

# DRUGS – A Simple Choice?

These notes outline a proposed presentation. The answers to the suggested additional questions in **bold italics** are subject to change dependent on legislation, updated research etc. If you wish to include these questions, you may want to check that you have the most up to date information. All other questions are designed to encourage an open exchange of opinions. However, it is important to ensure that you have some planned answers to any questions used.

*You may also find it useful to look through the transcripts of the DVD to identify quotes from the interviewees that could be used to reinforce issues raised in your presentation.*

The DVD is divided into four sections. Sections 1 to 3 conclude with key questions that can be used to open debate on both the Section that has just finished and to set the scene for the next Section. There is a 5 second black screen between these three sections to allow you time to stop the programme and discuss with your group.

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## **INTRODUCTION – Section 1 ‘Why Take Drugs?’**

The first part of the DVD looks at some of the reasons why people take drugs and the consequences that often occur through contact with drug taking. Although the characters interviewed are fictitious, the stories reflect actual incidents. Before viewing Section 1, the following question should be put to the group for them to consider.

- When you are watching this video clip consider what were the main reasons the three characters became involved in taking drugs?**

**Then play Section 1 of the DVD – 5 minutes 20secs**

### **JASON – age 24**

*‘My parents were dead against me going to the clubs. They were really bothered about me drinking more than anything else or perhaps meeting a girl outside my religion. I don’t think the idea of me taking drugs entered their heads; they would have been really shocked if they knew what was going on at school. I had a lot of my friends taking drugs but I really couldn’t see the point plus I was too scared of what my parents would say if they found out. It just wasn’t worth the risk.’*

### **SHARON – age 17**

*‘I suppose glue sniffing is a sort of drug taking - me and me mates used to do that quite a lot – I was about 10 the first time I tried it. Me mate got some tablets once from some bloke at a club. She brought them to school and we took them that lunchtime. It was so funny, she threw up in the middle of class and I couldn’t stop laughing even when I got dragged off to the head. I think they called an ambulance. I can’t really remember much but I do know we weren’t allowed back in school for a long time – it was great.’*

### **SAMUEL – age 18**

*‘Where I come from if you’re not teamed up you’re in trouble. There’s no choice, if you want to stay healthy you get yourself in or you’re going to get picked on big time. I was real lucky, both my older brothers were at the same school and they kind of looked after me. There was no question – I was with them and their mates. I can’t think of an actual time when I became like a member – it’s not like that, it just happens, I was always there. I mean there’s no real age, there’s no one minute you’re out the next you’re in – if you were big enough and had enough bottle – that was it.’*

### **JASON:**

*‘Everything really changed when I moved away from home and went to university. I met a girl there, we got on really well it was her that got me to try something. I knew she been taking stuff for years and had no problems and well we were out one night having a great time with our friends and I just thought what the hell they’re all doing it so I took one. I can still remember that night- it was fantastic; I’ve never known such a high.*

### **JASON (cont):**

*Brilliant. That was it -a night out from then on meant popping a few pills as well. I knew I'd get into trouble if I got caught but I never did – well, apart from a bouncer who caught me once but all he did was take them from me and kicked me out of the club. I was shit scared he'd call the police but it didn't happen.*

**SHARON:**

*'I reckon I was about 13 when I got caught shoplifting for the first time. We'd been doing it for ages but I was just unlucky. I was taken down to the police station, they called my dad he went barmy when we got home. Split my lip and told me 'You've got to find the money to pay the fine'. That was crap, it never got to that, I just got cautioned. I'm sure him and me mum knew I was getting in heavy but they never said anything - they were too busy arguing. So I kept out of their way, hardly went home. They didn't care. I hated being at home, hated going to school – total waste of time. God, the only time I felt good was when I was high so why the hell shouldn't I take something?'*

**SAMUEL:**

*'Drugs are no big deal. You take them because everyone else does and if you don't you're chicken – it just doesn't happen. See, getting them is no problem and what you take is up to you.'*

*'Me, I was real bothered about what I'd seen when my brothers took some of the stuff, there was no way I was going there but I wasn't going to get pushed around and laughed at like some of the kids – no way. So I just used weed. It was OK, most of the time I actually enjoyed it, didn't have any of those bad trips I'd heard other people had had. The main thing was I was one of them so no-one messed with me.'*

**Section 1 concludes with three questions that can be put to the group to open discussion.**

- 1) What do you think are the reasons people take drugs?**
- 2) Could it happen to you?**
- 3) Of the three, who do you believe is most at risk of becoming addicted?**

**STOP THE DVD**

The following provides examples of 'reasons' that should be discussed.

