

## A COSTLY HIGH



Imagined by Shutterstock/Burmes

With teenagers open to the lure of drug abuse, teachers and guardians need to stay informed to spot the warning signs. **BRINDA SARKAR** reports on an awareness meet at a school

**H**ow can adolescents be kept away from drugs? The answer lies not in scare tactics but in sensitive handling — and in equipping those closest to them with the right tools. With this in mind, The Newtown School hosted a workshop on drug awareness — not for students, but for teachers.

“Let’s not label any student as ‘good’ or ‘bad’. These are subjective terms,” said principal Satabdi Bhattacharjee. “Adolescents are at a vulnerable age. With hormones raging, they’re eager to explore. As mentors, our role is to grant them freedom, but also to stay alert for red flags. We wanted our teachers to be empowered with the latest insights from experts to protect our students.”

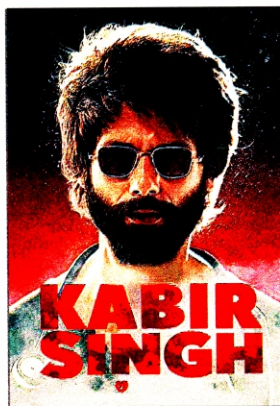
The workshop was jointly organised by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB, Calcutta zone), under the ministry of home affairs, and the Department of Psychiatric Social Work, Institute of Psychiatry-Centre of Excellence in Mental Health, state government, in collaboration with The Newtown School.

S. N. Prasad, inspector at the NCB, said drug abuse was a threat especially among students of Classes XI, XII and college-goers. And he appreciated the teachers’ baseline awareness.

### Stay ahead

At first, the teachers were embarrassed to even name any drugs they were aware but then opened up. Prasad discussed with them marijuana, heroin (brown sugar), LSD, methamphetamine (yaba tablets), Ecstasy.... “The fact is students already know all this, so teachers must stay ahead of them,” Prasad explained.

He warned that while cannabis products like ganja and charas emit a distinct smell, costlier drugs like cocaine, LSD, or yaba tablets are harder to detect. “LSD looks like a stamp, often brightly coloured, and, are to be placed in the mouth. Yaba tablets resemble candy. These can be carried in a pocket or bag without raising suspicion so teachers must



**NEGATIVE INFLUENCE:** Films like *Kabir Singh* show influential stars abusing alcohol and drugs

know what they are up against,” he said, sharing pictures of the contraband items.

When asked how LSD is now-a-days sourced leaving no digital footprint, teachers offered vague answers like “dark web” or “Telegram”. Prasad said teenagers would be able to answer this without batting an eye. “The answer is VPN. A teenager could be sitting in New Town but using a VPN to make his IP address appear to be in the US. There would be no way tracking him down to New Town and the package would reach him safely,” he warned.

He urged teachers to spread awareness not just about the health impact of drugs but also about the punishments under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985.

### Just say no

Debapriya Bhowmik and Supriya Dey from the Institute of Psychiatry then took over to discuss the psychological and social aspects of drugs.

Bhowmik explained the meaning of drug use and abuse. “In the case of alcohol, many start with

social drinking at parties. Then weekend drinking becomes a habit, then a daily need. Eventually, the body craves it to function. This is dependence and the quantity is ever-increasing,” she said.

### Why try drugs

● **Peer Pressure:** “Many youths do it to feel cool or macho. Some groups will only accept them if they take a drag,” Bhowmik said. Dey added FOMO (fear of missing out). “They see a friend posing with a beer mug and getting likes on social media so they try to do the same,” he said.

● **Availability and exposure:** “If parents drink or smoke openly, children are more likely to try it,” said Bhowmik. “It is common for adolescents, out of loneliness and boredom, to try liquor from the bottles in the showcase. When they tell their friends they get are idolised and so do it again. Teachers are also role models and so, even though they have the freedom to drink or smoke, they should do so discreetly.”

