

# Where's the Harm?

A Guide for Parents on  
keeping your child safe.



## FOREWORD

**Dr. Sakthi Karunanithi Public Health Director  
Lancashire County Council**

Supporting children and young people to flourish in Lancashire is a key priority for me. Looking after our own health and wellbeing includes being informed about how we can keep ourselves safe and how these impact on our decisions. Risk taking behaviours potentially expose young people to harm, or significant risk of harm which will prevent them from reaching their potential.

Some of the most common risk-taking behaviours include using alcohol, smoking, using drugs and involvement in knife crime. This can result in losing inhibitions, young people putting themselves at risk or in unsafe situations, youth crime and exploitation such as

county lines. It can have wider community implications with increased anti-social behaviour and people in our community not feeling safe.

Educating young people and adults about risks and consequences around drugs, alcohol, smoking and knife crime is important to their continued safety and well-being and to help them make informed choices. I hope that you find the booklet useful as it provides information for children, young people and their parents/carers to understand more around the harms associated with risk taking behaviours.

By working together, we can improve the well-being of our young people, and make our communities safer for everyone and allow children to live healthier lives.

Thanks  
**Dr. Sakthi Karunanithi**

## WHERE'S THE HARM - ALCOHOL

**Most teenagers will drink alcohol**

Is this what you think? That they will drink alcohol whatever you do or say, so what's the point?

Childhood plays a large role in influencing future alcohol behaviours

**Drinking habits are formed between ages of 11-13**

As a parent/carer you teach your children by the examples you set, the rules you make and the freedoms you allow them. Talking about the issues of drinking alcohol with your children will help your child to understand alcohol & its effects so they can make more informed choices about drinking in the future.

## REMEMBER

Drinking at a young age can result in physical or mental health problems and impair brain development.

It puts children at risk of alcohol-related accident and injury. It's also associated with missing/falling behind at school, violence, anti-social behaviour, and unsafe sexual behaviour.

**This is why the UK Chief Medical officer recommends that children under 15 should not drink alcohol. Current advice is:**

1. Children and their parents/carers are advised that an alcohol-free childhood is the **healthiest and best option**. However, if children drink alcohol, it should not be until at least the age of 15 years.
2. If young people aged 15-17 years consume alcohol it should always be with **the guidance of a parent/carer in a supervised environment**.
3. Parents and young people should be aware that drinking, even at age 15 or older, can be **hazardous to health** and that not drinking is the healthiest option for young people.

## WHERE'S THE HARM - ALCOHOL

### Keeping your children safe



#### Keeping your children safe

##### Talk before they drink

1 in 4 parents in Lancashire have not talked about alcohol with their children. Discuss the harms and risks and set rules around your child's use of alcohol before they begin to experiment.

Parents and young people should be aware that drinking, even at age 15 or older, can be harmful to health and that not drinking is the healthiest option for young people.

For more information <https://alcoholeducationtrust.org/parent-area/>

#### Do you buy your children alcohol?

Young people in Lancashire say they get alcohol mainly from parents. Lancashire Trading Standards conducted a social experiment in a shop to see how customers reacted to different situations, a 'dad' and a 16 year old 'daughter' (both actors) attempting to buy alcohol.

##### How would you react?

[www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancan/parents-information/underage-drinking/](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/lancan/parents-information/underage-drinking/)

#### Where are your kids tonight?

Lots of young people are stopped by the police at weekends carrying alcohol. They are often not where they have told their parents they are.

Do you know where they are?

Who they are with?

Do you check party/sleepover arrangements?

Do you know if other parents/ friends are giving them alcohol for the evening?

**Young people are vulnerable and often find themselves in risky situations if they drink too much alcohol.**

[www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking](http://www.drinkaware.co.uk/advice/underage-drinking)



#### Alcohol and the law

##### It is against the law:

To sell alcohol to someone under 18.

For someone under 18 to buy or try to buy alcohol.

