

FRANK

Drugs and young people in foster care

INFORMATION AND RESOURCE GUIDE FOR FOSTER CARERS

the fostering network
the voice of foster care

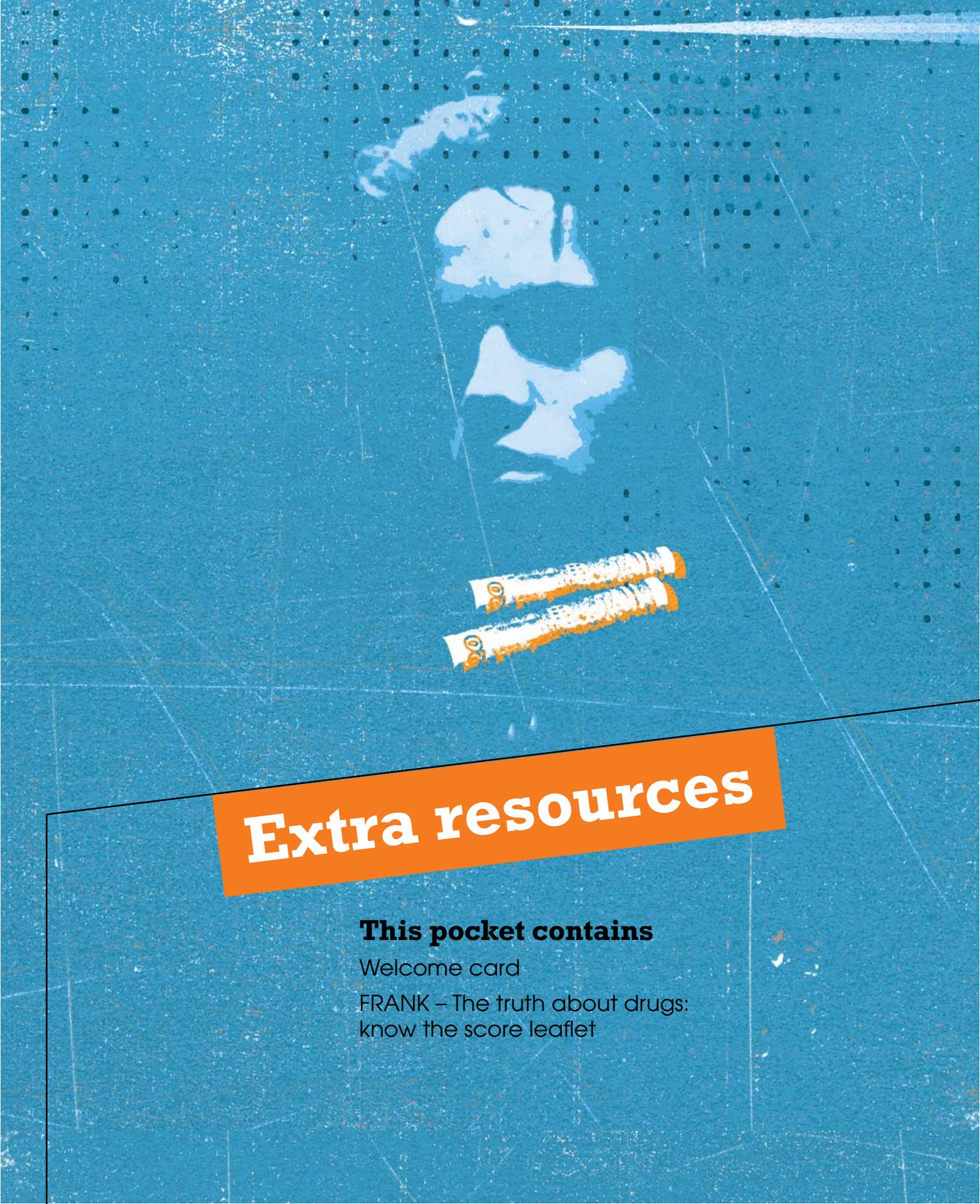


Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael yn Gymraeg, ac mewn ieithoedd a fformatau eraill ar gais.
This document is available in Welsh, and in other languages and formats on request.



Information guide

This 12 page guide aims to help foster carers support children and young people by encouraging them to talk about drugs – either with their foster carer or by contacting FRANK.



