

Clinical Toolkit

Clinical Tips: Alcohol and Other Drugs Risk Factors

The bio-psycho-social model considers that a person's substance use is shaped by range of interrelated factors that are biological, psychological/emotional and social or structural factors.

These factors are important to assess and can further guide intervention planning.

Biological

These are the unique biological features of the individual.

- The individual response of pleasure and reward centres
- Dopaminergic system
- Midbrain
- Frontal cortex
- GABA
- Inhibition yields more dopamine activation
- Predisposition to rewards
- Early age of first use
- Tendency for disinhibited behaviour (e.g. risk-taking behaviours in childhood)

Psychological

The following personality traits make a young person more vulnerable to a substance use disorder (SUD):

- impulsivity (rash impulsivity, sensation seeking)
- anxiety proneness
- reward dependence
- sensitivity to reinforcement.

Personal beliefs can also predispose a young person to a SUD. For example, the belief that substance use does not have a negative impact on health. Also, the lack of belief in

conformity or moral order may also predispose to a SUD.

The following factors also predispose a young person to a SUD:

- Low self-esteem
- Underachievement at school or low commitment to school
- Traumatic experiences (e.g. abuse as a child, or being bullied)
- Childhood ADHD or conduct disorder
- Other mental disorders (e.g. depression, anxiety)
- Poor coping skills (e.g. an avoidant coping style; responding to interpersonal conflicts in an aggressive manner)
- Positive Expectancies about alcohol (and drugs)
- Attentional bias is the ability of drug-related stimuli to capture attention. It is suggested to play a part in drug dependence, craving and relapse. Research suggests attentional bias increases the motivation to seek and use drugs or alcohol.

Family

- Parental attitude towards drugs and alcohol and parental role-modelling
- Low parental monitoring or discipline
- Difficulties with family cohesion
- Patterns of negative communication in the family

Community and Society

- Peers use drugs or alcohol
- Drugs or alcohol are readily available
- Acceptability of substance use