

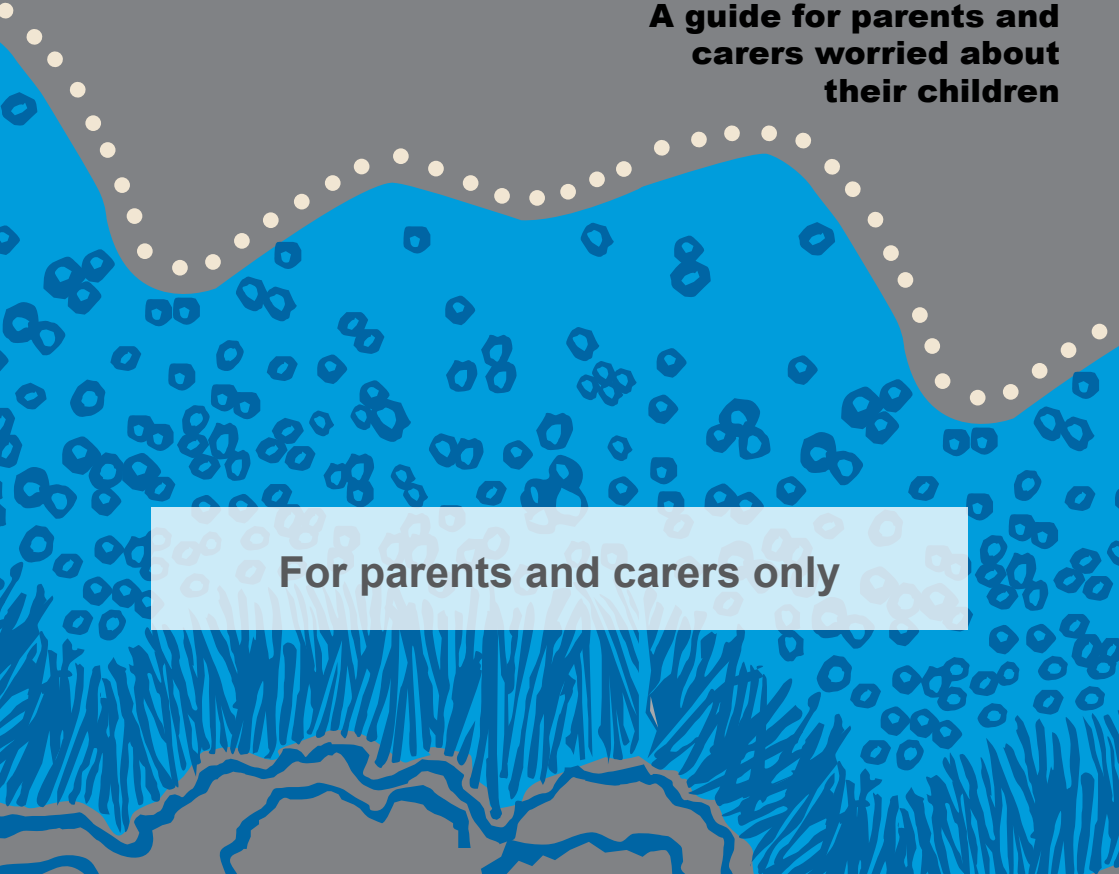


Strong Spirit Strong Mind

Aboriginal ways to reduce harm from alcohol and other drugs

**SNIFFING AND CHROMING:
A guide for parents and
carers worried about
their children**

For parents and carers only



Artist:

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The Aboriginal Inner Spirit Model (Ngarlu Assessment Model) was developed by Joseph 'Nipper' Roe, who belonged to the Karajarri and Yawuru people.

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Strong Spirit Strong Mind

“When people’s emotional, spiritual, physical and social needs are met, then their inner spirit feels strong because they are in a good state of health. When one or more of these needs are not met, people’s health deteriorates. This will affect your inner spirit and make you feel weak or no good” (Roe, 2000).

ABORIGINAL INNER SPIRIT MODEL



©Joe Roe

Our people have always had a strong sense of connection to our inner spirit, and this has always been part of our culture.

