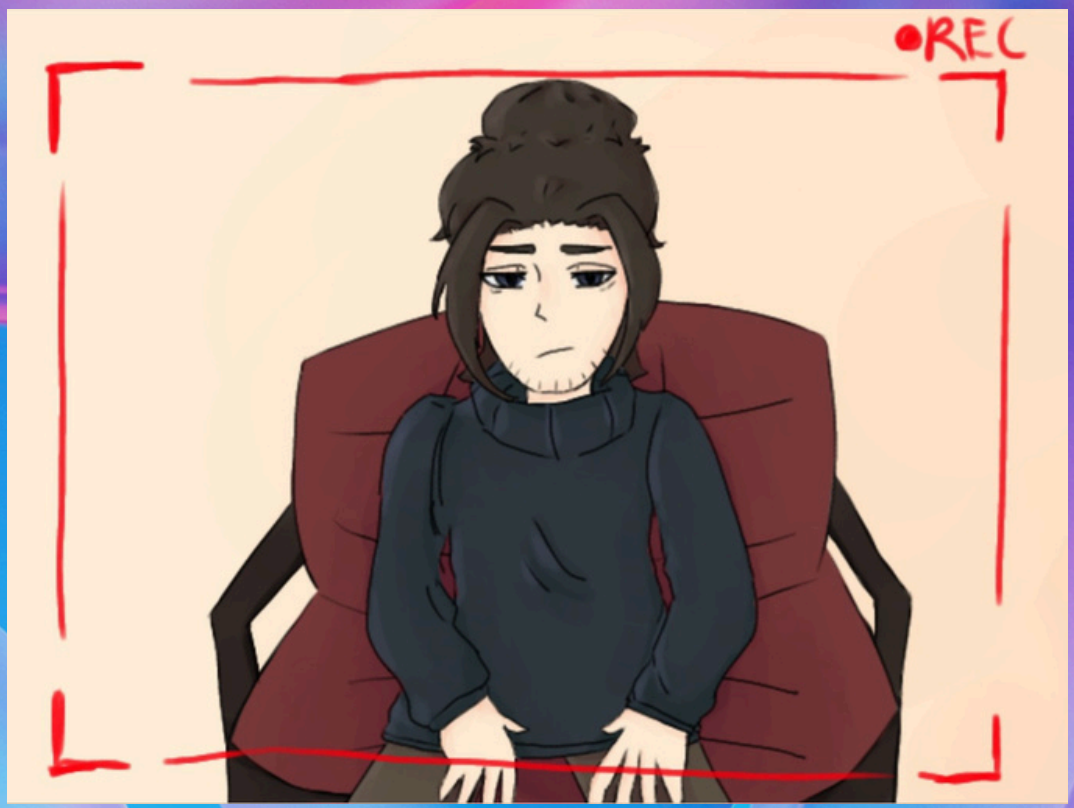
Ket to the Point

Parents and Carers Handbook



Find out more, access resources and get involved

SCAN ME

SPACE

In partnership with:

BARNSLEY Metropolitan Borough Council

BARNSLEY RECOVERY STEPS

KETAMINE

A Parent & Carer Guide

Understanding harm. Keeping conversations open. Getting support in Barnsley.

This guide is for parents and carers who are worried about a young person using ketamine. For the purposes of this guide, young person/ child relates to any young person aged 10 to 18 years.

Introduction

Finding out, or worrying, that a young person may be using ketamine can feel like a lot to take in. You may have questions about their health, what to say, or what to do next. This guide gives clear information and practical ideas to help you take things one step at a time.

Why you may be reading this guide.

You may be reading this because you have noticed a change, your young person has told you they are using ketamine, someone else has raised a concern, or you simply want to know more. You may feel worried, unsure, frustrated or confused. Whatever has brought you here, wanting to understand and support your young person is an important first step.