**SOCIAL/ENJOYMENT-** Jason takes them as part of a night out. Seen in a similar light as alcohol. Taken to heighten moods and to gain a pleasurable experience. Accepted by his friends as a part of the modern social scene – 'everybody does it'. Often viewed as a means to become 'a better person' – more fun to be with, more confident etc.

**ESCAPISM** – Sharon takes them to escape temporarily from reality and the problems she has. It can prove to be the start of a vicious circle. If the 'problems' remain or increase so will the dependence on

drugs and with it the temptation to take more or stronger drugs to gain the same effect.

**PEER PRESSURE** – all three characters provide examples of how peer pressure and the need to conform can be a prime influencer. Friends who seem to prove that there ‘is no harm in it’ persuade Jason. Sharon becomes involved with friends eager to experiment and once in she will find it difficult to leave. Samuel sees no option but to take drugs – refusal means facing ridicule, isolation or even physical punishment.

### SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- Were the reasons to take drugs justifiable ones? If so why?
- Can you think of any other reasons for taking illegal drugs?

Apart from the debate on illegal drugs relieving medical conditions, another reason for becoming involved is money. The next video clip will reveal that one of the characters moves into this area and a comment along these lines can help introduce the next section.

*Before viewing Section 2, the following question should be put to the group for them to consider.*

- **When you are watching this video clip consider what, apart from addiction, are the three risking?**

### **START THE DVD – Section 2**

**5 minutes**

#### **JASON: Charged with Possession**

*‘After university I got a graduate training job in London and I was earning good money. It meant I could get out clubbing whenever I wanted to. I was still popping pills but it wasn’t a big deal – I certainly wasn’t some crazy eyed addict. I got on well at work and apart from a few thick heads drugs didn’t stop me doing my work at all. In fact a lot of the people I worked with used to get their supplies from me. What started off as just doing a few favours turned into a lucrative sideline. I became sort of a middle man – I never thought I’d ever earn as much money – it just rolled in.’*

#### **SHARON: Charged with Burglary**

*‘After I jacked in school, I left home, just packed a few things, got some grub from the fridge and left. Squatted with me mates – no one cared what I was going to do. We had a good routine going, one of us would distract while two of us would move in and grab the bag. On a good day we might*

#### **SHARON (cont)**

*get £500 but sometimes even that wasn’t enough. I think I was maybe 15 when I pulled my first trick. I got well and truly tanked up and just blanked*

*out – twenty quid for 10 minutes, it was that easy. I felt bloody awful afterwards but me mates said I'd get used to it after a few times.'*

**SAMUEL: Life Sentence - Murder**

*'It was just after leaving school that things got a bit out of hand. I was trying to get a job but wasn't having a lot of luck cos of my record. We'd meet up in near the shops or in the pub most days and just chill out – there was nothing else to do. We had our own area and not much happened without our knowing about it or getting something in return if you know what I mean. We had a few scraps but no one got really hurt – just put in their place sort of thing. But a few of the lads got into crack and when that happened you didn't want to be around. They scared the hell out of me let alone the poor sods they picked on."*

**JASON:**

*'It was early on a Saturday morning that I heard a knock on the door, before I got there there was a loud crash and the next thing there's police everywhere. They searched my flat, lucky for me I don't keep much there but even though they got some stuff they wanted more. They wanted my supplier. There was some bad stuff going round at the time, some girl had died after taking E's at one of the clubs I looked after. It wasn't me, my gear was always clean but the press were all over the story and the police wanted a result. But no way. There are some people you don't cross.'*

**SHARON:**

*'On the game is real dodgy you know. You never know who's going to turn up. I tried to work with a mate so we could keep an eye on each other but one night it didn't work out that way. I got a real beating from a couple of blokes. No reason for it, they laughed while they kicked the shit out of me. Luckily I was half cut at the time but I felt it afterwards. I really thought I was going to die – I had real problems till I got some good stuff again.'*

**SAMUEL:**

*'I got my girlfriend pregnant. We were both stoned at the time and just didn't think – so bloody stupid. Her parents were good about it though, she lives with them now but the babe's had a lot of problems which the doctors keep blaming on Sally's habit. She's off smack now but the damage has been done. It does my head in being in here ... not being with them and not even knowing how long I'll be inside when I'm moved up to prison. That's something I don't want to think about.'*

**Section 2 concludes with two questions that can be put to the group to open discussion.**

- 1) 'What serious problems do Jason, Sharon & Samuel now have because of drugs?'
- 2) 'What do you think happens next?'