SSSM Inner Spirit Assessment model

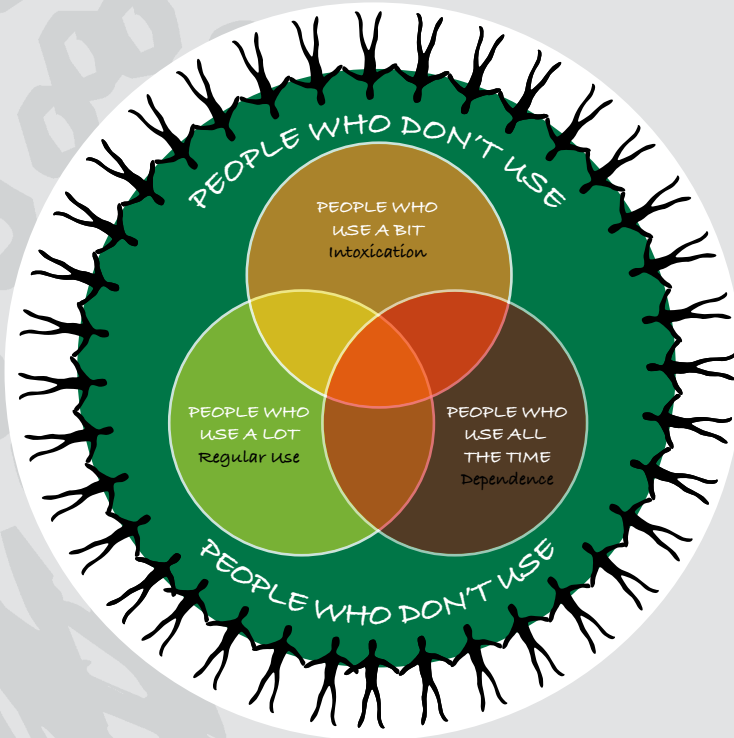
Aboriginal ways of being healthy include making good personal choices, and caring for family, community, country, and culture. Using things like solvents and inhalants can impact upon our inner spirit and tangle up our thinking.



This can affect our emotional, social, spiritual and physical well being. This can also weaken our connection with family, community, culture, and country.

People sniff in different ways

Most people in the community do not sniff but they are still affected by the people who do.



Some people just sniff a bit but they may have problems which come from being intoxicated, like accidents and injuries. Some people are regular users who sniff a lot of the time, and others may want to sniff all the time because they have become dependent. Only a few people in our communities are dependent, however all sniffing in the community can cause problems.

What are inhalants?

Inhalants are things which make fumes that can be inhaled or sniffed.

Other names for inhalants are ***solvents*** and ***volatile substances***.

A lot of things which are found around the house like glue, spray cans, and petrol produce fumes which can be sniffed.



When someone sniffs the fumes can make them feel stoned or high. But sniffing is dangerous. Even sniffing just once can cause problems.

Some people talk about ***sniffing***, and others might say ***chroming***. In this booklet we say sniffing.

How are inhalants used?

Inhalants can be sniffed from a container, bag or bottle. They may be carried around in a can, drink bottle or plastic bag.



Sometimes they are sniffed from a cloth. Some are sprayed straight into the nose or mouth.

Why do people sniff?

There are a lot of reasons why people sniff. When you want to support someone to make changes it helps to understand why they are sniffing.



People say many different things about why they sniff. The reasons include:

- Boredom
- Feeling angry
- Experimenting
- To have fun
- To block out sadness, pain or problems
- Stop them feeling hungry
- Wanting to be part of a group
- Feel pressured by friends
- Inhalants are cheap and easy to get
- Alcohol or other drugs not available

What are the effects of sniffing?

Sniffing solvents and inhalants has a depressant effect on the brain. This means everything slows down. The brain, the heart and the breathing all slow down. These effects usually happen within 3-5 minutes.



Sniffing can change the way a person thinks, feels and behaves. Some people feel light-headed and very relaxed, like they are drunk. Some people feel happy or excited, while others may feel angry, jumpy or quiet.

Sometimes people keep on sniffing so that they can stay high longer but this can cause them to black-out or see and hear things that are not really there.

What are the effects of sniffing?

When people sniff a lot they can also have mental and emotional problems. Sometimes they cannot think clearly and have problems remembering things. They may have mood swings or feel scared and become suspicious of other people.



Exercise, stress or fear can be dangerous to a person who has been sniffing because it puts extra pressure on their heart and can cause the heart to stop. This is called *sudden sniffing death*.

Short term effects

Sniffing can affect the person's body and mind. This can last for many days after sniffing has stopped.



People who sniff may have:

- Flu-like symptoms
- Sick in the stomach, vomiting, diarrhoea
- Red eyes
- Sores around the mouth and lips
- Headaches and feeling hung-over

After they have been sniffing for a while people may lose weight, have muscle weakness and feel tired a lot.

Short term harms

Some of the dangers from sniffing are because people who are sniffing may not be aware of what is happening around them. This means they are more likely to have accidents. This can include things like falling, being hit by cars or trains, or drowning.

Sometimes the way people sniff can put them in danger from things like burns and explosions, or choking on vomit.



Sometimes people spray things directly into their mouth; this is very dangerous because it can freeze their airways and they stop breathing.

Sometimes people who have been sniffing will hurt themselves, or they may try to commit suicide. When you know someone has been sniffing do not let them go off alone.

Dangers of sniffing inhalants, solvents or volatile substances

Accidents	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sniffing in places like roofs, near roads or water increases the chance of accidents.
Suffocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• If you put a plastic bag over your head, sniff when lying down or in small closed in spaces, this can lead to suffocation.• If you spray substances directly into the mouth this can stop your breathing.
Burns & Explosions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sniffing near an open flame (like camp fires or cigarette lighters) can cause explosions or bad burns.
Overdose	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Taking other drugs (like alcohol, gunja or medicine) when you have been sniffing can cause overdose.• Never sniff alone. If something goes wrong there will be no one to help you.
Dying	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Never let someone go off alone when they have been sniffing.• Sniffing spray cans or lighter fuel can kill you.• Do not run around or exercise after sniffing as this can cause a heart attack.• If someone is passed out or doesn't seem right call an ambulance or health worker.• Learn first aid. It could save a life.

