

## Tips for Suspected Use stage

### Trust your instinct:

Don't ignore your suspicions but also try not to jump to conclusions. A child could have some of these signs and not be involved in drugs. However, there might be something else wrong e.g. bullying, and it is important to talk to them and find out.

### Communication

The first step for us in responding is always to talk with our son or daughter. The timing of this conversation is very important and it should not happen in the heat of the moment or if they are drunk or under the influence of a drug. It is also important not to have this conversation if we, the parents, are under the influence of drink/drugs. When things have settled, possibly the next day, it is important to find out what happened, why it happened and who was involved. This should not be an interrogation but rather an open, caring and frank discussion. We should reassure them that we will always be there to talk and to listen to them. We need to think about how we would react if they tell us that they have tried, or are using drugs and be ready for this.

### Advice

Advice is important for both us as parents and our children. Based on what we discover from talking with our son or daughter, we may need to look for advice on how to deal with the situation. This may involve finding out more about the particular drug they used, or making contact with an outside agency that can offer us advice and support. Once again, the following sections in this booklet provide valuable information. We also need to be in a position to offer advice to our son or daughter about the next steps and how to deal with this situation. There should be consequences for their actions and this may involve sanctions because family rules have been broken. We need to be clear about the sanctions and stick to them, especially with children and younger teenagers.

### Links

As parents we shouldn't feel that we have to have all the answers and do everything. It is important that we look at links we can make with other people who can help us. There might be a case where we are not the right person to talk to the child/teenager and that another family member e.g. older sibling, aunt or uncle, may have more success. We may feel that we need to talk to other parents whose children may also be involved in this situation. This needs to be done sensitively and without either scapegoating our own child or accusing others. Depending on the particular situation, we may need to talk with people who are trained to deal with these situations. For a list of helping agencies, see section 5 of this booklet.

### Moving forward

While it may seem like the end of the world at the time, these situations, once dealt with, should be left behind. It is important that we as parents don't keep revisiting the situation or 'harping on' about it. We should let the child/teenager learn from their mistake and move forward.