**STOP THE DVD**

The following provides examples of areas at risk/problems they now have and includes issues that can be discussed regarding the second question 'What happens next?'

***Jason:***

Jason is risking prosecution, if he is charged with ‘possession with intent to supply’ it will inevitably mean a prison sentence.

He is also risking his employment. Most employers take a negative view of any criminal record.

He obviously comes from a family who totally oppose the concept of drugs. What will they think now that he has been caught?

He is scared of some of the contacts he has made in the drugs world. Will they tolerate this situation? Will they believe Jason hasn’t talked to the police?

**Do you think this will put Jason off dealing?**

***Sharon***

Living in a squat, high dependence on drugs – hygiene is not high on Sharon’s list and the possibility of sharing needles is an obvious risk.

From the clip we saw in the first section, Sharon has little regard for others – she leaves a used syringe in the park and openly takes drugs in front of impressionable youngsters. She is therefore risking not just her own health but also the health of others who have contact with her.

Sharon faces being caught by the police, she admits to mugging and has now moved into prostitution. These offences could well result in a custodial sentence.

In her own words she admits that ‘on the game’ is ‘real dodgy’. She’s had one bad beating will this happen again?

Apart from physical assault, prostitution leaves Sharon open to contracting sexually transmitted diseases.

**Do you think this will persuade Sharon to make a new start?**

***Samuel***

Samuel mixed with a dangerous group of people. The graphics revealed that he is serving a life sentence for murder. He is already paying a high price for the ‘risk’ he must have taken but what risks does he now face in prison? Violence? Mental anguish? Contact with heavy drugs? Contact with hardened criminals?

He now has a young family to support. How will they face the next few years without him?

What prospects will he have when he is released?

### **How do you think Samuel will cope with his situation?**

*Before viewing Section 3, the following question should be put to the group for them to consider.*

- **How many of the problems we talked about have become an issue for them? Are there any other problems?**

### **START THE DVD – Section 3**

**5 minutes 20 secs**

#### **JASON:**

*'I was dead lucky, I just got a hefty fine – I could have gone to prison. But my family didn't even turn up to the court – I'd disgraced them ... there was no way they were going to risk getting their picture in the paper. I haven't seen them now for over a year. My sister keeps in touch, calls me sometimes. She says they don't even mention my name – it's as if I don't even exist. I find that hard; I mean I'm not a bad person. No one got hurt. The only one who suffered was me. It's me that lost my job and any chance of getting one like that again. It's me that had threatening phone calls about the girl, had my car vandalised and have the police round whenever there's any bother. But they don't see it from my point of view.'*

#### **SHARON:**

*'One of me mates told out she was HIV ... well that was it, no way was I going on the game any more. I had to find other ways to get cash. Snatching bags was O.K. but my face was getting real well known, so we started to do a few houses. Real scary stuff but we got a good thing going with a couple of market traders. They'd take CDs, videotapes, DVDs – no questions asked. Then I got careless; this bloke comes home while I'm turning his place over and catches me at it. He grabbed and that was it. Next thing I'm down at the station.'*

#### **SAMUEL:**

*'When we found out she was pregnant we made all these plans about getting our own place but me mates couldn't get it into their skulls that I wanted out. One night I got caught up with them in a barney with a shopkeeper who used to pay us some money. His son comes through from the back with a baseball bat. I always carried steel but just for show. I just meant to scare him off. I don't know what happened. All I know is he died and I ended up with a life sentence and I don't know when I'm going to get out.'*

#### **JASON:**

*'I'll admit it I do take more now than before but I'm in control. I can't see that I'm doing any harm. The way I look at it, I'm providing a service for people who just want to have a good time. If they don't buy from me, they'll get it from someone else – so why shouldn't I make a living from it?'*

*'But I'm not stupid, I know I'm being watched and I know if I get caught dealing I'll go down next time so I'm a lot more careful about who I do business with. I couldn't handle going to prison.'*

**SHARON:**

*'Apart from all the questions from the coppers I had loads of interviews with all sorts of people wanting to know this, wanting to know that – don't know who half of them were. I tried to get in touch with me mates but they didn't want to know. I was amazed when me mum turned up and said she wanted me to come home. Me dad left a few weeks after I'd gone. She said she'd help me get straight. I'm not kidding it's bloody hard, we have right old rows, about money, getting a job, being on probation, helping at home, drug rehab. Sometimes it gets too much - I storm out, but I'm still there.'*

