EDAS

REACH
DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES

SOLVENT ABUSE WORKBOOK

EDAS/REACH YOUNG PEOPLES DRUG & ALCOHOL SERVICES

This workbook is for completion on your own or with support.

Speak to your keyworker if you feel you may need support with this workbook. They will be able to advise on the best person to help.

What you need to know...

Solvent abuse (or **'volatile substance abuse' or 'VSA'**) is the inhalation of volatile chemicals found in everyday products such as cigarette lighter refills and aerosols, for the purpose of getting 'high'. It's also known as *sniffing*, *tooting*, *buzzing*, and *huffing*.

The term 'volatile substances' refers to gases or chemicals that evaporate at room temperature to form a vapour which can be inhaled.

Many people mistakenly assume that solvent abuse is safe because it involves the use of legal, everyday products. In fact, when they are inhaled, volatile substances **can kill suddenly and unpredictably, and there is no way to avoid this risk.**

These everyday products are safe only when they are used for their legitimate purpose and according to the manufacturers' instructions for use.

What Are Solvents?

Volatile substances (VS) are **nervous system depressants**. They slow down the activity of the brain and central nervous system and affect physical, mental and emotional responses.

Substances that **slow down** the chemical messaging in the brain (that depress it) are called **Depressants**, their street name is **Downers**. Alcohol also falls into this category.

Types of Solvents

Nitrous Oxide 'Laughing Gas' or 'Hippy Crack'

Nitrous oxide is a gas used medically as an **anaesthetic**. It's also used in catering as the propellant in whipped cream chargers.

When sold for recreational purposes, **nitrous oxide or 'laughing gas'** tends to come in small metal canisters ('whippits'). The gas is then decanted into a balloon from which it is inhaled.

Effects

Nitrous oxide acts as a depressant (not unlike alcohol), in that it slows down the body's system and leads to feelings of relaxation or happiness – hence the name, **'laughing gas'.**

Health Risks

Inhaling nitrous oxide from single balloons is not, as yet, associated with any serious harm but there have been deaths caused through accident and through heavy inhalation.

- Inhaling nitrous oxide through a mask runs the risk of suffocation/asphyxiation.
- People with heart conditions may be at higher risk of **sudden sniffing death syndrome.**
- Nitrous oxide, like other volatile substances can cause heart arrhythmia (skipped heartbeats).
- Nitrous oxide inactivates B12 reserves in the body.

Types of Solvents

Butane and other gases

Butane gas is the substance primarily associated with solvent abuse. **It is also the most dangerous and is associated with over half of all solvent abuse deaths.**

Butane is found in any number of household products. For example, butane is the gas used in **cigarette lighter refills.** Butane and propane are also used as the propellant in **aerosols** such as deodorants, hairsprays, spray paint, and so on.

Many aerosols in the **UK carry the Solvent Abuse Can Kill Instantly (SACKI)** warning on the back.

Effects

Butane is a **depressant** and users report a range of highs, including **euphoria and hallucination.** The effect is short-lived so chronic users will continue inhaling to prolong the effect.

Health Risks

- Butane can lead to a psychological addiction.
- Butane is highly flammable so there is a high risk of burns or explosions, particularly for smokers.
- Some butane users report suffering from slurred speech and slower reactions while they are using.
- Other people feel that butane abuse has contributed to longer-term physical or mental health issues.
- Death from choking, suffocation, asphyxiation, or a form of heart failure known as **'sudden sniffing death syndrome' (SSDS)**.

There is no 'safe' way to inhale butane gas that avoids the risk of SSDS.

Types of Solvents

Alkyl nitrites or 'poppers'

Poppers are usually a chemical called **isopropyl nitrite**, sold in small bottles as a liquid. They are volatile substances that give off a gas that can be inhaled at room temperature.

Small bottles of poppers are sold as 'room odorisers' or 'deodorisers' from a range of sex shops, clubs, market stalls, online, etc.

Effects

Inhaled nitrites are rapidly absorbed into the bloodstream and relax smooth muscle in the body. This allows blood vessels to dilate and blood pressure to drop, causing a headrush or 'high'.

This can lead to a **euphoric headrush,** but also to headaches, dizziness, and nausea. The effect is likely to last for less than 5 minutes.