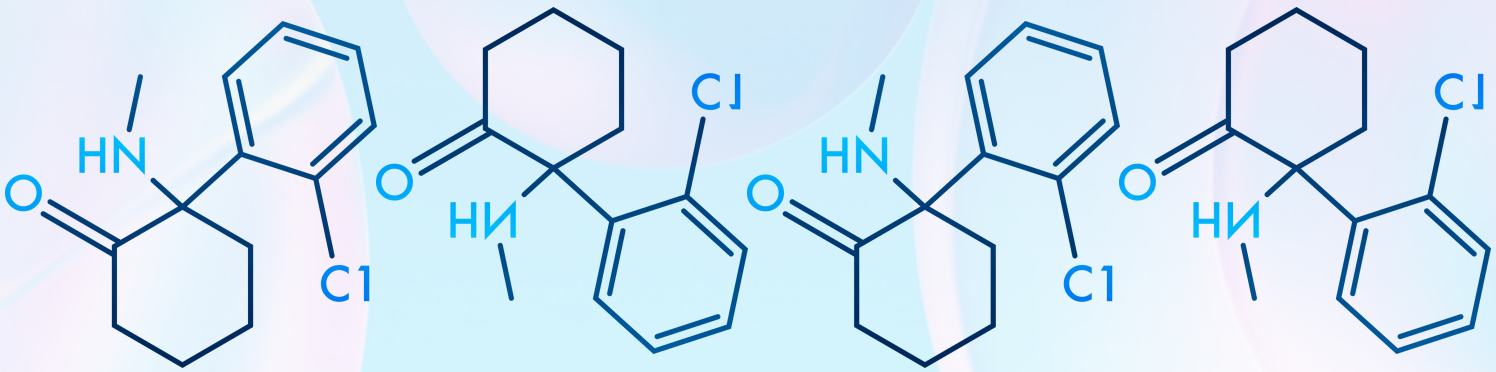
A message for you...

You do not need to have all the answers. You do not have to get every conversation right. Staying calm, listening and letting your young person know you care can make a difference. You can support them even if they are not ready to stop or change their ketamine use. You can also get support for yourself. It is important to know you are not on your own.

How to use this guide

- Read one page at a time.
- Write down what you notice, what you want to say, and who can help.
- Use the contact page when you want advice for your young person or for yourself.

This guide gives information and is not a diagnosis. If you are worried about symptoms, speak to a health professional.



TIPS: You do not have to fix everything today.

Staying calm, listening and keeping the door open can help. A young person can get support even if they are not ready to stop using ketamine.

What Is Ketamine?

Ketamine is a medicine used by doctors as an anaesthetic and for pain. Some people use ketamine outside medical care. It can change what they see, hear and feel. It can make them feel separate from their body or the world around them.

Why is Ketamine a Growing Concern?

Ketamine use and related health harms have increased in recent years. Young adults aged 18 to 24 have the highest rates of use, and use amongst school-age children, while still lower than alcohol or cannabis, has risen. More people are now seeking treatment for ketamine problems than a decade ago.

A Short History and The Law

Ketamine was developed in the 1960s and has long been used as an anaesthetic and as pain medicine. Non-medical use became more common in UK club settings in the 1990s. It became a Class C controlled drug in 2006 and was reclassified as Class B in 2014. It is illegal to possess, supply or use ketamine without lawful authority or a prescription.

What Might Happen After Use?

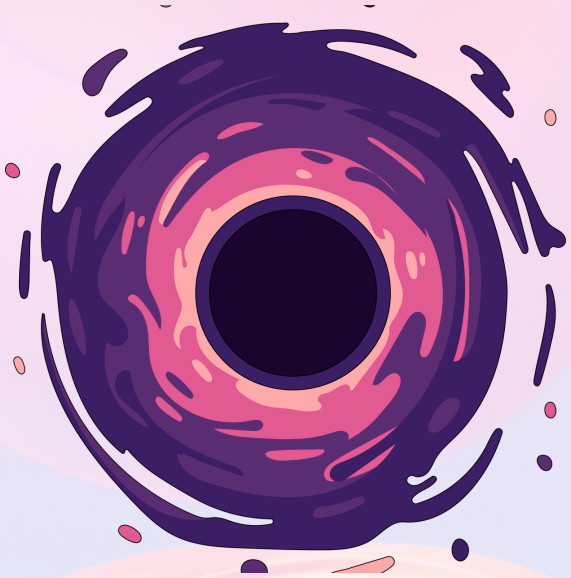
- Dizziness or poor balance
- Feeling confused or very sleepy
- Finding it hard to walk, talk or think clearly
- Feeling sick or being sick
- Feeling very separate from the body or surroundings