**SAMUEL:**

*'After a few weeks in here I got to thinking what's the point of carrying on. One day's the same as the next – same walls to look at, same faces, same aggro. So I thought – finish it. I cut me wrists but as you can see I'm still here. I'm on these tablets now that are supposed to be helping me to sort me head out. It's like I'm kinda not here, as if I'm sort of a machine. I still have days when I can't be bothered to get out of bed but I don't want to top meself anymore so I reckon they must be working.'*

**Section 3 concludes with two questions that can be put to the group to open discussion.**

- 1) 'Who do you have the most sympathy for and why?**
- 2) 'What do you think the future holds for them?'**

**STOP THE DVD**

The following can be discussed in terms of problems and future

**A) EMPLOYMENT & FUTURE PROSPECTS**

**Jason** loses his well-paid job because of his conviction committed during employment. In his own words he will find it difficult to find a similar post. **Sharon and Samuel** both have criminal records and this factor will reduce the scope of employment open to them. Employment provides income, which can be used to purchase material items that display to the world your 'place in society'. Take employment away and frustrations and anger can set in – '*I didn't have any choice*'.

**SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

- *Were Jason's employers justified in dismissing him?***

- Should a drugs conviction be treated differently to other crimes?
- ***For how many years will the characters have to reveal a criminal record?***

## **B) REPUTATION & LOSS OF RESPECT**

**Jason** loses contact with his family due to his conviction. In Jason's case this was largely due to his family's religious beliefs and the feeling that his involvement brought disgrace on them. However, such a response is very common when families and friends feel let down or betrayed by such behaviour. The consequence is that at a time when Jason needed support it was not there. **Sharon** loses respect due to her involvement not only with drugs but also for the criminal activities she committed to finance her habit. Moving back home takes her into an unfriendly environment where she feels isolated. **Samuel** even in the Youth Offending Institute he is in at the moment, he still risks losing 'respect' if he does not conform to what is considered to be part of the culture – conforming will make him accepted and 'one of the lads'. He is therefore facing the same pressures as before and his move to prison could increase this pressure.

### **SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

- How important do you consider reputation to be?
- Was the behaviour of the characters friends/family acceptable?
- If not, how would you have behaved towards the characters?
- What would the reaction be of those closest to you if you were one of the characters portrayed?

## **C) RISK TO PERSONAL SAFETY**

Although **Jason** believes he deals with clients in relatively 'safe environments', he is deluding himself. He already has suppliers he is afraid of and knows what would happen if he crossed them. To trade, he has to deal with criminals and these dealings will inevitably bring him into contact with other criminals opening up a whole new area of risk. For example, he is working in a 'competitive', highly illegal market and any moves into his territory would not be polite ones. If this happens who would he complain to?

**Sharon's** is now away from her friends and with it the dangers she regularly faced because of her life style. Beating is a common story told by many who believed that prostitution was an easy way to make

money. In addition, living rough, picking pockets and breaking into property all expose her to dangers. Any contacts supplying drugs are breaking the law and the chances are her suppliers are not operating in the so-called 'safe environments' described by Jason thus increasing the exposure to potential violence.

**Samuel** accepted that violence was part of being one of the gang. It was used to enforce or punish and although this was inexcusable, Samuel saw that drug induced violence was even more frightening as the perpetrators not only lose all sense of right and wrong but can also possess increased strength and do not appear to feel pain - a very dangerous combination.

#### SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- Where do people get drugs?
- Are some areas safer than others? Where are they and why do you believe they are safer?
- Have you ever come into contact with violence linked with drugs?
- Is drug taking now seen as an unavoidable part of social life?

#### **D) HEALTH RISKS**

Although **Jason** does not consider himself an addict, his increasing habit may lead to permanent health problems. Every time he trades in or uses drugs he is gambling on the quality of the product putting both himself and his 'customers' at risk. Jason mentions that the police initially believed he was responsible for inferior drugs that may have contributed to a young girl's death – an issue hotly picked up on by the media.

**Sharon's** long term use and dependence on drugs obviously puts her at a high risk of developing permanent health problems. The more dependent on drugs she becomes, the more difficult is the process of getting 'clean'. These mental pressures will add to the frustrations she already feels and will risk increasing the tension with her mother. Sharon's brief encounter with prostitution also opens up additional health risks such as AIDS. The possibility of her sharing needles again put her at risk of contracting AIDS but also exposed her to other infectious diseases such as Hepatitis.