They can enable or enhance sexual experience because they relax muscles in the anus and vagina.

Health Risks

- Because they lower blood pressure and increase heart rate they are riskier for people with heart conditions, abnormal blood pressure, anaemia, or glaucoma and for those who are pregnant.
- The most common after-effect of using poppers is headache and nausea.
- Isopropyl nitrite is being linked with a form of eye damage known as 'Poppers Maculopathy'.
- They may increase the chance of tearing during sex which makes it easier for HIV or Hep C to enter the bloodstream.

Types of Solvents

Glues, petrol and other solvents

In the 1980s and 1990s, glue was the most commonly abused product. This was due to the chemical **'toluene'** which was used in glues (and a range of other cosmetic and commercial products) as a solvent.

In response, the UK glue industry removed toluene from everyday, household glues, so they are no longer abusable.

Petrol is also associated with solvent abuse although this is more widespread in Australia and Canada than in the UK.

Effects

Inhaling petrol, solvents, or trade/industrial glues containing solvents can cause effects ranging from **dizziness** to **hallucinations**.

Very high concentrations can produce **anaesthesia**, **unconsciousness, and even death.**

Health Risks

- Some of the severe health risks involved in inhaling petrol, solvents, or trade/industrial glues containing solvents, include symptoms such as:

Nose bleeds, sores around the nose and mouth, nausea and vomiting, headaches, sinusitis, memory impairment, difficulties breathing, chest pain, fatigue, paranoia, anxiety, and depression.

- Repeated or chronic abuse can lead to long-term brain, lung, liver, and kidney damage.

Solvents and You

Why did you first start using solvents and what product(s) did you use?

Why did you continue to use them?

Does your using solvents put your health at risk? If so, how?

How does your using solvents affect you financially?

VSA

True or False

How much do you know?

1. It is illegal to abuse volatile substances

TRUE / FALSE

2. Most teenagers will experiment with VSA at some point in their lives

TRUE / FALSE

3. Most VSA deaths occur in individuals over the age of 18 years

TRUE / FALSE

4. Individuals can become physically addicted to volatile substances

TRUE / FALSE

5. Volatile substances make people more sociable and likely to interact

TRUE / FALSE

6. There are over 20 potential products of abuse in the average household

TRUE / FALSE

7. VS are similar in their effects on the Central Nervous System to alcohol

TRUE / FALSE

8. Long-term abuse of volatile substances may cause damage to internal organs

TRUE / FALSE

9. VS users can develop a tolerance and will need more to get the same effect

TRUE / FALSE

10. More boys inhale household products as drugs than girls

TRUE / FALSE

11. Young people who abuse products are more likely to take other drugs

TRUE / FALSE

12. Volatile substance abuse can cause more damage to the brain than cocaine abuse

TRUE / FALSE

13. The majority of people who die from VSA are male

TRUE / FALSE

14. VSA may cause spots and sores around the nose and mouth of the user

TRUE / FALSE

15. Volatile substances can induce hallucinations

TRUE / FALSE

16. Experimental users are at a lower risk of death

TRUE / FALSE

Check your answers at the back of the workbook!

Solvents and You

How does taking volatile substances make you feel?
Circle the ones that apply to you and add any others you would like:

Happy	Relaxed	Excited	Euphoric

It can also have physical and behavioural effects. Do any one of the following happen to you? Tick them if they do:

- [ ] make you feel 'drunk'
- [ ] make you have a lack of coordination, blurred vision, or slurred speech
- [ ] affect your mood in a negative way or make you have mood swings
- [ ] make you feel sick
- [ ] make you feel angry or aggressive
- [ ] make you feel depressed
- [ ] make you have problems remembering things
- [ ] causes you blackouts

Solvents affect everyone differently, but most people become:

- chilled out
- dream-like
- giggly

Does this happen to you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Some people become:

- dizzy
- drowsy
- confused
- anxious
- nauseated

Does this happen to you?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Solvents and You

The high is usually very short-lived. The more you use, the highs become less and the comedown gets bigger. Is this true for you? Explain the effects you experience from using.

Have you become more prone to depression, lack of confidence, experience more mood swings, and low self-esteem as your use increased? Please explain how you have changed since you started using.