Extra resources

This pocket contains

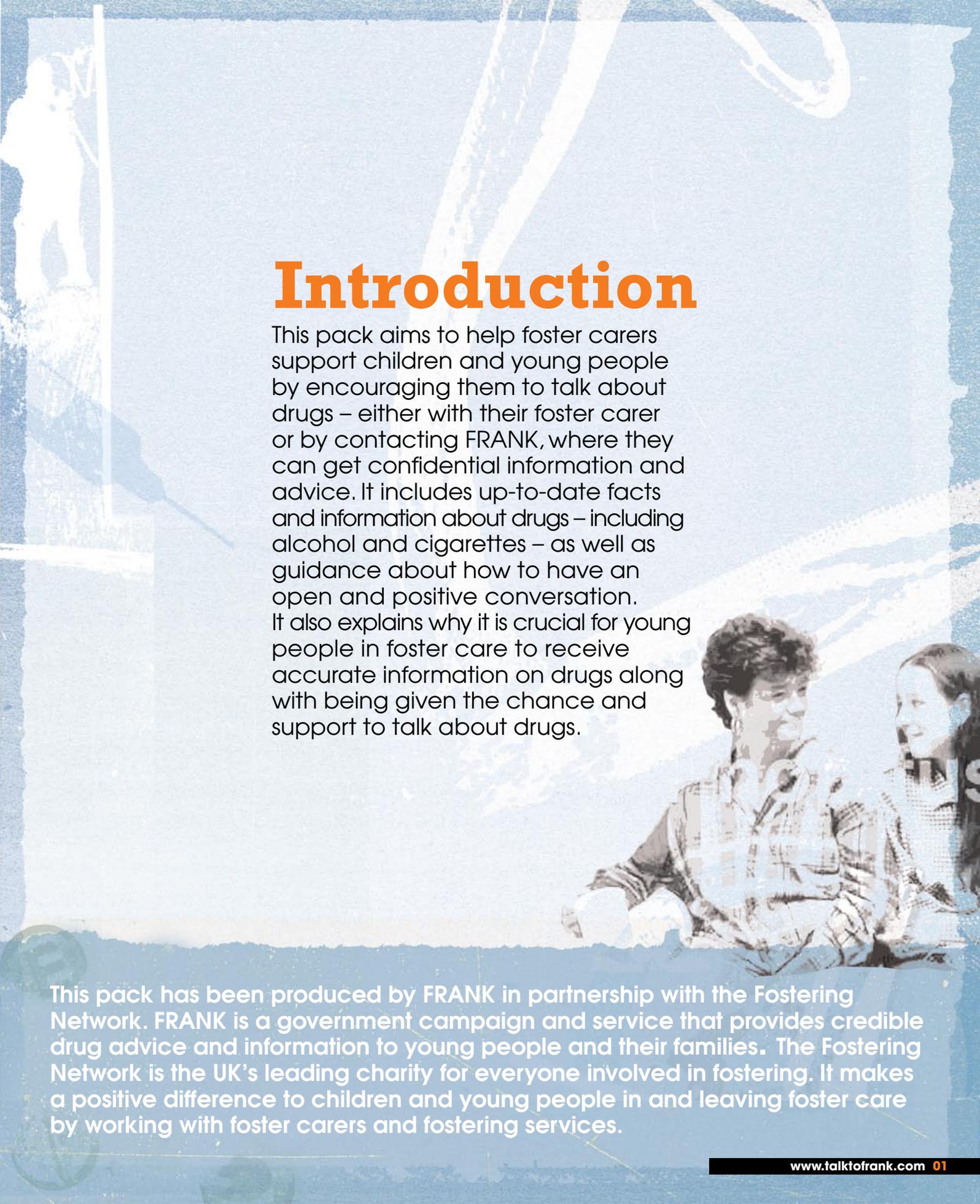
Welcome card

FRANK – The truth about drugs:
know the score leaflet

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Introduction

This pack aims to help foster carers support children and young people by encouraging them to talk about drugs – either with their foster carer or by contacting FRANK, where they can get confidential information and advice. It includes up-to-date facts and information about drugs – including alcohol and cigarettes – as well as guidance about how to have an open and positive conversation. It also explains why it is crucial for young people in foster care to receive accurate information on drugs along with being given the chance and support to talk about drugs.

