WHAT CAN A PARENT, CAREGIVER OR GUARDIAN DO **IF THEY DISCOVER THAT THEIR CHILD IS USING DRUGS?**

the doj & cd

Department:
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REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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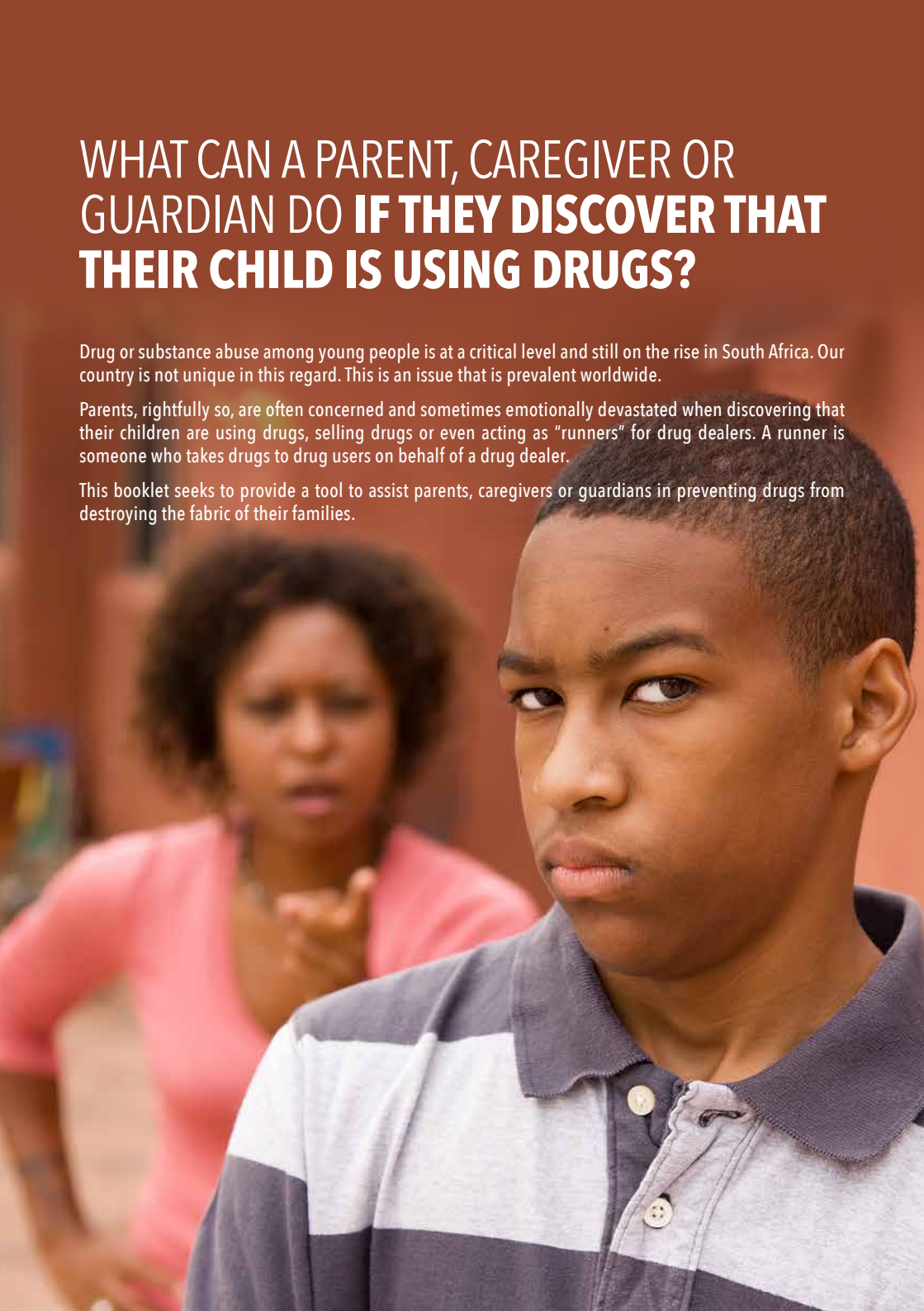
Drug or substance abuse among young people is at a critical level and still on the rise in South Africa. Our country is not unique in this regard. This is an issue that is prevalent worldwide.

Parents, rightfully so, are often concerned and sometimes emotionally devastated when discovering that their children are using drugs, selling drugs or even acting as "runners" for drug dealers. A runner is someone who takes drugs to drug users on behalf of a drug dealer.

This booklet seeks to provide a tool to assist parents, caregivers or guardians in preventing drugs from destroying the fabric of their families.