Effects some people seek	Effects that can create risk
Relaxation / wellbeing	Poor coordination or abnormal movements
Detachment / altered perception	Confusion, agitation or anxiety
Euphoria / sensory changes	Hallucinations or profound dissociation
Reduced awareness of pain	Reduced consciousness / prolonged sedation

Other Effects to Know About

Ketamine can change sight, sound and the sense of time. It can cause hallucinations, nausea, agitation, numbness, heavy muscles, slow or slurred speech, memory gaps, confusion and loss of control. Some people also experience low mood or depression. A very intense dissociative state is sometimes called a “K-hole”. The person may be very confused, unable to move normally or very disconnected from reality, which can increase the risk of accidents or being harmed by others.



Street drugs can be unpredictable. You cannot know the strength or contents just by looking at a powder or being told what’s in it by a dealer.

Why Does Early Support Matter?

The earlier a young person gets support, the sooner adults can assess health problems, understand what is driving the use and help stop problems getting worse. Some UK services are now seeing use begin in the early teenage years. Starting ketamine at a younger age is also a concern.

What May be Going on Underneath?

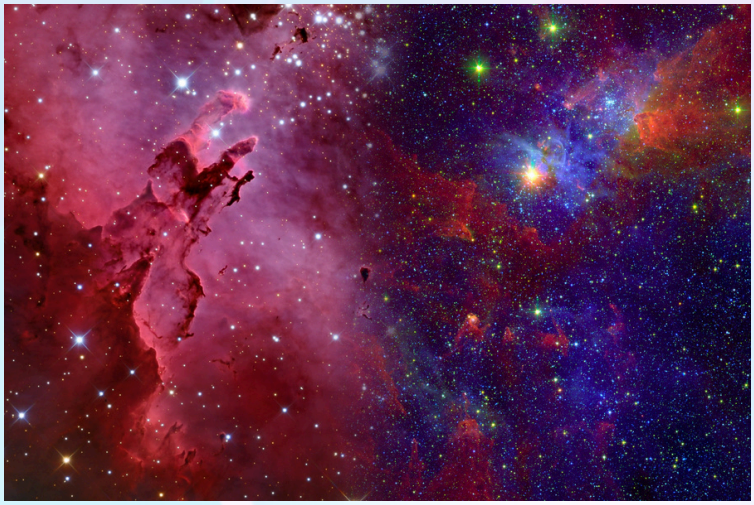


Drug use is not always just about the drug. A young person may be trying to cope with stress, worry, low mood, trauma, conflict at home, school pressure, friendship problems, feeling different or left out, boredom, neurodiversity, exploitation, sleep problems or other difficulties. Ask what ketamine is doing for them, not only how much they use or how often.

Young people may use ketamine for different reasons. This can include parties, curiosity, wanting to change how they feel, or trying to cope with pain, stress or mental health difficulties. Understanding the reason can help you have a more useful conversation.

Signs You May Notice...h

After recent use, you might notice unsteady movement, slow or slurred speech, confusion, poor responses, memory problems or a very “spaced out” appearance. With regular use there may be more toilet trips or bladder complaints, changes in mood, memory or concentration, and pulling away from usual activities. These signs can have other causes, so use them to start a conversation, not to make an accusation.



It Is Important To Take Time To Reflect: What Has Changed Lately?

Think about home life, school or college, friends, sleep, mood, money and health. What have I noticed about my child?

_____

_____

_____

_____

What I already know or want to ask...