This pack has been produced by FRANK in partnership with the Fostering Network. FRANK is a government campaign and service that provides credible drug advice and information to young people and their families. The Fostering Network is the UK's leading charity for everyone involved in fostering. It makes a positive difference to children and young people in and leaving foster care by working with foster carers and fostering services.

It's good to talk

Discussing issues around drugs isn't always easy, but children and young people who talk openly about drugs are able to make more informed choices with regard to their use. Research has shown that young people in public care are more likely to come into contact with drugs and unless they are known to use drugs, they may not get the chance to talk about them.

As a foster carer, you can give young people in your care the opportunity to do this and help them to get sound advice from a trusted source.

Talking about drugs doesn't always stop young people from taking them, but it will help them make more informed choices and reduce the risks associated with drug use. Talking about drugs can help young people in foster care to feel more independent and in control of their lives, as well as helping them to get further support and treatment if they need it. One thing is for certain - talking about drugs won't encourage a child or young person to try or take more drugs.

As a foster carer, you can offer stability and support to the children and young people who come into your care. This will encourage them to trust you. Some of these children and young people may not have another stable adult in their life that they trust. You can give them the opportunity to get reliable information.

You may already have experience of talking to young people about drugs. But even if you haven't, your training and experience as a foster carer will mean that you understand the kind of issues that young people may face and this will enable you to relate to them. You are also more likely to pick up on the signs that a young person might be using drugs, as you see them on a daily basis and are familiar with their routines.

Drugs & you

Drugs can affect many children and young people in the UK today. Children and young people from all kinds of backgrounds will experiment with drugs and some will go on to have drug problems. But young people in care often face disruptions in their lives which can make them vulnerable and more likely to come into contact with drugs than other children and young people.



Young people in foster care

As you will know, many children and young people in care have experienced difficulties in their lives, and are unable to stay with their own family for a wide range of reasons. Some will have lacked care and support from an early age, and being placed in to public care can add to this instability and insecurity. Many will have moved around a lot between their family home and different foster homes or residential care and this will add to their vulnerability. They may feel let down by adults and may find it difficult to trust you and talk openly about drugs straight away.

Some children and young people will be in foster care because of substance misuse in their family, and this will shape their knowledge and feelings regarding drug use. They may have grown up in homes or neighbourhoods where drug or excessive alcohol use is common. Therefore, it is not surprising that young people in foster care may need additional support to make informed and positive life choices about a whole range of things, including drugs.

As with all young people, the reasons for taking drugs include peer pressure and the enjoyment of the effects of drugs. However, young people in foster care may also take drugs for a number of other reasons including:

- to rebel against the 'authority' that has taken them away from their parents
- because they may have easy access to them
- because drugs help them to forget the difficulties that led to them being placed in public care
- because drugs can help them to relax, sleep, and normalise their feelings caused by the situation they are in
- because drugs can help relieve the stress associated with constantly moving and no sense of belonging

Even though they are more vulnerable in this way, children and young people who are in foster care do not want to be treated any differently. Many young people experiment with drugs and they don't want to be singled out. However, they do need consistent support as early as possible to help them make informed and positive choices.

Home Office research suggests that children and young people in foster/public care are more likely to use drugs than many of their peers. A minority will be completely against drugs because of the

problems that may have been caused by drug use in their homes. But many will start experimenting with cigarettes, alcohol, cannabis and ecstasy earlier than their peers. Many young people in foster care may also take more and a wider variety of drugs. This may be down to the fact they are likely to know where and who to get them from and it can be considered 'normal' for people to use them. The instability of their personal situation may also increase the risk of experimental or recreational drug use becoming problematic.

Source 1: One problem among many: drug use among public care leavers in transition to independent living (Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, February 2003).

- 73% of care leavers interviewed had smoked cannabis compared to 31% of the general population
- 29% had taken ecstasy compared to 6% of the general population
- 26% had taken cocaine compared to 4% of the general population
- 21% had used solvents compared to 7% of the general population
- 14% had taken crack compared to 2% of the general population
- 9% had taken heroin compared to 0.6% of the general population

Source 2: Newburn, T., Ward J. and Pearson, G. (2002) Drug Use Among Young People in Care. Youth Citizenship and Social Change Research Briefing.

