



CHEMSAFE: WELLBEING

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Further Support Page

The Reach

Provides in-person support for chemsex: www.gmpash.org.uk

George House Trust

Support for people living with HIV: www.ght.org.uk

Terrence Higgins Trust

Providing information about HIV and testing: www.tht.org.uk

Narcotics Anonymous

12 step programme for support on narcotics: www.ukna.org

The Northern

Sexual Health testing for Manchester: www.thenorthernsexualhealth.co.uk

Friday/Monday

Online resource on drugs and sex: www.fridaymonday.org.uk

Controlling Chemsex

Online support and info on chemsex: www.controllingchemsex.com

Chemsafe.Space

Digital resource for chemsex services in GM: www.chemsafe.space

St. Mary's

Sexual assault referral centre: www.stmaryscentre.org

Change Grow Live

Services supporting drug and alcohol use: www.changegrowlive.org

Introduction

LGBT Foundation, BHA for Equality and George House Trust work together in the Passionate about Sexual Health (PaSH) partnership to promote safer sex and support people living with or at risk of contracting HIV. Our goal is to stop HIV transmission in Greater Manchester. This resource offers information to help people involved in chemsex stay safe and cut down or stop using substances.

Chemsex Definition

"Chemsex" is the use of drugs to 'intensify' sexual experiences, usually organised through apps. These sessions can sometimes last for days and involve several people. While chemsex is often associated with cisgender gay and bisexual men, people of any identity and background can engage in chemsex. Some risks include mental health issues, sexual health problems, addiction, and harm to relationships.



Consent is Sexy

Consent is needed in any relationship to have safe, pleasurable and positive sexual experiences. However using substances can blur the lines of what consent and boundaries are during chemsex, as substances can affect the decisions you make and can create opportunities for other people to take advantage of these vulnerabilities. Remember, no matter the situation, context, or relationship with a person, consent is always necessary. So, consent is:

- Required
- Ongoing
- Retractable
- Given freely and equally
- A mutual agreement
- Confidential
- Comfortable
- Sexy

Remember, consent should always be enthusiastic, not an 'okay/fine' response, but more like 'yeah, that sounds hot!' to ensure everyone is on the same page. Making noise, encouraging your partner and checking in if your partner is enjoying themselves is a good way to keep consent going in a sexy way. It's also important to respect other people's 'no' as well as being able to express yourself. If someone doesn't consent, whilst it can be disappointing, you should respond by saying 'that's fine, I respect your boundaries' and move on.

Withdrawing consent doesn't mean you have to stop having sex either if you don't want to. You could try a new position, use a toy instead or take a break! Consent is ongoing, so checking in with your partner and speaking honestly is vital.

Consent in chemsex settings can be difficult as legally you cannot consent if you are under the influence. If you are with someone who seems too 'out of it', it's best to wait until they're in a better state to make sure they can give informed consent. Everyone involved in sex needs to be fully aware of who is participating, and everyone needs to give consent. If you are already having sex and someone joins in, that doesn't mean you have given consent. Always give verbal, enthusiastic confirmation and reinforce your boundaries if someone crosses them or doesn't get your consent. Even if you do say yes to something, it may not be considered consent if you feel pressured, are too drunk/too high, you were scared, you didn't know what you were consenting to or you didn't want to disappoint the other person/people.

Bounded Boundaries

Expressing yourself sexually may feel a bit awkward and uncomfortable, but learning how to express what you want (and don't want) during sex will make it all the more pleasurable and safer for you. Within a chemsex setting, being able to communicate your wants and boundaries is important in protecting yourself. Whether this be what substances you are okay with using, the use of condoms, or any sex acts you're willing to engage in, expressing this to your partner(s) is paramount to everyone having a safer chemsex session. It might help by writing a list on paper or on your phone of what you are comfortable with in the bedroom, what you don't want to do, and what you are willing to experiment or try. However,

4 it's best to practice new things with a trusted partner rather than someone new.

Consent & Education

In particular, for LGBTQ+ people, there may be more difficulty in talking about consent or expressing boundaries due to a lack of education and freedom of expression. Having up-to-date information on sex and relationship education will be key in building your confidence in setting boundaries in the bedroom and having informative, safer sex.