_____

_____

_____

_____

TIPS - 'Start a conversation'

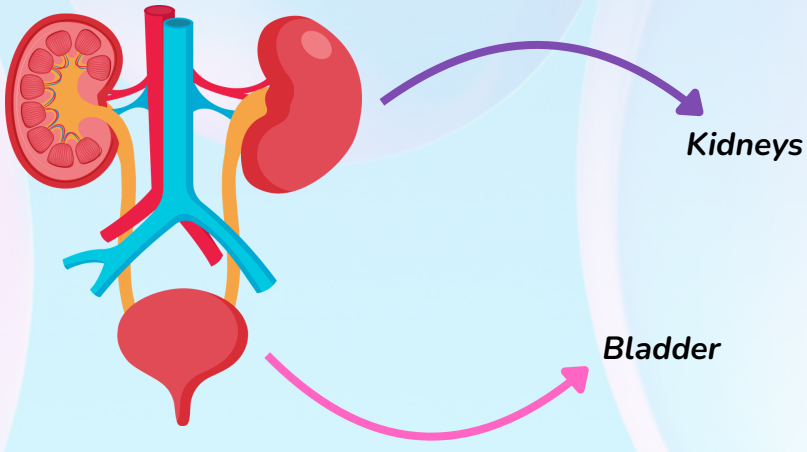
Try asking “I want to understand what ketamine does for you.” Avoid labels such as “addict”. Talk about the person, not just the drug.

The Bladder: Why Does It Matter?

Your kidneys make urine (pee). Tubes carry it to your bladder. Your bladder stores the urine until you go to the toilet.

Ketamine can harm the bladder and other parts of the urinary system. It can make the bladder sore and stiff, so it cannot hold as much urine. This can mean needing the toilet very often, having to rush to the toilet, or leaking urine. Sometimes bladder control can become so difficult that a person needs to wear incontinence pads.

If the damage gets worse, it can become very painful and can affect other parts of the urinary system, including the kidneys. Getting help early is important.



Early Warning Signs



- Needing to pee much more often, including at night
- A sudden need to pee or leaking urine
- Burning or pain when peeing
- Pain low down in the tummy, pelvis or bladder area
- Blood in the urine

These symptoms should always be taken seriously. Encourage your young person to speak to a health professional. Getting help early gives them the best chance of getting the right care and preventing further harm.

How Bladder Harm Can Get Worse?

In the short term... Bladder irritation can cause pain, urgency and frequent trips to the toilet. Sleep, school, work and going out can become harder.

Over time... With continued or frequent use, bladder damage can become severe, leading to loss of bladder control and possible incontinence. The bladder may become smaller and less able to stretch. People can also develop long-lasting abdominal pain, sometimes called “K-cramps”. The wider urinary tract can be harmed. In serious cases, kidney damage and harm to the liver can happen. Severe bladder damage can sometimes need major treatment or surgery. Some damage can last even after ketamine use stops.

Other Longer-Term Effects

Regular ketamine use can also be linked with anxiety, low mood, problems with memory and focus, tolerance and dependence. Tolerance means needing more to get the same effect. Dependence can mean finding it hard to cut down or feeling that ketamine is needed to cope. As ketamine can reduce pain, injuries or illness may also be missed.

Stopping ketamine gives the bladder the best chance to improve. Some people still need treatment. A doctor or specialist should assess ongoing symptoms.

TIPS TO SUPPORT ‘Having a Bladder Related Conversation.’

“I know this can feel embarrassing. Have you noticed pain when you pee, needing the toilet more, leaking, or blood in your pee?” Ketamine can hide pain for a while. A person may use again because they hurt, even when ketamine may be adding to the problem.
Try saying: “I believe your pain. Let’s get it checked out to make sure.”



Having A Conversation

A calm conversation can help you stay connected with your child. Try to listen and understand what is happening for them, while being honest about your concerns for their safety.

Honest conversations build trust

You do not need the perfect words. Being honest, calm and curious can make it safer for your child to tell you what is really happening.

Getting alongside

Young people often switch off if they feel preached to or told what to do. Try to get alongside them instead. Be curious about what is happening for them. Listen before giving advice. You can share your worries and set safe boundaries while still showing that their views matter.

Before you talk

- Choose a calm, private time
- Think about what you have noticed, not what you assume
- Plan one or two points. You do not need to say everything at once



Try these sentences

- “I care about you. I am not here to catch you out.”
- “Can I tell you what I have noticed?”
- “What do you like about ketamine? What is getting difficult?”
- “Have you noticed any changes in your bladder or health?”
- “What would make things a little safer this week?”

Reassuring messages you can say

“You are not in trouble with me.”
“Thank you for telling me.”
“We can work this out together.”
“I care about you, even when we disagree.”