Does your thinking become distorted the more you use? Please explain your answer.

Solvents and You

Has using volatile substances affected your health so far? If so, how?

Volatile substances may start out as a sociable drug but can develop into a habit. Did this happen to you? If so, how did it develop to become a habit?

How easy do you think it was/ will be to give up VS? Why do you think this was/is the case?

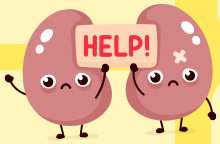
Did you become addicted quickly and were you surprised by this? If so, why?

Side Effects & Risks

Chronic abuse of volatile substances can cause damage to internal organs and contribute to the development of long-term physical health issues.

CANCER
Non-EEC regulated products could contain poorer quality gases which may be carcinogenic.

HEART FAILURE
Solvent use may stop the heart instantly or cause it to beat irregularly. Exercising after increases the risk of heart failure.



KIDNEY PROBLEMS
Products containing toluene impair the kidneys and in the long term kidney stones may develop.

EYE DAMAGE
The inhalation of poppers is causing a form of permanent eye damage known as 'Poppers Maculopathy.'

SUFFOCATION AND ASPHYXIATION
Spraying aerosols or butane gas down the throat can cause swelling of the windpipe, leading to asphyxiation. You also risk suffocation if you inhale from a plastic bag over your head. Some users die from passing out and choking on their own vomit.

RISK OF BURNS
Solvents can usually be highly flammable and carry a high risk of serious burn injuries.

PREGNANCY ISSUES
During pregnancy, VS could cause a syndrome of birth defects similar to Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS).

LUNG DAMAGE
Some VS are associated with lung damage and lung infections such as tuberculosis and bronchitis.

EAR/SENSE OF SMELL DAMAGE
Damage has been reported from prolonged use of substances inhaled through the nose, like glue or petrol.

SUDDEN SNIFFING DEATH SYNDROME
The biggest danger from misusing solvent products is **SUDDEN DEATH.** Inhaling these chemicals causes the heart to beat irregularly which can lead to a fatal heart attack called 'Sudden Sniffing Death Syndrome'.

Solvent abuse kills about 50 people a year in the UK, some the first time they use, some who have used for many years.

Some volatile substances are more dangerous than others and **butane gas (e.g. in aerosols and cigarette lighter refills) is currently the biggest killer.**

Solvents and You

Have you experienced any of these risks due to using VS? If so, which ones?

Do you have any concerns about your health after learning about the risks?

What are the risks of continuing to use volatile substances with regards to yourself?

What are the risks of continuing to use volatile substances with regards to other people?

What can you do to help overcome these risks?

The Cycle of Use

Most habits usually develop into a cycle, which is similar to a washing machine cycle (wash, rinse, spin, and back to wash again). Heavy volatile substances users often get cravings and find it hard not to take the drug.

You may bounce between the first two stages all night, or for days, but eventually, you will move through the cycle. If you want to give up solvents, you have to interrupt this cycle, usually between feeling okay and the mission.

Cravings and Urges

Cravings or ‘hanging out’ are strong urges to use solvents. They are normal. Almost everyone who stops or cuts down their use or can’t get any solvents for some reason has some cravings. **Can you think of a time when you were really craving to take it?**

Cravings tend to happen in events or situations that you have previously associated with using or 'triggers'. Examples of ‘triggers’ could be: experiencing a particular emotion, specific people or places, a particular time of day, boredom, and isolation.

Cravings only get stronger if you give in and ‘feed’ them. They will eventually weaken, die down and go away if you don’t give in to them.

You may have noticed that cravings tend to last only a short time. **Have there been times when you couldn’t take solvents when you had a strong urge to do it? Did the urge pass?**

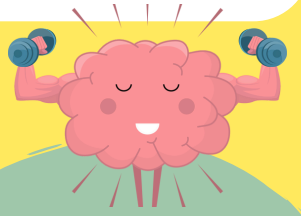
The key point is that cravings generally last between 30–60 minutes. This is true for everybody, but few people give themselves the chance to prove it.

