

SUPPORTING SUBSTANCE AFFECTED YOUNG PEOPLE

Methamphetamine (Ice)

This guide provides a framework for supporting young people who are 'coming down' from methamphetamine use.



This guide provides core steps and key practice approaches that focus on keeping young people safe, feeling valued and connected when they are 'coming down'. This situation is often the most challenging for those supporting them.

WHAT IS GOING ON FOR A YOUNG PERSON WHEN THEY ARE 'COMING DOWN'?

This is the period after the effects of the drug have worn off, starting up to 12 hours after ceasing use and lasting up to 2 days. It is like a hangover or a recovery period. During this time a young person will feel the opposite to what they felt when they were high. This is due to a depletion of neurotransmitters (dopamine, noradrenaline and serotonin) in their brain, that were released when they used. The degree of this 'come down' will depend on how much and how long they have been using.

Understanding what is going on for a young person at this time is essential to respond well.

When 'coming down' they may:

- Be flat, jittery, experience low moods
- Be threat sensitive, e.g. misread situations and responses as dangerous or threatening
- Have trouble making decisions
- Find it hard to pay attention, concentrate or plan for things
- Struggle with their memory
- Have difficulty regulating emotions
- Be anxious and irritable
- Have headaches or blurred vision
- Experience an exacerbation of any pre-existing mental health symptoms
- Experience mild psychotic symptoms such as paranoia or hallucinations.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT THESE SYMPTOMS ARE THE FUNCTION OF A NEUROBIOLOGICAL PROCESS THAT YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE VERY LITTLE CONTROL OVER.



*Important -
This guide has
been designed
to complement
but not replace your
organisational guidelines,
policies and procedures –
please refer to and follow them.*

WHILST THIS APPROACH CAN BE CHALLENGING AND TIME CONSUMING, BY FOCUSING ON BUILDING AGENCY, CONNECTION AND SAFETY, WE CAN GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS MEETING THE NEEDS YOUNG PEOPLE COMMONLY DESCRIBE BEING PROVIDED BY METHAMPHETAMINE.

Responding to young people who are coming down from methamphetamine use can often lead us to feel anxious, powerless and angry. Policies and procedures will guide **what** actions we have to take but **how** we go about these actions can vastly influence the experience of the young person and how a situation unfolds.

Each interaction with a young person in relation to their substance use offers a therapeutic opportunity to respond with understanding and acceptance in place of the more common experience of stigma and shame.

PLAN

DEVELOP A PLAN IN COLLABORATION WITH YOUNG PEOPLE THAT WILL SUPPORT THEM WHEN THEY ARE USING METHAMPHETAMINE. THIS NEEDS TO FOCUS ON SAFETY AND BE ABLE TO BE IMPLEMENTED CONSISTENTLY.

Help the young person know what to expect

Many young people are not aware of how their mood and functioning can be affected when coming down from methamphetamine. Have a chat to them about what this may look like or do some research with them.

Check in with what has been helpful or unhelpful before

Explore with the young person about what they find difficult when they are coming down and what environment or responses from people have worked to help them feel safe.

Be clear about your role and responsibilities

Orient the young person to the processes and procedures of your service that they will experience in response to their substance use. This includes what you are required to do in different situations and the understanding of substance use as functional. These responses must always be framed as coming from a place of concern.



ASSESS

WHEN ASSESSING A YOUNG PERSON WHO IS COMING DOWN FROM METHAMPHETAMINE, YOUR IMMEDIATE FOCUS IS ON SAFETY FOR ALL. HELP THEM FEEL SAFE AND REGULATED TO REDUCE THE LIKELIHOOD OF SITUATIONS ESCALATING.

A regulated worker

A young person 'coming down' will find it extremely difficult to regulate on their own, requiring the help of another regulated person. It is important to take a moment to check in with yourself and use some regulation or grounding strategies to settle your autonomic nervous system. Remember this is challenging work and staying settled and calm can be very difficult for even the most experienced workers.