WHAT ARE DRUGS?

Drugs are any chemical substances that cause physical, mental, emotional, or behavioural change in a person.

WHERE DO DRUGS COME FROM?

There are three basic forms of drugs:

- Plants: Drugs can be derived from plants. For example, we know of dagga or wild mushrooms. Plants can be dried, crushed, formed into pills or powder and smoked. The sap or fruit of a plant can be refined and used as a drug. Heroin, is derived from the poppy plant as is Opium. Cocaine is derived from the coca leaf. These are available in pill, liquid or powder form.
- Then we have synthetic drugs which have been developed for purposes other than use for illegal drug use. They might have been developed as medicines. These are not natural. Among these we have ecstasy, amphetamine and other psychoactive substances. These substances are available in pill, powder and liquid forms. They may be swallowed, injected or inhaled.
- The third form of drugs are the lethal combinations of substances. Among these we have Nyaope (also known as Wonga or Wunga), and Tik. Substances which make up these drugs include rat poison, antiretroviral or drugs used to treat HIV, and heroin. These individual ingredients are not drugs individually but when combined they are extremely dangerous. As these are quite new on the drug scene experts cannot predict how these combinations affect users. Legislation has been passed to classify combinations

of substances as a drug for purposes of prosecution--even though it is made up of substances which are not illegal drugs on their own.

WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE?

The use of drugs can harm the body in some of these ways:

- Alcohol abuse can damage the liver, kidneys and brain.
- Drugs such as dagga can cause cancer, heart problems and may cause infertility.
- Drugs can cause either weight loss or weight gain. Drug users may also experience an increased appetite yet continue to lose weight.
- Mandrax can damage the heart, lungs, nervous system, the blood circulation system and the brain.
- Crack or Cocaine which are inhaled may destroy the nasal tissues, causes high blood pressure, and damage the heart and mind. The drug called Tik, i.e. crystal methamphetamine (or crystal meth) or speed, has a similar effect.
- Heroin can damage the heart and lungs, causes severe weight loss, and result in fits (seizures) and tremors (shaking)
- Khat is a stimulant and often results in insomnia (not being able to sleep). Khat leaves are most commonly smoked, or chewed. The plant can be made into tablets and is highly addictive.
- Drugs which are injected into the body can cause surrounding body tissue to become seriously infected and necrotic (rotting of the flesh).
- Some drugs cause the user to have severe itchy skin or an unpleasant odour.
- The sharing and reuse of needles to injecting can lead to HIV or other transmittable diseases being passed on from one drug user to another through blood left on the needle.
- The and re-use of needles can lead to HIV infection or other transmittable diseases being passed on from one drug user to another through blood left on the needle.
- Depressants can make one drowsy, calm and relaxed –also known as 'zoned out'
- Stimulants can make one excited, alert and full of energy e.g. Tik and Khat.
- Hallucinogens can make one imagine things which are not there and result in distorted or nightmarish hallucinations.

The immediate effects of tik or crystal meth abuse include:

- Excessive sweating
- Diarrhoea and nausea

- Insomnia
- Irritability
- Loss of appetite
- Tremors
- Agitation
- Confusion

The long-term effects of tik or crystal-meth are life-threatening and can cause the following:

- Hypertension (abnormally high blood pressure)
- Increased body temperature
- Increased heart rate or arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat)
- Increased blood sugar levels
- Constriction or narrowing of the arterial blood vessel walls

STAGES TO DRUG DEPENDENCY:

There are 4 stages to drug dependency

- **The experimental stage:** The first time a drug is used i.e. having a single puff or hit could lead to drug dependence.
- **The recreational phase:** The user does not actively try to acquire the drug, but partakes when offered by friends or acquaintances.
- **The regular-use stage:** The user personally gets the drugs and makes sure he or she always has a stash. They use drugs once or twice a week or more frequently.
- **The dependency stage:** At this stage drugs have become the most dominant thing in the user's life and any attempt to separate the user from the drug will be met with fierce resistance.

Drug addiction is a deadly disease if not treated and can lead to death.

WHICH DRUGS ARE COMMON ON THE SOUTH AFRICAN STREETS?