Handling Cravings/Urges

Urges usually come and go in waves and so it is important to ride them out. This is called **urge surfing**. Imagine you are a surfer on a board riding a wave – you need to stay on that board and ride that wave until it subsides without falling off. Therefore, if your urges feel intense, try to distract yourself for a little while and you will soon notice that the worst part has passed. Each time you overcome a craving, it makes the craving weaker next time and makes you stronger as your technique for resisting improves. Knowing that they are short-term will help you handle them. If you ride them out, they will weaken.

If your cravings are feeling strong try:

Distracting: do something unrelated to using.
Delaying: check the time and make a deal with yourself not to use for at least half an hour.
De-stressing: it’s important to take time to relax and unwind, e.g. have a bath, walk, or listen to music.
Keeping the craving in perspective: don’t get carried away.
Remember the negatives: often when having cravings people tend to remember only the positive effects of taking solvents and forget the negatives.



You win every time you beat your craving. It makes the craving weaker next time and makes you more confident you can resist to use.

Solvents and You

Triggers & High-Risk Situations

Another useful strategy for handling cravings/urges is to avoid situations with strong personal triggers.

Triggers are feelings or events that cause strong thoughts about wanting to take solvents. They can be internal (certain moods or feelings) or external (sitting down to watch TV, listening to music, or having a visit from friends).

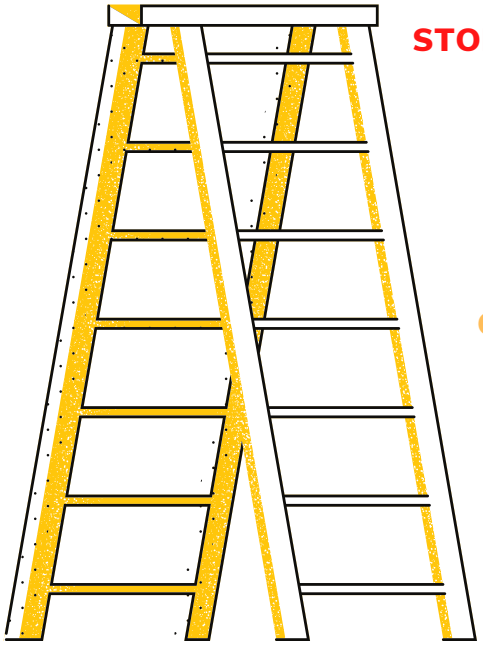
High-risk situations include times and places where you usually take solvents. For example, if you usually do it with certain friends, then you will probably feel like a doing it whenever you are with them.

What are your internal (thoughts and feelings) high-risk situations and triggers?
e.g. bored, stressed, angry...

What are your external (situations and places) high-risk situations and triggers?
e.g. someone offers me some VS to use, seeing my friends use VS, watching a video

Solvents and You

THE LADDER OF CHANGE



STOP USING

CONTROL USING

CONTINUE AS NORMAL

Where do you see yourself on the ladder?

Where would you like to be on the ladder and why?

How will you get there?

Solvents and You

COST BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Using this **Decision-Making Model** you can learn to think through all aspects of why you are making a decision to change or to not change.

The purpose of this model is for you to **become more aware** than you may be now so that you can make an **'informed choice.'** Having a choice is really important because it means that you have real power in your life.

You can easily learn how to change things that aren't so good for you and take responsibility for your actions.

List the **POSITIVES** of taking solvents (e.g. what are the benefits and rewards for taking it)	List the **NEGATIVES** of taking solvents (e.g. what don't you like about it during or afterwards, what bad consequences happen)
List the **POSITIVES** of **NOT** taking solvents (e.g. what **do** you like about **not** taking it)	List the **NEGATIVES** of **NOT** taking solvents (e.g. what **don't** you like about **not** taking it or what bad things happen)

Reduce the Risks

There is no **safe form** to take solvents that will take away the risk of death from heart failure. This risk will always be present but, if you choose to use, please keep the following information in mind to minimise any health risks.

Tolerance

Tolerance of solvents can build up within a few weeks in regular users, so you might need to use more to achieve the same effects. This reverts back to normal within a few days of stopping.

Addiction

It may be possible to become psychologically dependent on volatile substances, meaning the users develop an increased desire to keep using despite any harms they experience.

Don't Mix With Alcohol or Other Drugs

Every time you mix drugs together you take on new risks.