My opening sentence _____

TIPS

Try: “Help me understand what this is like for you.” Listen first. Ask before offering advice. Thank them for talking with you. You can be clear about safety without turning the conversation into a lecture.

What Happens If They Do Not Want To Change?

A Young person may not be ready to cut down, stop or stop experimenting. You can still care. Keep talking and encourage them to seek support. Support does not have to wait for a promise to stop.

Keep the door open

- Ask what feels realistic to them
- Focus on immediate health and safety
- Offer help to contact SPACE, or a GP
- Keep checking in. One “no” does not mean “never”
- Set clear, calm family boundaries. Avoid threats you cannot keep
- Seek support for yourself from SPACE or another professional working with your family network

What am I worried about? What can I do?

What is working well?

Think about what strengths I see in my child. Who do they trust? What helps them cope without ketamine?

TIPS TO GUIDE YOU. If they say “I’m not stopping”

“I hear you. I am still worried about your health, and I still want to help. You do not have to agree to stop for us to talk to someone about keeping you safe.”



Reducing Harm

Reducing Harm at Home



Try to keep conversations focused on care and safety rather than punishment. Let your young person know that they can come to you if they are worried, need help or become unwell. It can help to agree a simple safety plan together, such as who they can call, how they can get home safely and what you will do if they need medical help. Keep medicines at home stored safely.



If your young person is continuing to use ketamine, encourage them to think about these ways of staying safer:

- **Try not to use alone.** Being with people they trust means someone can get help if something goes wrong.
- **Avoid mixing ketamine with alcohol, opioids or benzodiazepines.** Mixing substances can make someone very sleepy or unwell and can increase the risk of overdose.
- **Think about the place they are in.** Ketamine can affect balance, awareness and judgement. Encourage them to stay away from driving, cycling, swimming, busy roads, heights or other situations where they could be injured.
- **Pay attention to bladder symptoms.** Pain when peeing, needing the toilet much more often, suddenly needing to go, leaking urine or blood in the urine should not be ignored. Encourage them to get medical advice.
- **Notice if ketamine use is becoming more frequent.** If it is, encourage your young person to talk to someone they trust and consider getting support. Longer gaps between use can reduce exposure, but the safest option is not to use ketamine.



Drinking extra water does not prevent ketamine from damaging the bladder. If your young person has bladder symptoms, encourage them to get them checked. Reducing or stopping ketamine gives the bladder the best chance to recover.



TIPS TO SUPPORT - Take one small step together

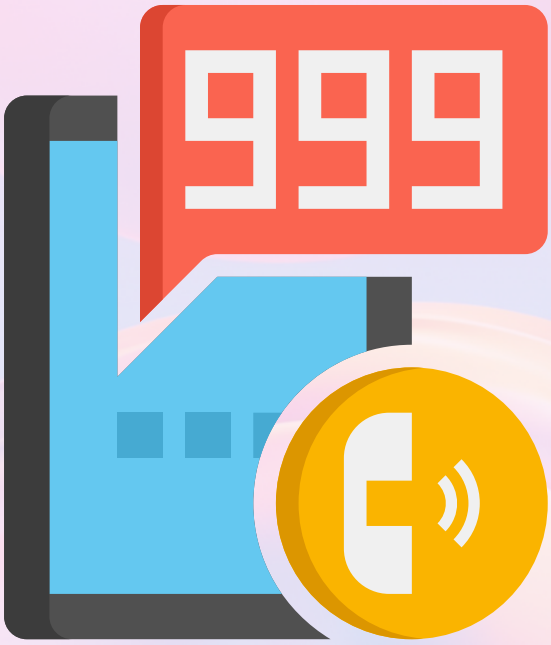
Ask: “Is there one thing that could make things safer?”
This keeps the conversation practical without pretending use is risk-free.

When Your Child Becomes Very Unwell

It can be frightening if your young person becomes very unwell after using ketamine. Serious reactions can happen, particularly if ketamine has been mixed with alcohol or other drugs that make them sleepy.