Researchers from Goldsmith College carried out a survey of 400 young people in residential and foster care. The research found that:

- Young people in care used drugs more regularly compared with the general youth population, reporting more frequent use of cannabis, cocaine, crack and heroin
- In a number of cases, young people had grown up in families where heavy drinking or drug use led to parental neglect.
- Many young people in the study had experienced loss, bereavement and rejection. Some young people had turned to drugs to compensate for these negative experiences and to combat depression
- Despite the somewhat bleak data, many young people in care perceived drug use as a minor problem compared to the difficulties they had already experienced

As a foster carer, you are likely to have to deal with drug related issues at some point. In order for you to feel confident handling these issues, it is important to be prepared.

Drugs and Foster carers

Knowing the law

As a foster carer, you can be held responsible for illegal drugs that are kept or used in your home, so having clear boundaries about drug use is a good idea. If a child or young person uses drugs in your home, you can explain that this behaviour isn't allowed and that you will have to talk to their social worker. The social worker may decide to tell the police. You can stress that even though drugs are off limits, talking about them isn't and they can come and speak to you about them at any time. Reassuring a young person that simply talking about drugs won't result in them being thrown out of your home is vital when initiating such a conversation. This will help the young person to feel more secure and build their trust in you.

If a child or young person is in trouble with the law, then you can support them and make sure that they have legal representation. If this situation arises, you should contact Fosterline or a similar advice service to understand your obligations and rights, but here are some useful points to be aware of:

- Children under 10 cannot be taken to court or held responsible for a crime
- Children and young people between 10 and 18 can be held responsible for crimes and taken to court
- Children and young people aged 16 and under should not be interviewed by the police without a responsible adult present
- An adult does not have to be present with a young person who is aged 17 or over unless the young person has mental health problems, learning difficulties or is seen to be vulnerable.

Keeping records

You will already keep records about the behaviour and wellbeing of the children and young people that you look after. As part of this, you should look out for general health indicators and signs of drug use. If you can, try and make a distinction between recreational or experimental drug use and more serious drug problems.

Obvious signs of drug use are finding things like pipes (sometimes homemade), syringes, burnt foil or spoons and torn ritzes. Other signs can include loss of appetite, drowsiness, poor hygiene or appearance, mood swings, red-rimmed eyes and/or a runny nose, as well as money going missing.

Providing a safe environment

You should make sure that your home is a safe environment for children and young people. Any volatile substances should be kept out of reach of the children and young people in your care. These are household products that give off strong fumes and can be inhaled – such as butane or propane gases, glues, aerosols, lighter-fluid, nail-polish remover or paint.



Getting advice and support

If you think a child or young person's health or wellbeing is at risk, you should talk to their social worker as well as your own supervising social worker. You can raise any concerns about a young person's drug use or about parental drug use if you are worried about contact visits. A child's social worker will be able to help them to access support and advice on treatment if they need it.

As a foster carer, you do not have parental responsibility for children or young people you foster. This means that you cannot give consent for medical treatment unless it is officially passed on to you. Otherwise, if a child or young person is placed under a care order, the local authority

has to give consent for them to have treatment. Where children or young people are accommodated, that is placed into care voluntarily; their parents must give consent for treatment. Fosterline can give you more information about medical consent.

Even if you can't give consent, you can work with children's services and health agencies to help a child or young person to get medical treatment. You can ask for consent if treatment is needed and if you think consent has not been given quickly enough, you can make a complaint.

Doctors can provide treatment without consent if a child or young person's life is in danger.

Find out more about drugs

Knowing about different kinds of drugs and their effects can help. A child or young person is more likely to listen and talk to you if they think you know what you are talking about.

Included in this pack is an A-Z of drugs leaflet: **FRANK – The truth about drugs: know the score.**

The leaflet is designed to provide both adults and young people with information explaining what these drugs are, how they are taken, the effects and risks of taking them, signs of use and how to reduce harm.

Having up-to-the-minute knowledge about drugs and their effects will help you to identify whether a child or young person in your care is using drugs. It is also advisable that you read your local fostering service's drugs policy, which will be available from your supervising social worker (link worker).