● **Curiosity:** Keeping kids isolated in a room while parents and their friends drink only piques their interest.

● **Excess pocket money:** Bhowmik cited the case of a mother who gave her teenage son nearly Rs 2,000 before he went to visit a friend. The boys bought alcohol, had an accident, and the son died.

● **Relationship issues:** “Popular films like *Kabir Singh* and *Rockstar* glorify heartbreak-induced substance use, sending the wrong message,” said Dey.

### Drugs commonly used by Indian teens:

● **Tobacco** – in cigarettes, beedis, gutka, khaini, zarda, and hookahs. “They are cheap and easily available and often teens steal them from their fathers to try,” said Bhowmik.

● **Alcohol**– branded as well as home-brewed or illicit variants with dangerously high and unknown alcohol content.

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THE TELEGRAPH SALT LAKE FRIDAY 13 JUNE 2025

NBCF

## A costly high



S. N. Prasad of the Narcotics Control Bureau shows pictures of LSD that resembles stamps, at The Newtown School. Picture by Brinda Sarkar

### THE LAW

- Possession of narcotic drugs (eg opium, morphine, heroin, cannabis) and psychotropic substances (amphetamines, LSD, diazepam, ketamine) even in small quantity for personal use is an offence
- Cultivation of narcotic crops like opium, cannabis without permission is an offence
- To allow your premises to store, sell or consume illegal drugs is an offence
- Trafficking of drugs in commercial quantity can lead to imprisonment of up to 20 years. Death penalty can be imposed for repeat offenders.

### DIAL TO AND FOR HELP

- Anonymously call the National Narcotics Helpline 1933 to share information about drug trafficking.
- Call Telemans helpline 14416 to speak to counselors about matters such as addiction, depression and stress. This is a government helpline, free and is open 24x7.

### Keep them motivated

“Addicts don’t recover overnight,” said Dey. “If you tell them to quit, they won’t quit at once so you must plant the seed and keep them motivated, as relapses are common.”

He noted that simply listening is often the best support. “One need not

be a trained counsellor to just lend a patient ear. Guide them to channel their energy into hobbies, volunteering, meditation, and positive self-

talk,” Dey said.

### Addiction to advocacy

Thirteen years. That’s how long

matic practice banned in many countries and makes the patient averse to the treatment from the start,” he said. “Also, don’t expect an overnight cure after which your son can return and take exams the same semester. If you rush him out he may relapse. And once back home, don’t believe him blindly. Let him earn your trust.”

While narcotic addiction is common in the 20–35 age group, alcoholics often seek help much later, after losing everything. “Alcohol is socially acceptable, so alcoholics stay on at home much longer,” he said, adding that very few women come to rehab.

“That’s because women in rehab is a big taboo but the addiction problem is huge among them, especially in the Sector V and New Town workforce. Many women from small towns join the IT sector there. They cannot handle the freedom that they suddenly get. To fit in, they overdo smoking, drinking, and drugs,” Maity said.

Another former user from Sector III said his curiosity stemmed from pop culture. “We saw rockstars using drugs and though I knew it was bad, I lacked the foresight to realise they would be so addictive,” said Raj Basak (name changed).

He recalled a teenage neighbour, slightly older to him, who would borrow money from his mother for movies but was secretly funding a heroin habit. “He soon started stealing too. My friends and I began with marijuana and later experimenting with everything, including prescription drugs that were sold at two well-known medicine shops in sectors I and III in the late 90s.”

Basak quit when he realised the drugs were ruining his health and hampering his studies. “Some friends weren’t as lucky. One died of an overdose as a teenager. Another committed suicide. Those who couldn’t quit do not keep in touch with us. Despite having brilliant minds, they are unable to work, and are lost in a toxic loop.”

Are teenagers open about their habits and practices with family? Write to The Telegraph Salt Lake, 6 Prafulla

Sarkar Street, Calcutta 700001 or email to saltlake@abp.in