

Young people, smoking and mental health: a guide for facilitators and educators

This document is intended to support facilitators to raise awareness of the link between smoking and mental health. Some useful resources have been developed to help with conversations amongst 14-17-year-olds, including:

A flyer



A contact card



An animation

[Access the resources via this link.](#)

After reviewing this crib sheet, you could begin a session by showing the animation. You could then facilitate a discussion using some of the conversation starters below.

The stop smoking conversation should not be a one-off thing. If a young person isn't ready to quit yet, they may consider it again in the future. Ensuring they are equipped with the facts is essential to helping them make an informed decision.

Why should I talk to young people about smoking and mental health?

It can take just three cigarettes to become addicted to tobacco. Most adults (two-thirds) who smoke report that they first tried smoking when they were under the age of 18.

Smoking amongst young people is declining but there is still lots of work to be done. 11% of young people aged between 11-15 years of age report having smoked.

It's important to address the myths around smoking and mental health:

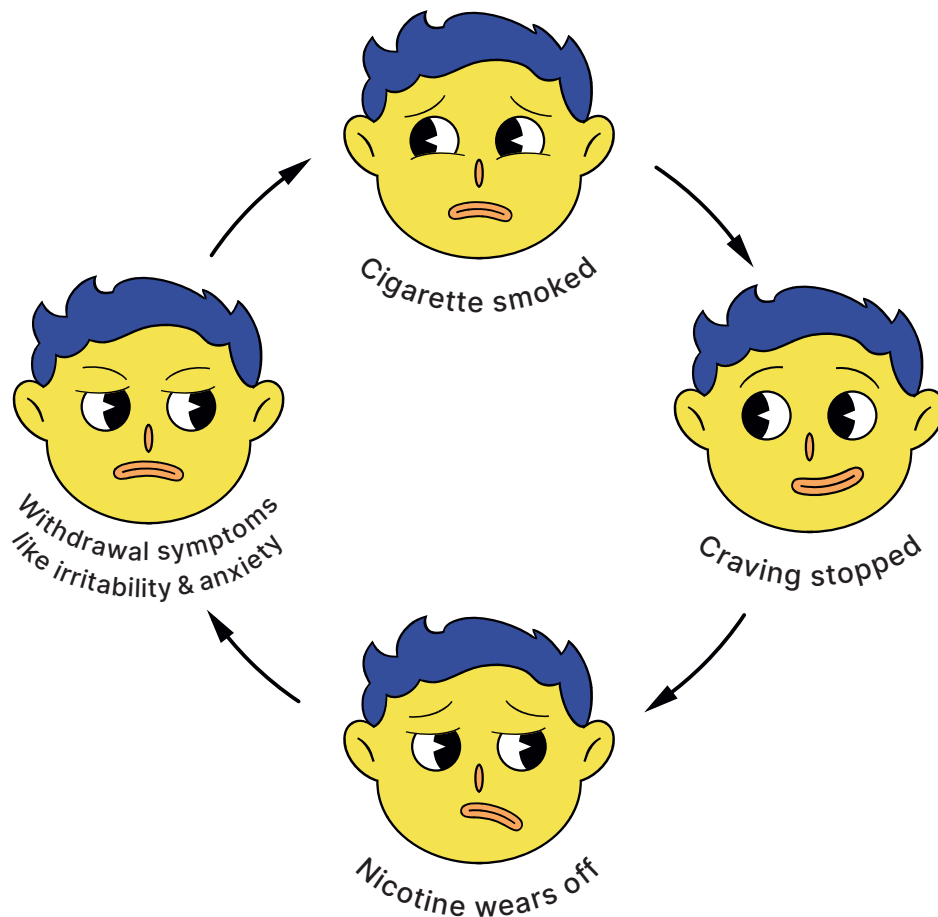
- Some people may think that smoking provides relief from stress, anxiety and low mood, but the opposite is true.
- When people feel stressed they may reach for a cigarette thinking it will help. In fact, what they are experiencing is the relief from nicotine withdrawal.
- By stopping smoking, a young person could feel more positive, less stressed and anxious, and improve their mood.
- Smokers with mental health conditions can achieve the same success as those without.

Helping a young person to understand that smoking can negatively impact their mental health may support them to stop smoking and prevent others from starting in the first place.

Smoking and breaking the cycle

Smoking can offer a temporary sense of relief but this soon gives way to unpleasant withdrawal symptoms.

When someone hasn't had a cigarette for a while the craving can make them feel irritable and anxious, which may make them reach for another cigarette.



This traps them in a cycle, and by stopping smoking they are breaking this cycle.

Support from Smokefree Sheffield

Smokefree Sheffield offers free and confidential support which can help young people to stop smoking. It can be provided over the phone, online, via text or in person.

Smokefree Sheffield can provide free nicotine replacement therapy (NRT) such as gum and lozenges to help them manage withdrawal symptoms. NRT can be provided for young people aged 12 and above.

Vapes are not a type of NRT, and whilst they are an effective quit aid for adults, Smokefree Sheffield does not provide vapes to support young people aged under 18 who want to stop smoking. For more information on vaping and young people, please refer to the resources at the end of this document.

The most effective way for a young person to stop smoking is a combination of support from an advisor and NRT. If a young person wants to find out more about the support they can get from Smokefree Sheffield, more information can be found via QR codes on the resources. This will lead them to a dedicated webpage for young people.

Here are a few example conversation starters:

- Does the link between smoking and mental health surprise you?
- How could you support a friend who is struggling with their wellbeing?
- What is one positive action we can take from today?

Further reading and helpful information

For more information about mental health support for young people, visit [Kooth](#) or for additional wellbeing support visit [Mind](#).

For more information about NRT options, please follow this [link](#).

For the most up-to-date statistics on young people and smoking visit [ASH youth smoking](#).

When you talk about smoking with young people, it is likely that the topic of vaping will also come up. A comprehensive set of resources have been developed by Smokefree Sheffield to help talk about vaping with young people, which you can [view here](#).