Talking about drugs can be difficult for all young people whether they are in foster care or not. The important thing is to let them know that you are available for them to talk to whenever they wish. Doing some preparation will help you to feel more confident and able to answer any questions that children and young people might have. Here are some of the ways that you can prepare to talk about drugs.

Preparing to talk about

Think about the child or young person

Your knowledge about the individual circumstances of the children in your care may help you to understand their experiences of and attitudes towards drugs. Some other things you could think about are:

1.

Short or long term foster care

Young people who have been in your care for a long time are more likely to trust you and may be willing to talk freely about drugs. You may already know if they, their friends or members of their family use drugs, which can help you to start a conversation.

Those who are only staying with you for a short time may not trust you yet. Children who have moved a lot may have talked to other foster carers about drugs; but this does not necessarily mean that they will immediately feel comfortable talking to you about drugs. If this is the case, you could think about taking a different approach – for example, using the set of cards to discuss and expand their knowledge about the effects or risks of drugs.

Included in this pack is a Welcome Card, which you could give to a young person who is new to your home. The card has space for you to fill in your contact details, so that a young person knows where they are staying and how to get in touch with you. On the reverse are the contact details for FRANK. It's a way of making a young person aware of the FRANK service without having to have an in depth conversation when they first arrive in your home.

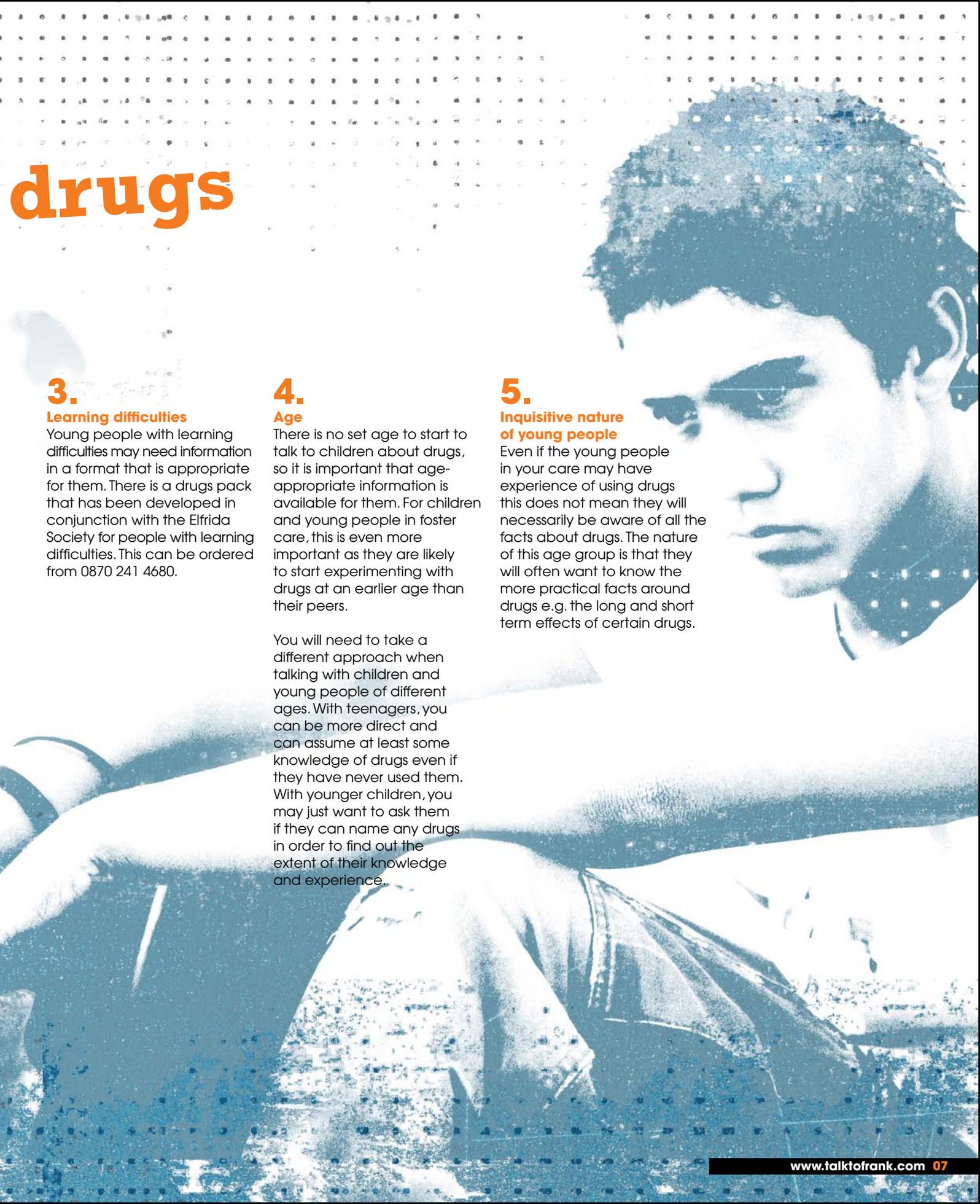
2.

