

NGAGE with Aquarius is a specialist drug and alcohol service for young people aged between 10-18 in Northamptonshire. This guide aims to provide an overview of the service to parents and carers, as well as advice for how to approach any concerns you may have with your children in a constructive and positive way.

NGAGE

with aquarius

Service information for **Parents**

NGAGE with us

NGAGE is the specialist substance misuse service for young people in Northamptonshire, funded by Northamptonshire Public Health & Wellbeing Team and operated by Aquarius.

Our service provides **information, education, advice and support to young people** in relation to drug and alcohol use. **NGAGE is a free and confidential service.**

We cover the whole county, and have dedicated workers for Northampton, Kettering, Corby, Daventry, Wellingborough, South Northamptonshire and East Northamptonshire.

NGAGE also has a named Youth Participation Worker who is committed to promoting the voice of young people in the design and delivery of the service, and who runs our youth group Evolve, offering positive activities and opportunities for young people to get involved.

All permanent staff members have undergone enhanced DBS checks.

**Supporting YOUNG PEOPLE
to make positive choices
about drug and alcohol use**

Who can access NGAGE?

**We work with young people between the ages of 10 and 18.
Young people referred to the service must consent to the referral.**

The young people who access the NGAGE service have a wide variety of experiences of drug and alcohol use, including:

- Wanting advice and information about drugs and/or alcohol use
- Associating with others who are misusing drugs and/or alcohol, and who may be vulnerable
- Using drugs and/or alcohol and would like to reduce the harm caused
- Wanting to reduce their drug and/or alcohol use, or stop completely
- Needing an opiate/benzodiazepine substitute
- Needing support into inpatient detox for alcohol dependency.

Each individual accesses the service in a different way for different reasons.

Northampton-based operating countywide

We typically meet young people in venues close to them where they feel comfortable. Usually we see young people in schools, youth counselling offices, and sometimes their own homes. NGAGE is a countywide service.

Our administrative base is located in Northampton. We only see young people at this office by booked appointment.

What does **NGAGE** offer?

NGAGE is a confidential and voluntary service supporting young people. Our support is flexible and tailored to each young person we work with, but often includes:

- Information, education and harm reduction advice around drug and alcohol use
- Structured 1:1 sessions and interventions as part of a care plan
- Empowering young people to achieve their goals, and enable them to access positive activities, training and peer mentors through our Evolve youth group
- With the young person's permission we offer brief family interventions or structured family work
- We regularly liaise with CAMHS regarding young people who have mental health issues as well as substance use concerns. We can receive direct referrals from practitioners
- We offer an outpatient clinic to all young people who attend A&E with a drug or alcohol related injury or illness. Referrals are made by A&E staff to our clinic
- We support young people leaving Youth Offending Institutes to prevent relapse
- Group information, education and harm reduction sessions for target groups, provided on request at various outreach venues through Northamptonshire including: schools, Pupil Referral Units, Complementary Education Centres, hostels, children's homes, and youth clubs
- Volunteering and training opportunities for young people we support who want to be more actively involved through our Evolve youth group.

Our support

What does NGAGE do to support young people who use drugs or alcohol?

We aim to look at each young person's quality of life, what they feel they are currently gaining from drug and alcohol use – such as feeling relaxed, having something to do, not getting angry – and from that look at what could be changed in their lives to make it less stressful, and gain those effects without drug or alcohol use.

Telling a young person that they may develop mental health problems one day, or become a dependent drug or alcohol user in the future is often counterproductive. It can be difficult for young people to imagine themselves in these situations when they may know people who have used cannabis or alcohol for years without it becoming too much of an issue. Focusing on future effects also does not help to inform them about immediate risks.

When setting goals related to drug or alcohol use and lifestyle change, we aim to be realistic and work with each young person to find what's right for them. Tools such as drug or alcohol diaries and relapse prevention plans mean young people have a greater chance of achieving their goals. Once one set of goals has been achieved, they may feel more confident about more ambitious goals and perhaps stopping drug or alcohol use altogether.

“It is really great to have someone to talk to who understands the issues”

NGAGE client

Tackling cannabis and alcohol

We have found that over the last few years more young people are accessing NGAGE having experienced problems with their cannabis use; however, there is a lot of confusion as to how problematic cannabis use can be.

Similarly, alcohol is viewed by many as a more socially acceptable drug, yet it is no less harmful than other drugs. We've compiled the information below to support you and your child if there are concerns about their cannabis or alcohol use.

I'm concerned my child is using drugs or alcohol

- First of all, try not to get angry or judge them. Even if you're annoyed or disappointed, telling them that is likely to make your child defensive
- Talk to them and keep channels of communication open, showing an interest in what they do. This is far more productive than telling them you're disappointed or annoyed
- Don't confront them when they arrive home and appear to be under the influence. Have a calm discussion after the effects have worn off
- Find out if they would like to talk to one of our NGAGE workers to get more information about what they are using. Most young people get their drug knowledge from peers and may believe urban myths
- You may find the questionnaire later in this booklet useful. If your child is uncomfortable sharing the information with you, ask them to fill it in privately. The results may help them realise they need support
- Talk to NGAGE!

Getting in touch with NGAGE

- Assure your child that our service is confidential and that any information they share will stay between us. We will only share information if the young person signs a consent form
- An NGAGE worker can meet with young people informally to provide an introduction to the service and give an idea of how we might be able to help them
- If your child agrees to a referral being made, you or your child can contact us on **01604 633 848** or **ypnorthamptonshire@aquarius.org.uk** to speak with one of our workers
- Your child **MUST** be aware of and consent to the referral being made.