LGBTQ+ people may also feel that they should engage in sex that they may not be comfortable with. It's important to try and speak openly with trusted sexual partners to learn and practice expressing yourself and your boundaries. You can also practise 'sexual embodiment' with yourself, to explore what you enjoy and figure out what pleasures you in sex. Sexual embodiment is how people feel and show their sexuality through their bodies. It includes physical feelings, how they see their bodies, their emotions, and how society influences their sexual experiences.

Sexy, Healthy Relationships

So, what does a healthy sexual relationship look like? This can be a hard question to answer as different people face different compatibilities and ideas of what a good relationship looks like, but 4 things make up the core of a healthy relationship:

- Trusting one another
- Mutually respected boundaries
- Open and honest communication
- Authentic care for one another's well-being



If your partner is controlling, coercive or aggressive during sex or in your relationship (though in consensual BDSM/Kink scenarios, this may take place, so ensure you have established boundaries before sex), this may be a sign this is not a healthy sexual relationship.

What to do if I didn't give consent?

Any non-consensual sexual activity is never okay and is a criminal offence. You cannot legally give consent when you're under pressure or you don't have the capacity (like being intoxicated or unconscious). The police should take this seriously if you decide to report an assault. You can always access support services like medical support and counselling, even if the assault was not recent. You can attend your local Sexual Assault Referral Centre for support following an assault.

Boundaries during Chemsex

Having boundaries during chemsex can also help you reduce harm and improve your mental and sexual well-being. Whenever you use substances, you will have a comedown as they start to wear off. Generally, the more you take and mix, paired with a lack of food and sleep, the worse your comedown will be. Additionally, doing actions you might regret or worry about can add to your anxiety during a comedown.

Here are a few tips that can help you reduce your engagement with chemsex, play safer or lessen comedowns:

- Try to set limits for how long you play, and how much you will use during a chemsex session – you can use timers on your phone to help remind you
- Establish your boundaries before a session so you can communicate them to other people without worry
- Make sure you have at least a few people you know well when playing
- Decide on using condoms or PrEP in advance
- You always have an option to leave a chemsex party early, or when you are tired and worn out
- It's much better to go home to a welcoming space – clean your room, tidy up and change the sheets so you return to a comfortable and safe home
- Try and keep some of your favourite foods and drinks stocked for when you get home, as eating and drinking might be challenging after a chemsex session
- Watch out for mouth ulcers which can cause irritation or become sites of infection
- Make plans for when you get home, have a relaxing bath, a new film, or time to reflect on what you enjoyed or didn't enjoy about the session; this makes it easier to return home and if anyone asks why you are leaving
- You can also begin creating boundaries with apps you use that are often used to organise chemsex parties, see advice from [56 Dean Street](#) on their website.



Chemsex and Psychosis

Psychosis is when someone may hear and see things that aren't there or have unusual beliefs and opinions that they wouldn't normally express or think. Psychosis is a serious mental illness and can be brought on through continuous heavy drug use. The following substances have been linked to mental health problems when used in excess:

- Amphetamines (e.g. speed, crystal meth)
- Mephedrone
- Cocaine/crack
- Marijuana
- Acid/LSD
- Ketamine

Drinking alcohol in combination with taking substances will also exacerbate someone's comedown, as alcohol is a depressant. This is especially true if you also already experience mental health problems like anxiety and depression, and drug taking can also increase your risk of developing these issues. If you already take medication like anti-depressants, they can also stop working if you take recreational drugs. Unfortunately, you may not know of these triggers to your mental health until the substances wear off.

A lot of people use recreational drugs or engage in chemsex to escape issues or situations in their lives that might make them feel depressed, and the idea of sex and partying can be appealing. However, the comedowns from chemsex can make your life issues even harder to manage when you are sober. If you need further support or advice on mental health issues look at



**WE EMPOWER
LGBTQ+ PEOPLE TO
REALISE THEIR
FULL POTENTIAL
EVERYDAY**

LGBT Foundation offers inclusive sexual health services for the LGBTQ+ community. We offer free rapid HIV testing, STI screening, condom and lube distribution, sexual health advice, and information on PrEP and PEP

Contact us at 0345 3 30 30 30 or email sexualhealth@lgbt.foundation