Parental drug use

Parental drug use will affect how young people think about drugs. Although they may have seen the negative effects of drugs, they may have grown up thinking that drug taking is the norm and that they know all there is to know about drugs. You should take their experiences into account when you talk to them about drugs.

Young people whose parents use drugs may also worry that their own drug use is inevitable. You can reassure them that they can control their choices but they may need some support to help them do this. If they are worried about the drug use of a friend or a member of their family then encourage them to talk to a responsible adult that they trust. This may be you, a teacher, doctor or social worker or an organisation like ADFAM which gives support to families of drug and alcohol users (see Useful contacts section on page 11).

drugs



3. Learning difficulties

Young people with learning difficulties may need information in a format that is appropriate for them. There is a drugs pack that has been developed in conjunction with the Elfrida Society for people with learning difficulties. This can be ordered from 0870 241 4680.

4. Age

There is no set age to start to talk to children about drugs, so it is important that age-appropriate information is available for them. For children and young people in foster care, this is even more important as they are likely to start experimenting with drugs at an earlier age than their peers.

You will need to take a different approach when talking with children and young people of different ages. With teenagers, you can be more direct and can assume at least some knowledge of drugs even if they have never used them. With younger children, you may just want to ask them if they can name any drugs in order to find out the extent of their knowledge and experience.

5. Inquisitive nature of young people

Even if the young people in your care may have experience of using drugs this does not mean they will necessarily be aware of all the facts about drugs. The nature of this age group is that they will often want to know the more practical facts around drugs e.g. the long and short term effects of certain drugs.

Talking about drugs

While it is important to encourage dialogue around drugs, there are limits to what you might achieve, so don't feel that you have failed if a child or young person refuses to talk to you. The best things that you can try to do are:

- listen
- answer questions
- provide a comfortable and 'safe' environment in which to talk
- help them to make informed decisions
- direct them to specialist advice or support if needed

Top tips for talking

Don't single out the fostered young people in your home from your own children. Talk to your whole family and make sure that information about where they can get help is available for everyone. This might help to build young people's trust and shows that you are including them as part of your family.

"I think it has to be for all kids in the family, otherwise it's like your foster carer is saying, my own children are never going to do drugs but you're in care, so you will."

Use opportunities to try to talk. Stories in the media or on TV can help to start a conversation. Real life stories and celebrities can often make what is a potentially intimidating and exposing subject into a more relaxed affair.

Don't make it taboo. Explain that they can say anything they want to. Make them feel that you are not there to pass judgement or immediately report them.

Listen with respect and sensitivity to what they have to say and don't get angry if you disagree with what they are saying. Accept that you may have different opinions about drugs, but that you may be able to offer information on local services and more practical facts. For example, the child of a drug user may view a certain level of drug use as 'normal'. Don't lie about your own drug use. And you don't need to pretend to know more than you do. If you don't know the answer to a question, then help them think about where they could get reliable information.

If they don't want to talk to you then encourage them to talk to someone else. This could be a friend or a confidential drug advice line like Frank.

Pick a good time to talk when you won't be distracted or interrupted. If you think they are using drugs don't confront them when they might have recently taken them.

Let them know that you're there for them. They can come and talk to you another day if they want.

Help them with denial. Some children and young people will think that they know all there is to know about drugs or will not recognise that their drug use is problematic. You can explain that all drug and alcohol use has some risk attached and that the more they know about the effects of drugs, the more likely they are to reduce these risks. They have nothing to lose by finding out more for themselves.

