

SORTED

Substance Use and Misuse Team

Nitrous Oxide Parent/Guardian Resource

Introduction

Nitrous Oxide, also known as 'nos', laughing gas, or balloons, is a popular drug used by young people at parties, music festivals or even before and after school. There is a general misconception that it is a harmless drug as the effects can be very short lived, however that is not always the case and using Nitrous Oxide can be quite dangerous, with possibility of a fatal outcome. This resource has been created to provide you with information to support conversation with your child about nitrous oxide. You will read about what nitrous oxide is, what the dangers and risks are, as well as the legalities to help you make the most informed decisions to keep your child safe and happy.



What Is Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous Oxide is a colourless gas often used by dentists and in maternity wards i.e. for mild sedation and also used in catering i.e. in whipping cream canisters. Young people buy it in a small silver canister. It can make people feel euphoric and make people laugh, hence the nickname 'laughing gas'. It is readily available and easy to get hold of.

How Is It Used?

It is usually transferred from the canister it comes in, into a balloon to be inhaled. Some young people will inhale the gas directly from the canister which is very dangerous.

How Do I Know My Child Has Used Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous Oxide is a depressant which slows down the body's functions and the brain's responses. The effects are usually short term, lasting up to 2 or 3 minutes. How long the effects last and the time the drug stays in your child's system depends on how much they've taken, their size, whether they've eaten and what other drugs they may have also taken. It can cause the following short term effects.

Sound distortions and hallucinations



Giggles and laughter



Feelings of Euphoria

Stops you thinking straight



Long Term Effects

Short Term Effects

Heavy regular use can cause a B12 deficiency and lead to a form of anaemia. This might result in nerve damage, tingling in the feet and toes, which can be painful and affect walking. Regular use can also stop the white blood cells in the body from forming properly.

Dizziness

Relaxation

Severe headaches

Calmness

Short term intense feelings of paranoia



If you would like more information on any of the above you can go to [drugwise](http://drugwise.org.uk) or [talktofrank](http://talktofrank.org)

What Are The Risks Of My Child Using Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous Oxide can cause a drop in the level of oxygen in the blood stream. There is a risk of pressure building in the muscles in the upper airways, causing the throat to spasm.

This can cause -

- dizziness
- unconsciousness
- fainting
- difficulties with breathing
- suffocation from lack of oxygen



Although viewed as harmless by young people, it has and can lead to death. The danger is increased when the gas is inhaled in an enclosed space or a large amount is inhaled in a short space of time.



Will My Child Get Into Trouble For Using Nitrous Oxide?

Nitrous Oxide is covered under the Psychoactive Substances Act 2016 as a psychoactive drug. It is unlikely your child would face legal consequences for possession for personal use, however it is still illegal to give away or sell and there are consequences for this;

- Possession with Intent to Supply - having it with intent to share or sell can get you up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.
- Supply – including giving it away to friends for free or sharing it, can get you up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.
- Dealing – selling for any sized profit, can get you up to 7 years in prison, and unlimited fine or both.
- Production – producing the substance can get you up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both.



You can read more about nitrous oxide, the law, and psychoactive substances on the [government website](#).

How Can I Help My Child?

It can be difficult to know the best way to support your child if you are concerned. Speaking with professionals already working with your child is the first step such as teachers, and key workers. Below are local and national services to find more information and support for your child.



Local

- Adolescent Development Team
 - SORTED
 - sorted@hillington.gov.uk
 - 01895 250 721
- ARCH Hillingdon
 - 01895 207 777
 - arch.hillingdon@nhs.net

National

- Frank - talktofrank.com
 - 0300 123 6600
 - frank@talktofrank.com
 - text - 82111
- youngminds - youngminds.org.uk
- ADFAM - adfam.org.uk
- Childline - 0800 1111
- The Childrens Society - childrenssociety.org.uk
- MIND - mind.org.uk