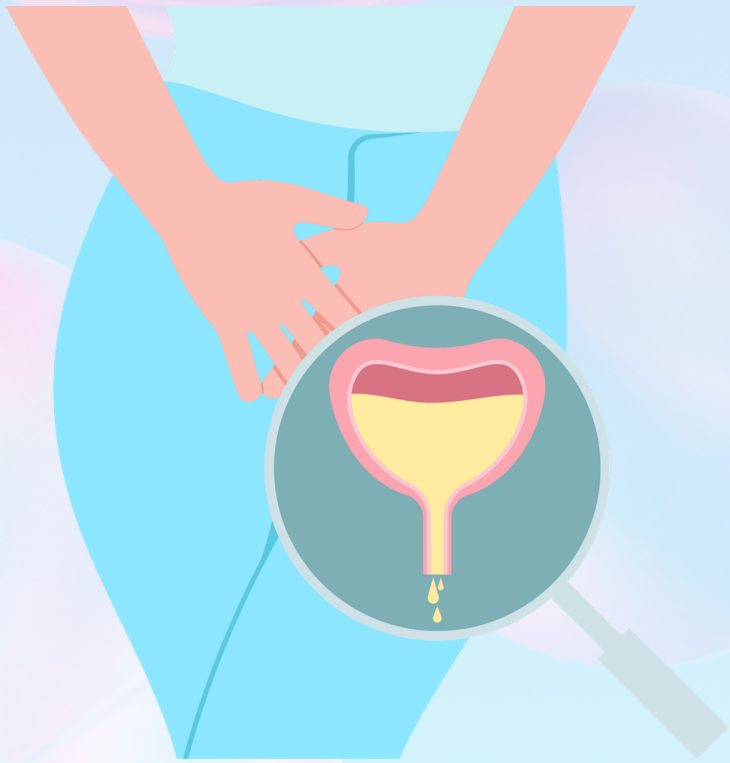
Call 999 now if:

- They are unconscious or cannot be woken
- They have serious trouble breathing
- They have a seizure or convulsion
- You think they are seriously unwell or in immediate danger



Stay with them if it is safe to do so. Tell the ambulance team honestly what you know about any drugs, alcohol or medicines they may have taken. This information can help them give the right care. Follow the advice given by the emergency services.

Trust your instincts. If something does not feel right or you are worried about their immediate safety, it is OK to ask for urgent help.



When to Arrange Health Advice

Not every health problem is an emergency, but bladder and urinary symptoms should not be ignored.

Encourage your young person to speak to a GP or another appropriate health professional if they have:

- Pain or burning when peeing
- A need to pee much more often
- A sudden or urgent need to pee
- Leaking urine or difficulty controlling their bladder
- Blood in their urine
- Pain around the bladder, pelvis or lower tummy
- Any new symptoms or symptoms that are getting worse

If you are unsure how quickly they need medical help, NHS 111 can advise you. Call 999 if you think it is a life-threatening emergency.

Tips to Support: Healthcare does not have to wait

Your young person does not have to be ready to stop using ketamine before getting help with their health.
Try saying: "I'm not here to judge you. I'm worried about how you're feeling and I'd like us to get it checked."

Working With School Or College

School or college can be an important part of your young person's support network. It may help to talk with them about whether there is an adult there they know and trust.

Where possible, involve your child in deciding what is shared and who it is shared with. Working together can help them feel supported rather than talked about. If you have concerns about their health or safety, speak to the appropriate member of staff. If you believe they are being harmed or are in immediate danger, seek urgent safeguarding help.



Ketamine Support In Barnsley

Support can start whether the goal is to stay safer, cut down, stop ketamine or simply understand what is happening. The approach is person-centred and does not rely on pressure.

Under 18s: SPACE

SPACE is Barnsley's free, confidential and voluntary specialist drug and alcohol service for young people aged 10 to 18 years old. Meetings can take place at school, college, a youth provision, home or another place that feels comfortable.

Ketamine-related support from SPACE

- One-to-one support and a safe place to talk about ketamine
- Early and brief interventions, harm-reduction advice and staying safer
- Assessment of ketamine use alongside physical health, emotional wellbeing, safety, relationships, family life, education and support networks
- Exploring patterns, triggers, cravings and what may be feeding the use
- Coping strategies and personalised support plans
- Risk assessment and safety planning where needed
- Support to reduce ketamine or work towards stopping when ready



- Group work and wider health support where appropriate
- Support, advice and guidance for parents and carers, even if the young person is not ready to engage
- Residential rehabilitation is not part of the under-18 ketamine treatment pathway as this pathway doesn't exist for under 18s right now. SPACE will instead provide coordinated age-appropriate community-based support around the young person's individual needs

How you can help

Listen without judgement. Talk positively about SPACE. Offer to help with the first contact. Ask what would make support easier. Keep checking in and notice strengths or small steps, including after a missed appointment.



