

Difficulties with Alcohol and Substance Use

Alcohol and substance misuse

Many people who have experienced trauma struggle with alcohol or substance related difficulties. Often people will use substances, for example alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, illicit drugs or medications) to help them to cope. Sometimes this will be to numb take away distress caused by memories of the past, to help with sleep or cope with strong feelings for example anxiety or worry.

It's important to remember to be kind to yourself and others and understand difficulties without judgement. Understanding alcohol and substance use difficulties and even dependency when it comes to trauma is often viewed as starting out as a coping or indeed survival strategy.

Unfortunately, alcohol and substance misuse can interfere with recovery from a trauma for many reasons.

- Alcohol and drugs can stop or interfere with how the brain processes memories and emotions, so they continue to be a problem.
- It can impact on your sleep, so whilst you might start using alcohol to help you sleep, alcohol itself can lead to less restful sleep and lead to low energy and mood the following day.
- In the same way using cannabis to manage anxiety/feelings of being on edge, in the longer term can also make you feel more on edge or under threat
- Substance misuse may also contribute to other problems like our ability to work and function day to day, contributing to financial difficulties. It can impact on our health and relationships.
- It might also keep unhelpful or negative beliefs about ourselves going; like, 'I can't cope' or 'I am rubbish or worthless'.

If you are struggling with alcohol or other substance misuse problems, with the right help and support, you can learn new ways of coping with your symptoms and reduce or stop using substances. Your G.P might be a good place to start to get help. They can discuss your problems with you and get you into appropriate treatment and support services. If it is too difficult to speak with your G.P you can access local drug and alcohol services for advice and guidance.

If you are seeking therapy for trauma it's important that you let your therapist know about any substance and alcohol use. Don't worry this shouldn't stop you from accessing therapy but it is important to think about how your alcohol and substance use could impact on the effectiveness of therapy. Together with your therapist you can consider what support and treatment will be best so you can get the most out of it.