For an adult to buy or try to buy alcohol on behalf of someone under 18.

For someone under 18 to drink alcohol in licensed premises, except where the child is 16 or 17 and is accompanied by an adult. In this case it is legal for them to drink (but not buy) beer, wine or cider with a meal.

## WHERE'S THE HARM - TOBACCO

### Keeping your children safe

Most parents/carers whether they are smokers or not have an opinion on smoking, the majority would prefer their children never smoke.

**Talk to your children** about the dangers of tobacco **BEFORE** they experiment. Some young people's first cigarette is at the age of 9/10 years old.

#### Can a few cigarettes really hurt my child?

Yes! Research shows even a few cigarettes can cause long-term changes in a young person's brain that may increase the likelihood of becoming addicted to cigarettes. After only 4 weeks, a 12 year old can become addicted to smoking.

Be the example: If you agree with smoking it is more likely your child will smoke. If you are a smoker be honest with your children, explain it's hard to quit and you know it is harmful.

#### What can I do to help my child resist pressures to smoke?

Teenagers often use cigarettes to help them 'fit in' (peer pressure) so it's important to encourage your child to have the confidence to say 'NO' if they are being pressured to smoke.

For practical tips and child friendly information:  
[www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/drugs-alcohol-smoking/smoking/](http://www.childline.org.uk/info-advice/you-your-body/drugs-alcohol-smoking/smoking/)

An issue across Lancashire is the selling of cheap illegal cigarettes in shops, pubs, private houses or on the street. Illegal tobacco might not seem a big deal but people who sell illegal tobacco don't care if they sell to your kids.

It is sold so cheaply that it makes it really affordable and easy for young people to buy. It brings crime into your neighbourhoods, fuelling human trafficking, the drugs trade and loan sharks.

For more information and to report sales anonymously <https://keep-it-out.co.uk>

Smoking

### Smoking and the Law

#### It's illegal:

- for shops to sell cigarettes (e-cigarettes & e-liquids) to anyone under 18
- for an adult to buy cigarettes (e-cigarettes & e-liquids) for someone under 18
- to have, give or sell cannabis to anyone. If you are caught with cannabis you could get a warning, a formal caution, or be arrested. You could even be sent to prison
- to smoke in a car with a child.

NO  
Smoking



## WHERE'S THE HARM – VAPES

### What you need to know

There are growing concerns about the numbers of young people using vapes a recent survey of young people aged 14-17 years in Lancashire showed an increase in regular use to 17% almost 3 times as many since 2020. Trading Standards have also seen a significant increase in complaints about sales of disposable vapes to young people.

**It is important to advise your child that if they don't smoke they shouldn't vape.** Vapes are less harmful than smoking, but their purpose is to help adult smokers stop smoking.

**Short term side effects can include** -dry mouth, a cough, nausea, mouth & throat irritation, headaches & shortness of breath. The longer-term effects on the body are **still to be confirmed**

**Did You Know?** – Vapes come in all shapes & sizes, disposable ones are popular with young people as they are cheap costing £4-£10 and come in flavours such as cotton candy and cola. These are promoted to young people on social media platforms.



### REMEMBER

Vaping is not for young people. Whilst it can help people quit smoking, if you don't smoke don't vape.

To report underage sales, contact Trading Standards via the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 0808 223 1133 or report them online at the Citizens Advice webpage.

## WHERE'S THE HARM - VAPES

### THE LAW

It is illegal for anyone under the age of 18 to be sold any vaping products. The maximum penalty for selling a nicotine inhaling product (vapes/e-cigarettes) to a person under 18 years is a fine of **£2500**

Parents or adults buying for underage children (under 18) can also be prosecuted.