DRUG	ASSOCIATED TERMINOLOGY AND LINGO
1. Tobacco	smokes, cigarettes
2. Alcohol & Spirits	drinks, booze, papsak, drankies
3. Dagga	weed, doobie, pot, smoke, slow boat, bong, pipe, marijuana, hashish, ganja, zol, cookies, bankies.
4. Nyaope	wunga, whoonga
5. Tik	crystal meth, tik - meth, meth-mouth, crystal
6. Cocaine	coke, snow, blow, "chop us a line", "cut a line" or "do a line"
7. Rohypnol	roshhies, roofies, "the date rape drug"

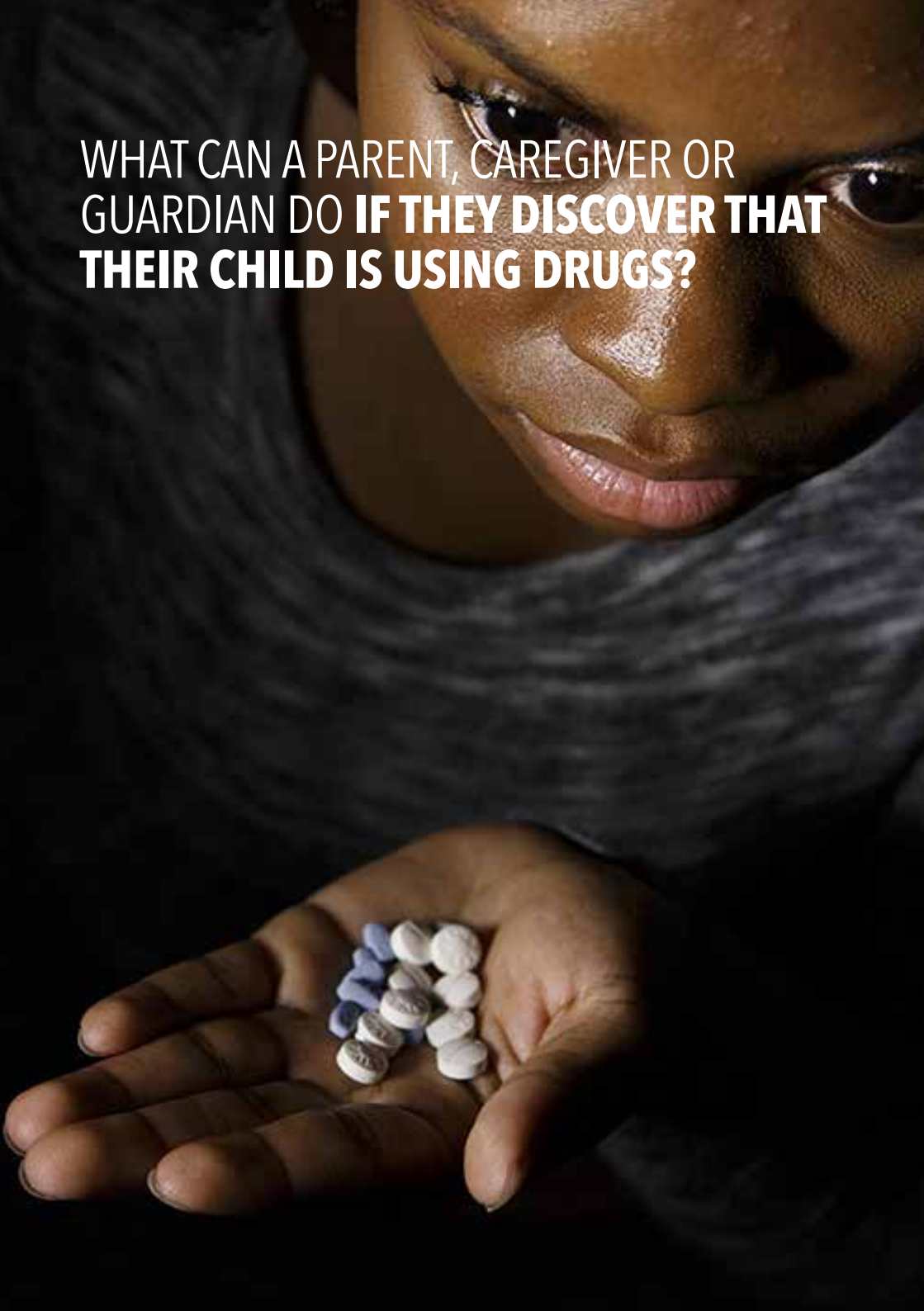
WHAT SIGNS CAN A PARENT, GUARDIAN OR CAREGIVER LOOK FOR TO DETERMINE IF A CHILD IS USING DRUGS?

- A usually noisy child may become withdrawn and uncommunicative.
- A usually quiet child may become overly talkative or rowdy.
- The child may withdraw to their private space or room a lot, and avoid communicating with anyone. Alternatively, they may want to talk all the time.
- The child may become clumsy, dirty, unkempt and/or shaky.
- The pupils of the eyes of the person may become dilated (enlarged).
- The child's behaviour may inexplicably change i.e. they may become rude, threatening or aggressive.