A calm and quiet environment

Reduce stimulation or sensory input. Consider lights, temperature, space, noise and other people. Scents and aromas can also be used by negotiation with young people to enhance the calming nature of the space.

Clear and simple communication

Communication needs to respond to the temporary difficulties the young person has with flexible thinking, attention and retaining information. Avoid information overload, use simple terms and repetition if necessary.

Be mindful of tone, body language and eye contact to reduce chance of being perceived as a threat.

Delay any consequences or detailed discussions about the situation until the body has had a chance to recover.

Promote Recovery

With rest and replenishment, the young person will recover much quicker. Encourage regular, hearty and healthy meals, and getting plenty of sleep.

Attune to their needs

Understand what the young person is trying to communicate and what their needs are. Sometimes what young people say is not what they mean, so outbursts at workers can often be a safe way for them to express feeling confused, unsafe, overwhelmed or shameful. They will need support with regulation so negotiate with them what works. It might be music, soft toys, a bath, drawing, tactile play, or breathing, but check in and refine this with the young person over time.

MONITOR

MONITORING IS IMPERATIVE AS A YOUNG PERSON'S PRESENTATION CAN CHANGE OVER TIME. BE OVERT, RESPECTFUL AND PREDICTABLE ABOUT WHAT YOU HAVE TO DO.

Be clear

Know what processes and procedures you have to follow regarding monitoring and communicate these clearly and from a place of concern.

Be unobtrusive


As much as possible try not to be too obtrusive or in the young person's face whilst monitoring as this could be triggering or seen as a threat.

Be aware

Many young people who use methamphetamine will also use other substances to help them with the symptoms of 'coming down' or get to sleep. These are often depressant drugs and can be quite dangerous due to overdose potential.

Check in

Be mindful that when young people are 'coming down', the neurotransmitters responsible for mood, pleasure and impulse control are depleted. During this period they are also likely to reflect on their experiences when they were using, many of which can elicit feelings of shame and regret. These leave young people vulnerable to experiencing suicidal ideation and self-injury. Check in with them about their safety and undertake a risk assessment as required.



MONITOR

REVIEW

OUR RESPONSE SHOULD ALWAYS BE CONTINUOUSLY EVOLVING AND LEARNING. REFLECTING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE OFFERS OPPORTUNITIES TO CHECK THAT WE ARE STILL ALIGNED AND TO READJUST HOW WE RESPOND TO THEIR NEEDS.

Consider how you can improve the response

Get feedback from carers and the young person as to how the plan played out. Work through step-by-step and look for areas to refine and tailor the plan to the young person's particular needs and situation. Make sure that the plan and feedback is documented, otherwise you are likely to miss key learnings and to continue doing the same thing, hoping for different results.

Reinforce non-negotiables and undertake repair work with the young person

It is important to follow up with the young person the next day or once they have rested and recovered. If there have been any ruptures, letting them know that you don't hold grudges or judgements is key to reducing shame, guilt and subsequent spirals of negative thoughts and behaviours. Being consistent in your discussions about procedures, processes and non-negotiables, as well as in your positive regard and care for the young

person, helps them feel safe, stable and contained. This is essential in building the foundation for trust, engagement and connection that is needed to explore alternative and more sustainable ways than substance use to meet their needs.

Reinforce harm reduction strategies

The young person may plan on using again. To keep them safe, have a look at how any harm reduction strategies worked and where they could be improved. Were they tailored to the young person? Did they take into account and minimise the environmental, social, legal and other areas of risk for the young person. Were they co-created with the young person?

Check in and build insight

Use this review time as an opportunity to reflect with the young person where they are at with their substance use. Through gentle curiosity explore the role of substances in their life and any barriers to change.

REVIEW



ABOUT YSAS

Youth Support + Advocacy Service (YSAS) is a leading youth health not-for-profit agency that enables young people experiencing serious disadvantage to access the resources and support they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

*For further information
call YoDAA 1800 458 685
or visit yodaa.org.au*