"We put barriers up around us and that's just because of what we've been through. So obviously you have to try and break down those barriers step by step not by throwing things about drugs in our face. It takes time to cultivate, to nurture the relationship."

Difficult behaviour

If a young person you are fostering is using drugs, this can lead to them behaving in ways you find challenging. It can be difficult to deal with mood swings, or aggressive behaviour. You may also suspect that a young person in your home is lying to you about their actions, or stealing from you. This behaviour may well be more difficult for you to accept than the drug use itself.

It is important to remember that you are not working alone and that there is support available to you. Your first port of call should be your supervising social worker, who will listen to your concerns and suggest ways forward. If you are a member of a local foster care association this can also be an invaluable source of support and advice.

You should receive training on dealing with challenging behaviour, and there are a number of publications that explore this topic. For more information, see www.fostering.net. You can also contact Fosterline, a confidential advice line which can offer information, support and advice on all fostering-related issues, on 0800 040 7675.

Child protection

The conversations you have with a child or young person can remain confidential and you don't automatically have to discuss everything they say with anyone. However, if you think a child or young person's health or safety may be at risk, for example, if they reveal that they are using drugs or that a parent is using drugs, then you need to ensure that children's services are aware of the problem.

It's important to be upfront about this. Being honest will help children and young people to trust you. If they are uncomfortable talking to you, you can suggest that they contact Frank (either by phone or email) where they can speak to someone with complete confidentiality.

Other kinds of support

You can help children and young people who are using drugs in other ways than by talking. You can help them to build a support network and possibly stay in contact with their family and friends. You can also encourage new interests and help them to identify or develop something they are good at. You can also try and get them to talk about some of the experiences and feelings that might make them want to use drugs. By doing this you may help them increase their sense of self worth. This can help them to build resilience and independence so that they feel more supported and in control of their lives.



FRANK

0800 77 66 00
talktofrank.com

Further action

Ask your fostering service to provide training about drugs. You should always speak to your supervising social worker about any training needs you may have. Many will run courses for foster carers to explore substance misuse, and the Fostering Network also runs training on this. They may also provide trained staff who can carry out alcohol and drug education for children and young people, which you can encourage those you foster to attend.

Talk about drugs at your local support group or Foster Care Association meeting. You may find it useful to talk with other foster carers about the different ways that you can help children and young people think about drugs. You could also invite a worker from your local authority's Drug and Alcohol Action Team (DAAT), a local drugs charity or a police officer to come and talk to your group about their work.

For more copies of this leaflet, call 0870 241 4680 and quote product code XXXXXX.



Useful contacts

Talk to Frank for confidential, credible information about drugs:
www.talktofrank.com / 0800 77 66 00

ADFAM
Support and information for families of drug and alcohol users.
www.adfam.org.uk

Drinkline
For confidential advice about alcohol.
0800 917 8282

Release
For legal information.
www.release.org.uk / 0845 4500 215

The Children's Legal Centre
www.childrenslegalcentre.com
Freephone for young people:
0800 783 2187
Child Law Advice line: 0845 120 2948

The Fostering Network
For all fostering-related queries
www.fostering.net
Fosterline: 0800 040 7675

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation
For mentoring opportunities
www.mandbf.org.uk / 0161 787 8600

Parentline Plus
Support and information for anyone parenting a child.
www.parentlineplus.org.uk / 0161 787 8600

Young Minds
Confidential helpline providing advice and information on mental health
www.youngminds.org.uk / 0800 018 2138

Useful resources

The Truth About Drugs: Know the score
An A-Z of drugs for young people

All About Drugs: Does your child know more than you?
Information for parents and adults

Cannabis: Find out the facts
Information for parents and adults

Cocaine: What you need to know
Information for parents and adults

Drugs: know your stuff
An introduction to drug awareness

Vulnerable young people: Making a difference
Effective communications with vulnerable young people

We are family
Dealing with drugs issues in the family.

To receive updates and to download or order FRANK materials, visit www.drugs.gov.uk/frank
For further information and advice on drugs and for access to local services, call FRANK on **0800 77 66 00** or visit talktofrank.com