Adults 18+: Barnsley Recovery Steps

Barnsley Recovery Steps provides free, confidential and non-judgemental support for adults 18+ living in Barnsley. Treatment is built around what the person wants to change.

Ketamine-related support from Barnsley Recovery Steps

- A comprehensive assessment of ketamine and other substance use, physical health, mental health and wellbeing and social circumstances
- Fast-track support for people who want to reduce use or stay safer
- Personalised care planning with a Recovery Navigator
- One-to-one work to reduce use, understand triggers, manage cravings and make changes
- Dedicated ketamine group support, mutual aid and peer-led ketamine support
- Joint ketamine health support with Barnsley Hospital Urology for bladder and urinary problems, including tailored harm reduction

BARNSLEY RECOVERY STEPS

- Health checks, with clinical input and blood tests where appropriate
- Specialist support where mental health and substance use needs overlap
- Needle and syringe provision for adults, with sterile equipment, blood-borne virus testing and harm-reduction advice
- Referrals and help with housing, education, employment, community groups and building a recovery network
- For adults who require more intensive treatment, we offer a clinical assessment of the person's needs and suitability to determine whether detoxification is needed and explore community and residential rehabilitation options to form part of the wider Barnsley Recovery Steps treatment offer

How you can help

Ask: "What would you like some help or support with at the moment?" Offer help to make contact if they want it. Encourage medical support for bladder or other health problems. Notice progress in whatever form it takes and stay connected through setbacks.

TIPS TO SUPPORT: Progress is personal

A first step might be talking openly, getting bladder symptoms checked, reducing harm or reducing use. Start where they are and build from there.



Support For You, The Parent Or Carer

You matter too. Barnsley Recovery Steps can support you if you are affected by your young person's drug use. Ask about the Family and Concerned Other worker. You can get advice and support even if your young person is not ready to get help.

Contact Barnsley Recovery Steps / SPACE

- Phone: 01226 779066
- SPACE Duty Worker: 07483 367805
- Email: brs.referrals@waythrough.org.uk
- Website: barnsleyrecoverysteps.org.uk
- Main Hub: Mclintocks, 4th floor, Summer Lane, Barnsley



Other trusted information

FRANK: 0800 77 66 00 for information about ketamine and other drugs.
Adfam: information and support for families affected by drug or alcohol use.

My Next Steps

You do not need to change everything at once. **One small step is enough to begin. Things to think about:**

Who does my young person trust?

What support might help my young person or me?

One small step we could take together:

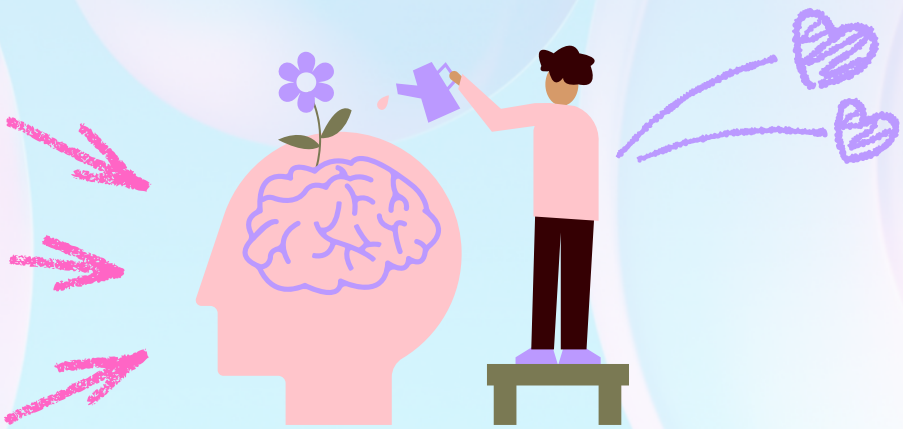
A Message To Take With You

You do not have to have all the answers or get every conversation right. What matters is letting your young person know that you care and that they do not have to face this alone.