**Samuel's** detention has led to depression. Hopefully his medication will help him to adjust to his circumstances. Although he wants to keep away from drugs, even in prison he will find fellow inmates trying to lead him into becoming a user again and he will have to fight hard to resist temptation – peer pressure and escaping from reality

will be prime pressures on Samuel. Samuel is already a father – the result of unprotected sex. A large proportion of teenage pregnancy has been linked to drugs and alcohol abuse - inhibitions and the sense of responsibility diminish considerably whilst under the influence. For Samuel there is an additional problem – his child was born with major health problems brought about by his girlfriend's addiction to smack.

#### SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- ***What are the medical risks relating to drug taking?***
- ***Are some drugs more dangerous than others?***
- ***How many people die in the UK each year from illegal drugs?***
- ***How long does it take to become 'clean'?***
- ***Which drugs pose a threat to unborn children and what are the dangers?***

#### **E) INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME**

By taking or supplying illegal drugs, all three are breaking the law – the penalties for which will depend on the type of drugs, the quantity involved and any previous criminal convictions. Although possession of drugs is obviously an aspect of drug taking that needs to be discussed, of primary concern are the crimes committed to finance drug taking or committed whilst under the influence.

**Jason's** crime is one of dealing and he risks being charged with 'intent to supply' – a charge that usually carries a prison sentence. An area for debate is outlining the difference between 'personal use' and 'intent to supply' – each class of drug has its own volume limit which the law uses to determine what offence has been committed.

Both **Samuel and Sharon** were involved in criminal activities that directly or indirectly funded their, or their friends, drug habits. Examples of such crimes include: Muggings, Extortion, Pick pocketing, Shop lifting, Burglary, Prostitution

#### SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

- ***What are the penalties for possessing drugs – personal use and intent to supply?***
- Should 'intent to supply' automatically mean a heavy prison sentence?
- Should some drugs be decriminalised? If so which ones and why?
- ***How much crime can be directly attributed to drugs?***

## **F) RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM**

Although **Jason** believes his drug income gives him freedom in monetary terms he has paid a high price in terms of personal freedom. He is now ostracised from his family with very little chance of reconciliation whilst he continues to trade in drugs. He knows he is a ‘marked’ man and he is constantly watching his back, concerned about falling foul of the law and of upsetting his criminal contacts.

**Sharon** has been fortunate in having the support of her mother who is prepared to provide her with a home. As she is on probation, she will have to report regularly to her probation officer and she risks a prison sentence if she reoffends. Her sense of entrapment is compounded by her not being able to get employment, which would provide her with the income to become more independent. She also feels restricted by her lack of ‘real’ friends and by the rejection she feels from those who live around her.

**Samuel** has paid the highest price in terms of freedom. His life sentence will mean many years spent in the penal system. As he is under 21, he will initially be sent to a Youth Offending Institute and during his stay there he will be regularly assessed both mentally and physically to determine the support needed to help him adjust to imprisonment. At 21, he will be transferred to an adult Prison where he will be assessed again – this time to determine the exact sentence in terms of years that he will be facing.

### **SUGGESTED ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS**

- Is prison the correct solution for drug takers (not dealers)?
- Should the police target known dealers such as Jason?
- Should Sharon have been punished more severely for her crimes? How?
- What support should addicts be given?

**After the above discussion, the group should be asked to summarise their thoughts on what they believe the future holds for each of the three. The final section can then be played.**

<b>START THE DVD – Section 4</b> <b>What does the future hold? 1 minutes 30 secs</b>
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**JASON:**

*'I'll tell you this much while I'm making good money there's no way I'm going to work in some takeaway or clean offices – that's what they keep shoving at me. That's not for me. I've got a good bunch of mates, we have a great time and I help other people have a good time as well, so what's the problem?'*

**SHARON:**

*'I'm not really sure what's going to happen. I've lost contact with most of my old mates and a lot of people round here won't have anything to do with me but I don't care. I've been clean now for about 6 weeks and I do feel all right most of the time but ... I don't know... have to see, won't I?'*

**SAMUEL:**

*'I've promised Sally that I'm staying out of trouble from now on – that's a promise. A lot of the team are inside like me; I don't keep in touch – that's the past, something I'd rather forget. I've been thinking of learning some sort of trade while I'm here but really it's a case of getting through tomorrow – that's my ambition at the moment.'*

## CONCLUSION

Summarise the session by recapping the areas discussed. For example:

***The key reasons people become involved with drugs are:***

- For social and recreational purposes
- To escape from problems
- Due to peer pressure
- Profit

***The possible negative consequences of drugs are:***

- Risks to Health
- Impact on Employment and Future Prospects
- Damaged Reputation and Respect
- Risk to Personal Safety
- Involvement in Crime
- Restrictions on Freedom