“...being able to talk to someone openly about cannabis use has changed my approach to life”
NGAGE client

Drugs and the law

It is very important to have firm boundaries with young people in your care. If you knowingly allow a young person to consume drugs on your premises, including your garden, you are committing an offence. Good communication is important, and that includes being clear with your boundaries about what you will and will not allow in your home.

The Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 Section 8 states that a person commits an offence if, being the occupier or concerned in the management of any premises, they knowingly permit or suffer of any illegal drug use or possession to take place.

Cannabis Risks

As cannabis is not physically addictive, many people falsely believe you cannot develop a 'problem' with cannabis. However, problematic drug use is not just about physical addiction. Cannabis is psychologically addictive, and can affect all areas of a young person's life including physical and mental health, motivation and lifestyle, relationships, money, living situation, and ability to go to school or work. People trying to give up cannabis often find that their pre-existing dependence on cannabis to have fun, relax and socialise leads to cravings.

Cannabis is also an illegal drug, so young people using cannabis face the risk of a criminal record if they are caught.

Why should young people using cannabis access a drug service?

The majority of NGAGE service users solely smoke cannabis and do not use any other drugs. Everyone has a different reason for accessing a drug service. Some common reasons include:

- Suffering from mood swings
- Having arguments at home
- Being at risk of becoming homeless
- Struggling to concentrate and keep up with school work
- Risking temporary or permanent exclusion from school
- Involvement in petty crime
- Friendship groups changing due to drug use
- Escalating drug use leading to tenancies being at risk.

Alcohol Risks

Alcohol is a depressant, which means it slows down your body's responses.

This can feel good in the short term, but can lead to long term health and wellbeing effects. Alcohol misuse and binge drinking are becoming more common amongst young people, and NGAGE has seen an increase in the number of young people seeking support for alcohol use.

- Alcohol can leave you feeling out of control and behaving differently – slurring your words, losing your balance, vomiting, and becoming aggressive or upset
- Psychological and physical dependence on alcohol can creep up on you. Tolerance to alcohol gradually increases the more you drink, so you may find you need more alcohol to gain the same effects. It may appear that you are getting better at holding your drink when in fact you are developing a problem
- Serious over-drinking can lead to alcohol poisoning, which can put you in a coma or even kill you
- Alcohol is toxic to the body. It depresses the brain stem, which is responsible for life processes such as breathing, your heartbeat, and the swallowing reflex
- Alcohol use is a factor in serious societal problems such as personal injury, violent crime, domestic violence, and road traffic accidents.

“I learnt a lot about myself, especially under the influence of alcohol. I now know my limits and the need to take my time if I drink alcohol.”

NGAGE client

Practical tips to tackle alcohol use

- Start an alcohol diary to keep tabs on exactly how much you are drinking. Often people think they drink less than they really do
- Make a list of things you enjoy doing that DON'T involve alcohol – and arrange to do them more often!
- Alternate alcoholic drinks with soft drinks
- Swap high unit drinks with lower unit drinks
- Eat before you drink, and avoid mixing drinks
- If you're drinking to deal with problems or distract yourself, talk to someone. Alcohol can mask problems in the moment, but when you sober up the problem is still there and may seem worse
- If you want to cut down but struggle to drink less when out with friends, arrange to meet friends later than usual and leave earlier. This delays your first drink, and means you leave before getting extremely drunk
- Drinking can leave you vulnerable to assaults and robbery. Being a victim of an assault is NEVER your fault. However, alcohol can make you more of a target; stay with friends, and try not to walk home alone.

“...amazing to be able to talk to someone and let it out and get it out of my system”

NGAGE client

NGAGE Questionnaire

If you are unsure about whether a young person you know needs help with their substance use, or if they are telling you everything is okay, you can use this questionnaire with them to help highlight whether there are any concerns.

1. Are the effects of the drug/alcohol more important to you than the thrill or adventure of using the drug/alcohol?
2. Do you have a favourite drug/alcohol?
3. Do you ever use drugs/alcohol alone?
4. Do you use drugs/alcohol to suppress feeling sad, bored, lonely, confused or anxious?
5. Do you think a lot about drugs/alcohol and drug/alcohol use?
6. Do you plan your day to make sure you can use drugs/alcohol?
7. Do you need to use more drugs/alcohol to get effects now than before?
8. Do you feel depressed, irritable or anxious if you do not use?
9. Do you crave for or 'miss' your favourite drug/alcohol?

'Yes' answers score 1, and 'no' answers score 0. A total score of 5 or more is a strong indication that there may be a substance use problem and a further detailed assessment may be needed. Substance misuse in adolescence questionnaire adapted from SMAQ; SWADI, 1997

Contacting NGAGE

We cover the whole county, and have dedicated workers for **Northampton, Kettering, Corby, Daventry, Wellingborough, South Northamptonshire** and **East Northamptonshire**. Get in touch, and we can put you in contact with the relevant team member.

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Web: aquarius.org.uk/ngage

Tel: 01604 633 848

Email: ypnorthamptonshire@aquarius.org.uk

Facebook: [@aquariusnorthampton](https://www.facebook.com/aquariusnorthampton)

You can also contact a specific member of our team:



NGAGE is managed by **Aquarius**, a Midlands based charity that supports people to overcome the harms caused by alcohol, drugs and gambling.

Registered charity number: 1014305



Aquarius is part of **Recovery Focus**, a national group of charities inspiring recovery by providing bold, innovative services to support people on their personal recovery journeys.