Illegal vapes are easily accessible on the high street & online, the content is not regulated. Marijuana-based products such as CBD oil can be added to these vapes. **It is not safe to add illicit e-liquids or other substances.**

**Trading Standards are taking action against stores that sell vapes to people under 18 and against stores that offer for sale illegal vapes.**

**Further information on vaping for adults who want to stop smoking**

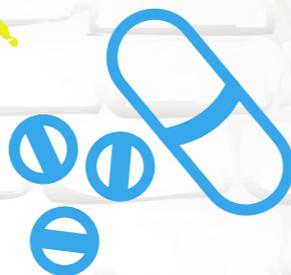
**Using e-cigarettes to stop smoking - NHS**  
[www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/](http://www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/using-e-cigarettes-to-stop-smoking/)

**Quit Squad | Your local Stop Smoking Service**  
[www.quitsquad.nhs.uk](http://www.quitsquad.nhs.uk)



## WHERE'S THE HARM - DRUGS

### Keeping your children safe



Children are less likely to take drugs than alcohol but it is better to discuss the risks as early as possible. If you don't, they may end up getting the wrong information and make poor choices.

#### Drugs can:

- Affect their physical and mental well-being
- Make them vulnerable to harm
- Expose them to exploitation

Your child will get drugs education in secondary school. Discuss what they have learnt, it's important to respect their views and for you to set clear limits and boundaries.

Talk to Frank - honest and useful information about drugs, including risks, the law and how you can support your child [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

The effects of taking drugs are varied, it depends upon who is taking them, what the drugs is, if it has been mixed with something and where the person takes them.

#### Main effects

- Physical and mental health and personal safety
- Drugs can affect the part of the brain used for learning/remembering which can impact upon daily functioning at school, college or work.
- Regular drug use can lead to debt.

#### Supporting your child

If you suspect they are taking drugs, encourage them to be honest with you, stay calm and ask them what they are taking. It's also important to find out why they are taking drugs, it could be due to stress, peer pressure or to boost their confidence.

Whatever the reason listening to what they say and how they feel can give you an idea of how you can help. If you are worried about your child's use of drugs you can speak to your local young peoples treatment service

We Are With You in Lancashire [www.wearewithyou.org.uk](http://www.wearewithyou.org.uk)

#### The Law

If your child is caught in possession of a controlled drug, they have committed a criminal offence. This will be recorded by the police and could lead to them being prevented from taking up certain jobs or from visiting some countries.

For a first offence your child may receive a warning or a caution. If they are between 10- 17 years old and commit further offences, they could be dealt with by a Youth Court.

As a parent you risk breaking the law by turning a blind eye. If you allow the smoking of cannabis, or the use of any other illegal drug in your home, this is also an offence and you could lose your job as a result.

## WHERE'S THE HARM - NITROUS OXIDE (LAUGHING GAS)

Nitrous oxide is a colourless gas that is most commonly found in pressurised metal canisters. You may have seen these metal canisters lying around in streets particularly outside bars and nightclubs. It is becoming increasingly popular with young people in the UK, it is readily available to buy online.

Laughing gas is often categorised as a 'legal high' but is considerably less risky than others, such as synthetic cannabis and stimulant mixtures. However, if someone takes too much nitrous oxide, they risk falling unconscious and/or suffocating from the lack of oxygen.

### What does laughing gas do to your body ?

When it is inhaled, usually through a balloon, it can make people feel happy, relaxed, dizzy and lead to hallucinations. Taking several doses can prolong the dream-like effects. It is not a hallucinogen but there is often a distortion of audio and visual perceptions.

Young people may be more likely to try it after a few drinks and the dizzy feeling can increase the risk of people falling over and injuring themselves. This is a major risk of taking the drug.



### How should parents respond?

Although parents should not categorise this behaviour as high-risk drug taking, you may be concerned that your child has taken something intoxicating. Although you may be worried, it's important to remember that they have not broken the law by possessing it.

It's a good idea for parents to raise these issues with their children to ensure they understand the levels of risk, how best to stay safe – and how to look after their friends too. Stay calm and open-minded when you talk to your child about drugs.