Long term effects

Long-term sniffing can cause serious health problems. Damage can be done to the brain, the heart, lungs, liver and kidneys. Some of these problems may go away if the person stops sniffing. It may take a long time for the person to get better. Sometimes damage can be forever.

If someone has been sniffing for a long time, stopping suddenly may make them very sick. There are people to help someone to stop sniffing or using other drugs.



It is very important that women who are pregnant do not sniff because this can harm both them and their babies. This is because the chemicals from sniffing can pass from the mum into the baby. This can cause the baby to be born early, and sometimes they are sick and have problems breathing.

How to help in an emergency

The effects of sniffing can be very quick, and sniffers may not know they have had too much. Sometimes people mix drugs which can be very dangerous. Sniffing at the same time as using other drugs, including alcohol, can cause overdose.



If a sniffer has bad effects or passes out, make sure you call an ambulance or health care worker straight away. By doing this you could save their life.

- 1.** If someone who has been sniffing passes out, put them on their side and make sure they can breathe.
- 2.** Dial 000 for an ambulance or the number for your local health worker. Police don't usually come unless there is violence or if someone dies.
- 3.** Stay with the sniffer till the ambulance or health worker arrives – never leave them alone.

How do you know if someone has been sniffing?

When someone has been sniffing you may notice things like:

- Breath or clothes smell like chemicals
- Sores around the mouth and nose
- The sleeves or the neck of their jumper held up to their face
- Paint around the mouth and nose
- Empty glue tubes, lighter refill cans or spray cans



Sometimes you might notice that the person is behaving strangely, like:

- Being drunk
- Mood swings
- Anger or violent behaviour
- Feeling worried or jumpy

What should you do if you find someone sniffing?

- You may feel angry, upset or scared, but try to stay calm.
- Do not talk to them about the sniffing straight away.
- Make sure they are safe and ask if they need help.
- Tell them they will be OK.
- Stay with them until they have sobered up.
- Try to work out what and how they have been sniffing as this will help you talk to them later about it.



Never chase or frighten a person who may be sniffing because some of the chemicals which are sniffed can cause the heart to stop if the person is stressed, scared or does exercise while sniffing.

What should I do if I find out one of my mob is sniffing?

- Try talking to them when things are calm and they are *not* high. But remember they may not want to talk with you about this.
- Let them know that you know they are sniffing and that you have some information that may be helpful to them.



- If it is difficult for a close family member to talk to the person. Ask someone else like a family elder or the elders of the community. Or maybe a nurse, health worker or someone trusted by the community.
- Listen to what the person sniffing has to say and respect them. They may want to feel they are making their own decisions. You can help to support them to make good choices.

What should I do if they don't want to stop sniffing?

- Your family member may not be willing to stop sniffing but you can still give them support. Offer to yarn about it when they're ready.
- You may want to involve other family members. This way everyone is watching out for them and keeping them safe.
- You could take them home or out to *country* for a safe place to talk.



- You could do things together that remind them of who they are and their place in the family. This could be things like fishing, hunting or camping.
- Keep including them in family activities.

Prevention messages are important

- Speak to your mob when they are young about the effects of alcohol and other drugs, and how to manage peer pressure.
- Make sure that your mob knows about your culture. Teach them things like who they are and where they belong, what their role is and will be in the family.



- Help them to understand how important they are to their family and community.

Looking after yourself and getting some support

When some of your mob are sniffing it causes problems for the whole family. This can be a very worrying time. In your family there may be people who can help you to manage these issues.

There is also professional help available. Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drug workers, health workers, and other health professionals are there to provide support. Their experience and skills can help you to make a difference for your family and community.



Sometimes people do not ask for help because they feel too shame or are worried about community gossip. Health care workers will not put you down and they will not discuss your issues or concerns with other people.

Support and help for people who are sniffing and their families

Contact your local Community Alcohol and Drug Service, Aboriginal Medical Service or Health Worker.

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS) is a telephone counselling service for anyone worried about their own or someone else's drug use. They can also tell you what services are near you. You can call them for a yarn and you don't have to say who you are if you don't want to.

9442 5000 or 1800 198 024 (country toll free*)



Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS) is an alcohol/drug telephone counselling service for parents and families.

9442 5050 or 1800 653 203 (country toll free*)

Support and help for communities where people are sniffing

As a community you can yarn with other parents, schools, police, health and welfare workers. You can get together to help stop sniffing in the community.



Local Drug Action Groups (LDAGs) are a state-wide network to help communities prevent alcohol and other drug-related harm.

9370 0364 or 1800 532 407 (country toll free*)

* Except from mobiles but if you call and leave your number they will call straight back

For more information and help

Local Contact:

**Produced by the Aboriginal Alcohol and Other Drug Programs
and Workforce Development Branch, Drug and Alcohol Office**



Government of Western Australia
Drug and Alcohol Office