Glues, gases, solvents and aerosols produce a similar effect to alcohol, so mixing them together can have serious consequences. The effects are increased and can lead to unconsciousness and death.

Follow this Harm Reduction Advice:

- Be as informed as possible, particularly if you have pre-existing health conditions.
- Don't do it alone. There is always a risk of death and someone with you can call an ambulance.
- Avoid spraying directly into the mouth.
- Don't smoke or light cigarettes. All volatile substances are highly flammable
- Make sure people know where you are. Stay in a safe environment - away from roads, heights, or anywhere you could have an accident.
- Don't argue with, chase, or excite someone who is high on gases/solvents. Raising their adrenaline levels increases their risk of death.
- Be careful where you get your nitrous oxide from. Make sure you are not being. supplied with a more dangerous gas-like butane.
- Don’t use a mask or put a plastic bag over your head to inhale.
- Don’t drive a vehicle while under the influence of any volatile substance. There have been fatal accidents linked to their misuse (especially nitrous oxide).
- Never swallow poppers – they’re toxic and can kill.
- If a solvent comes into contact with eyes or skin. If this happens, rinse with plenty of water and get medical advice as they can cause medical burns.
- If using poppers for sex, always use a condom.

Solvents and You

CHANGE PLAN SHEET

What do I want to change (this could be anything!)	
The reasons I want to do this are:	
To do this, I will need to take these actions	
People who could support me in this area	
What are my possible obstacles to change?	
How will I deal with obstacles?	
I will know my plan is working when....	

Relapse Prevention

'Relapses' and 'slips'

A **relapse** is when you return to your old level of VS use. A **slip** is a 'one-off' case of using once, which does not necessarily mean you will have a full relapse.

It is quite common to make mistakes when you begin learning a new skill. Changing your VS use is no different, and you may make the odd mistake.

If you do have a slip it is important to remember that this doesn't mean you have failed, or you are unable to change or can let yourself slip into a full relapse. What is important to long-term success is how you handle the slip. How to handle it will depend on how it happened. The slip may have been intentional or unintentional.

Intentional Slips

Slips can happen 'on purpose' for a couple of reasons. You may tell yourself that you are tired of sticking to your plan and want a night off. Or you may decide that you deserve a reward (to use once) for what you've achieved so far, or it is just too hard. If this happens to you, think carefully about your reasons for wanting to change.

- consider your reasons for changing. How important are these to you?
- remind yourself that each slip reduces your chances of long-term success. Your craving will return more strongly, which means more hard work

Unintentional Slips

You may have a slip, despite your best intentions, because you find yourself in a high-risk situation with your guard down. If you do, look at your strategies to see what can be improved.

- did you just slip into an old habit again without thinking?
- are you finding some high-risk situations too hard right now?
- is there a better way of dealing with them?

Plan ahead for dealing with a slip

A slip can feel like a crisis and getting back to your chosen goal will take some effort. Here are some things to do.

<u>If you have a slip you can:</u>

- **get rid of the solvent products and get away from the situation where you used**
- **remind yourself that one use or even a day of using doesn't have to result in a full-blown relapse**
- **remember that feelings of guilt or blame will pass**
- **call for help from someone you trust**
- **look at the slip to see what triggers there were and your reaction to them**
- **think about what you expected using solvents to change or provide**
- **set up a plan for coping with similar situations in the future**

VSA
True or False

How much do you know?

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TRUE / FALSE

2. Most teenagers will experiment with VSA at some point in their lives

TRUE / FALSE

3. Most VSA deaths occur in individuals over the age of 18 years

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4. Individuals can become physically addicted to volatile substances

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TRUE / FALSE

15. Volatile substances can induce hallucinations

TRUE / FALSE

16. Experimental users are at a lower risk of death

TRUE / FALSE

Check your answers at the back of the workbook!

My Notes

Need Support?

For further support and advice contact the **EDAS/Reach Young Peoples team. We are here to help!**

We are a specialist free and confidential alcohol and drugs support service for under 25s living in the county of Dorset. We offer non-judgemental advice and information about how to keep safe and discuss potential treatment and support options.

Get in touch with us on 01202 741414 or 0800 0434656 - option 2.

EDAS

REACH

DRUG AND ALCOHOL SERVICES

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