Remember to look at the FRANK A-Z of drugs to make sure your knowledge is up-to-date and accurate. [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)

### The Law

It is illegal to sell to under 18s  
It is illegal to supply for human consumption (penalty is 7 years in prison or unlimited fine)  
It is illegal to possess

## WHERE'S THE HARM - KNIFE CRIME

### Keeping your children safe

Whilst the majority of young people do not carry knives – it is still a conversation worth having. Approximately 1 in 7 (15%) young people in Lancashire claimed to have witnessed an incident involving a knife (2022-23)

### Why do young people carry a knife?

From protection to peer pressure, there are many reasons a young person may carry a knife. Some signs to look out for that may suggest your child is feeling this way are:

- school's not going well / they don't want to go in to school at all
- they've been a recent victim of theft/ bullying/ mugging
- a different network of friends who may be older than your child.

Remind your child that they should always walk away if confronted with the threat of violence.

### What you need to know

It is illegal to carry a knife even if the knife belongs to someone else.

Carrying a knife increases your child's risk of getting stabbed or injured

Carrying a knife could result in your child getting a criminal record. This may prevent them getting a job, going to college / university or even travelling abroad to some countries.

### Contact details:

If you would like more information on knife possession visit [www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives](http://www.gov.uk/buying-carrying-knives)



## WE ARE WITH YOU LANCASHIRE — SUPPORT SERVICES

We provide free and confidential support to young people, under 25, experiencing issues with drugs, alcohol or mental health. We help young people achieve their goals, whether that's staying safe and healthy, making changes or reducing harm.

### As part of our service we:

- Work one to one and in groups with young people to address their own substance or alcohol misuse
- Deliver group work sessions with young people in schools, colleges and youth groups etc.
- Train professionals, parents, and foster carers on substance misuse and the wider risks associated
- Address a range of issues that impact on the young person and affect their resilience e.g. smoking, self-harm, emotional health and wellbeing
- Support families and carers



### Nest Lancashire

Nest Lancashire has been set up to support young people aged 8 to 18 who have been affected by crime or subjected to bullying, threats or harassment. You can talk in confidence and services are free of charge. Our aim is to help you recover from whatever it is you have experienced and our trained, friendly staff will be able to help you move forward and feel safe again.

Experiencing or witnessing a crime can be really frightening. Being hassled, bullied or threatened is not ok. It is normal to feel upset, angry, frightened or scared following the experience. You may feel fine one moment and overwhelmed the next. Everyone deals with things differently and whatever you are feeling, support is available for you .

It doesn't matter if you haven't told anybody or if the incident happened a long time ago. Even if you are unsure of whether what has happened to you is classed as a crime, help is available . There is no incident too small or too big for available support.

#### Get in touch

If you are unsure about what to do or if you simply need someone to talk to, confidential help is available .

Call: 0300 111 0323

TextCall: 0300 111 0323

Text: NEST and your number to 60777

Email: [info@nestlancashire.org](mailto:info@nestlancashire.org)

### Contact details:

#### Central Office

Ringway House, Percy Street, Preston,  
PR1 1HQ 01772 281495

#### North Office

YMCA, Fleet Square, Lancaster  
LA1 1EZ 01524 239570

CVS, 62-64 Yorkshire Street, Burnley,  
BB11 3BT 01282 505037

[spoc.yalancs@wearewithyou.org.uk](mailto:spoc.yalancs@wearewithyou.org.uk)  
YP Freephone Number – 0808 164 0074

[www.wearewithyou.org.uk](http://www.wearewithyou.org.uk)  
[lancashireinfo@wearewithyou.org.uk](mailto:lancashireinfo@wearewithyou.org.uk)  
[www.facebook.com/wearewithyoulancs](https://www.facebook.com/wearewithyoulancs)  
Twitter:@WAWYLancs

East Office



# Where's the Harm

**Lancashire**

County  
Council

