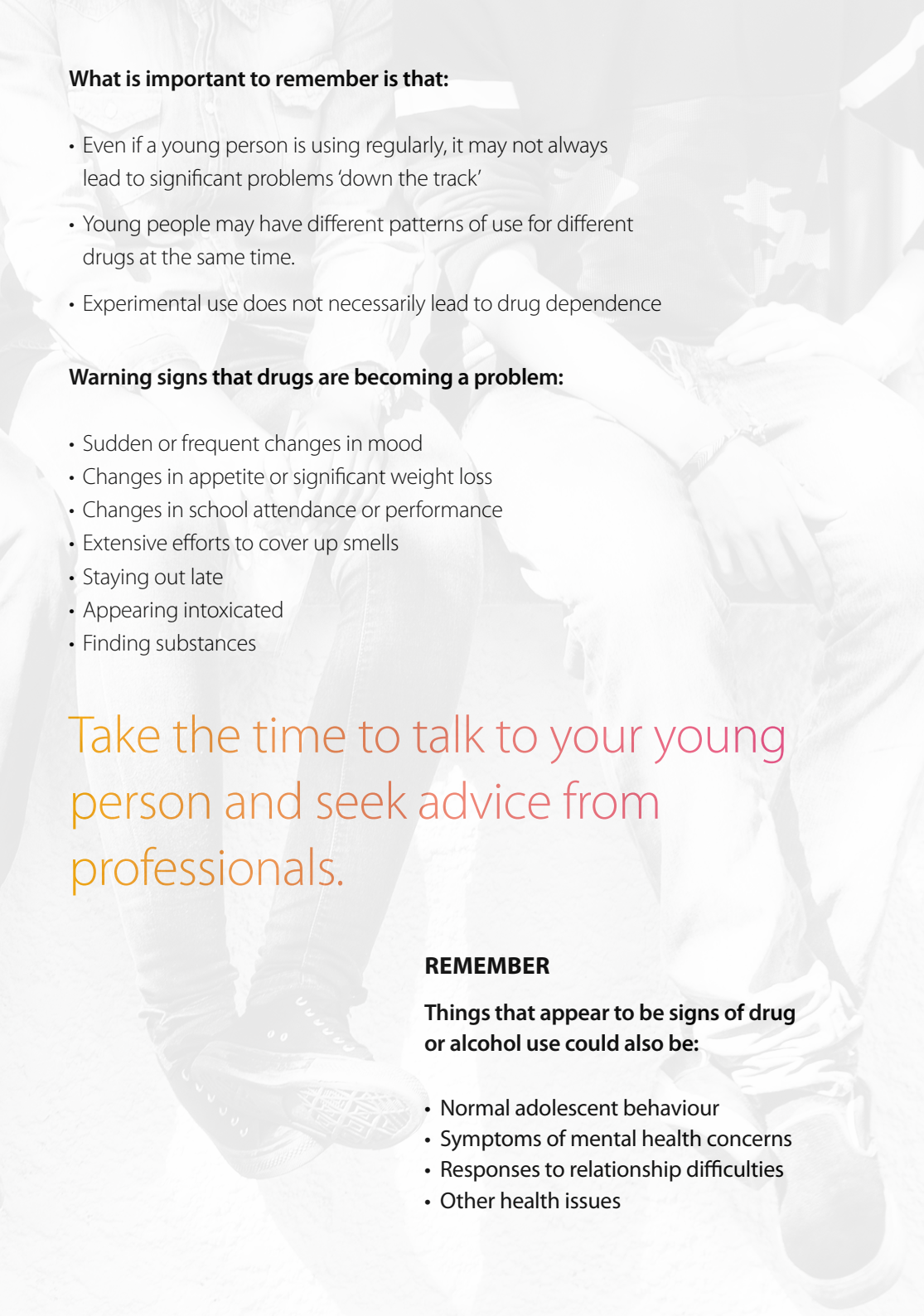
- Do things that are pleasurable
- Take risks
- Experiment
- Fit In

At the same time, they are still developing:

- Impulse control (pausing before acting)
- Problem solving strategies
- Ability to understand risk and perceive consequences

The way young people use alcohol and other drugs will vary.

Many will experiment as a way to fit in, take a risk or simply because they are curious. Whilst others may use in stressful situations like preparing for an exam or before a court appearance. When the young person is using drugs or alcohol in a way that is interfering in other aspects of their life, their use has become problematic.

A grayscale background image showing a person lying down, possibly on a couch or bed, with their legs crossed and arms resting on their knees. The person is wearing jeans and sneakers. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

What is important to remember is that:

- Even if a young person is using regularly, it may not always lead to significant problems 'down the track'
- Young people may have different patterns of use for different drugs at the same time.
- Experimental use does not necessarily lead to drug dependence

Warning signs that drugs are becoming a problem:

- Sudden or frequent changes in mood
- Changes in appetite or significant weight loss
- Changes in school attendance or performance
- Extensive efforts to cover up smells
- Staying out late
- Appearing intoxicated
- Finding substances

Take the time to talk to your young person and seek advice from professionals.

REMEMBER

Things that appear to be signs of drug or alcohol use could also be:

- Normal adolescent behaviour
- Symptoms of mental health concerns
- Responses to relationship difficulties
- Other health issues



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