- The child may refuse to bath or shower, and start smelling, or keep scratching. In some instances, a bath or shower may be taken excessively.
- A child may start eating a lot eat at irregular times or alternatively refuse to eat at all.
- You may notice a pattern of unexplainable and inexcusable absences from home or school.
- There may be a sudden decline in school performance.
- The child may sleep abnormally long hours or stay awake and become abnormally energetic for days.
- The child may start asking for money frequently and become cross if not given any.
- You may find household items are missing. They may have been stolen to purchase drugs.

THE NEXT STEPS: TREATMENT OR TOUGH LOVE?

- Parents or caregivers should start by speaking to the child whom they suspect may be using drugs or is in any way involved in drugs.
- Allow the child to speak his or her mind and explain what is happening.
- Check how the drugs are made available to the child.
- If the child is unwilling to listen, seek the support of a social worker or any relevant person.
- Decide whether the situation is serious enough to call on the school authorities or health officials for assistance. In this manner you would be able to alert the school to the drug issue among the learners.



WHAT CAN A PARENT, CAREGIVER OR GUARDIAN DO **IF THEY DISCOVER THAT THEIR CHILD IS USING DRUGS?**

- If the child is displaying violence it may be necessary to obtain a domestic violence protection order against him or her. You are encouraged to enlist the help of the police when a situation threatens to get out of control. It may be necessary to contact the police for assistance if a child or young adult is involved in gang and drug activities.
- Contact your local drug authority to check on what resources and assistance they may be able to offer. The contact details are available from provincial social workers.
- It may be necessary to contact the police for assistance if the child or young adult is involved in gang and drug activities.

IT IS NOTABLE THAT CHILDREN OF DIFFERENT AGES DEMAND DIFFERENT RESPONSES.

The abuse of substances is increasingly prevalent among very young children. This is alarming but also easier to deal with through immediate intervention and action, than when older children are involved.

The intervention should take place through professional counselling i.e. from social workers and medical professionals.

We have identified some critical age groups to categorise children into:

Ages 10 to 12 years:

This age group is trying to figure out their place in the world. They are susceptible to peer pressure. At the same time, they may even begin to challenge parents quite openly.

The Transitions:

The first year of high school: –a year of transition and adaptation.

- Your child's transition from junior to high school is anticipated years in advance.
- Here the child is under great pressure to adapt to being a one of the younger learners after being a one of the more senior children in junior school.
- At this stage your child may not always be willing to communicate their concerns and experiences to you.
- These may include: assault, humiliation, stalking, bullying and of initiation by older high school students. Cyberbullying is potentially a problem at this stage. Be aware that your child may be victim but can potentially be a participant in cyberbullying
- The workload the child has to cope with may be a far greater than he or she is accustomed to in junior school.
- Be warned that this is a critical time in your child's development and calls for greater vigilance on your part.
- It is at this time that a seemingly supportive friend might introduce your child to drugs as a coping mechanism.
- This may take the form of cigarettes or prescription medication to start with.
- Parents and children should talk openly about the kinds of potential social pressures that may present themselves before they manifest. This way they can determine how they will intervene or get help.

Ages 13 to 15 years

For parents who are informed about substance abuse before this, this is a critical time for helping children make positive choices when first encountering drugs and alcohol. No child is immune from influence.

Ages 16 to 18 years

- State what you, as a parent, will do if a child is found to be using or dealing in drugs. This often demonstrates to them that you are serious about the issue.
- Continue to read and further inform yourself about drug usage and trends.
- Recognise changes in behaviour and other indications. Not all the signs discussed are necessarily an indication of drug use. Some may be due to the normal process of growing up as a teenager.
- If you're at all concerned that your teenager is using drugs or alcohol, take action immediately to help them get back on track to a healthy life.

<u>The young adult:</u> Ages 19 to 25 years

As you prepare your child for their lives after graduating from high school, you can help guide them to healthy experience as a young adult. Bear in mind that in South Africa, when a child reaches the age of 18, they are classified as an adult. This means that this young person takes on all the responsibilities of an adult and will no longer be tried as a minor by the law on accounts of drug use, drug dealing or manufacturing.

The move into tertiary education or employment is usually stressful. The young adult needs to take on grown up responsibilities. Some do not manage to do this as easily as others do. It is often then that some young adults may turn to drugs to calm themselves, feel more confident, fit in, or to earn money.

If you suspect that the young adult is using drugs or in any way involved in the drug scene, the most important step you can take in intervention is to speak up and urge him or her to get help.

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