Change can take time. Keep listening, notice their strengths and recognise the small steps along the way. Remember to look after yourself too. **You and your young person both deserve support. Take things one conversation and one step at a time.**

TIPS TO SUPPORT: Looking After You Matters Too

Getting support for yourself does not mean you are giving up on your young person. Looking after yourself can help you manage worry, think about boundaries and stay connected. You matter too.



Case Study Of A Parent Affected By Ketamine Use

Susan is a retired nurse who has returned to work to support her three adult children, who all live at home and experience ketamine use. She came to us feeling overwhelmed by repeated requests for money, which were affecting her financial security and emotional wellbeing. She wanted support to manage these pressures and understand how to better support her children while looking after herself.

Family Circumstances

Susan's daughter, Faye, 37, has a long history of ketamine use and recently left rehabilitation early. Susan believes she has not returned to ketamine use and is attending support groups at Mclintocks. Susan also feels upset about limited contact with her granddaughter and is unsure how her daughter continuing to live at home affects this.

Susan's son, Elliott, 32, also uses ketamine. Susan worries about his wellbeing, particularly following an incident involving intoxication and police attendance. Although he is linked with Recovery Steps, she is unsure how regularly he attends appointments.

Susan's son, Ben, 31, is experiencing poor mental health, and Susan is particularly worried about his safety and the possibility of him harming himself. He is reportedly attending appointments at Burleigh Court.

These circumstances contribute to Susan's ongoing worry about her children and their recovery.

Impact on Susan

Susan described feeling emotionally and financially overwhelmed, particularly around Christmas due to family tensions and limited contact with her granddaughter. She has returned to work to help fund her adult children's ketamine use and finds it difficult to refuse repeated requests for money. During her appointment, Susan explored how this pressure affects her wellbeing, the potential for financial and emotional abuse, and the importance of setting boundaries to protect herself.



Interventions and Support Provided

Understanding enabling behaviours: Discussion focused on the difference between supporting a loved one and providing assistance that may unintentionally sustain harmful behaviour. Susan demonstrated insight into how repeatedly giving her children money may enable their continued substance use, despite her intentions to help them.

Establishing boundaries: Susan was encouraged to consider the importance of setting clear and consistent financial boundaries. The discussion emphasised that her children are adults and that they need opportunities to take responsibility for their own decisions and recovery.

Recognising financial and emotional abuse: The potential impact of repeated financial demands and emotional pressure was discussed. Susan was supported to recognise that she has a right to protect her finances, emotional wellbeing, and personal needs.

Managing guilt and responsibility: Susan's feelings of regret about collecting Faye from rehabilitation were acknowledged. The discussion provided an opportunity to reflect on the limits of her responsibility for her adult children's choices and the importance of allowing them to engage with their own recovery journeys.

Identifying support needs and concerns: Susan's worries about Elliott's substance use, Faye's recovery, and Ben's mental health were explored. The importance of maintaining appropriate professional support and recognising potential risks was highlighted.



Identified Needs and Ongoing Considerations

The following areas may benefit from further exploration during future appointments:

- **Emotional wellbeing:** Supporting Susan to manage stress, anxiety, guilt, and the emotional impact of living with three adult children experiencing substance use.
- **Financial stability:** Exploring practical strategies to protect her income and reduce the financial burden associated with funding her children's substance use.
- **Healthy boundaries:** Supporting Susan to develop and maintain consistent boundaries around money, expectations, and responsibilities within the family home.
- **Family relationships:** Exploring the emotional impact of the current family situation, including Susan's distress regarding limited contact with her granddaughter.
- **Peer and specialist support:** Identifying appropriate family support groups and services for relatives affected by another person's substance use.
- **Children's recovery support:** Encouraging appropriate engagement with existing recovery services, while recognising that each adult child is responsible for their own treatment decisions.
- **Mental health and safety:** Further exploring Susan's concerns about Ben's mental health and potential risk of self-harm, with appropriate professional assessment and escalation if an immediate safety concern is identified.