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Drugs use link to mental health

This Drug Action Week (20 -26 June) Kids Helpline has revealed that the number of young people reporting drug and alcohol use who also show symptoms of mental illness has more than doubled since 2005.

Kids Helpline General Manager Wendy Protheroe said 12 per cent of young people contacting the national counselling service during 2009 about drug and alcohol use, also reported self-harming behaviours or had thought about suicide.

“In contrast, in 2005 only five per cent of those contacting us about drug and alcohol issues said they engaged in self-harming behaviour or had suicidal thoughts,” she said.

“This means incidences where drug and alcohol use and mental illness are linked has more than doubled since 2005.”

Drugs and alcohol, including illicit drugs such as amphetamines and legal drugs like pain-killers used inappropriately, can have harmful effects on the mind and body.

“It can be hard to tell which problem came first – the drugs or the mental illness,” Ms Protheroe said.

“Having a mental illness can make a person more likely to abuse drugs. While taking drugs may make their symptoms feel better in the short-term, it is just as likely that drug problems may trigger the first symptoms of mental illness.”

Ms Protheroe said adolescence is a time of experimentation and for many young people this can include trying drugs and alcohol.

“It’s important that we work together to give young people the best opportunities to grow into adults without drug and alcohol problems or mental health issues,” she said.

“It’s also important that we make sure that young people who do not use drugs and alcohol recognise the impact their healthy lifestyle has on a happy and safe future.

“Parents can assist by knowing about and understanding the harmful impacts of drug use, helping young people make informed choices about responsible alcohol and legal drug use, and being good role models.”

If you know someone who needs help, Kids Helpline provides 24 hour counselling services to young people aged 5 to 25 years. Call us free on 1800 55 1800 or visit www.kidshelp.com.au.

Kids Helpline is Australia’s only national counselling service for children and young people.

Media Contact: Kristy Porter 07 38671386/0434 077 439 or Regan Flor 07 38671390 or 0423 843 786