By Mari Hudson, The Good Doctors

Young people love to experiment, but it can have disastrous effects. With the help of Dr Lize Weich, psychiatrist at Stellenbosch University, we explain why teens are at risk.

The brain of a teenager is still under construction. At this stage of life the part of the brain that controls reasoning and impulses isn't fully mature yet.

So it's understandable that teens are impulsive and irrational, that they take risks without thinking twice and want instant gratification. Because adolescent brains are not mature enough to calculate and avoid risks, their owners are more likely to experiment with alcohol and drugs.

A teen may think smoking pot is a harmless bit of fun. But at this stage of development, the brain is extremely sen-
PROTECT YOUR CHILD

- Create a safe, loving and protective home environment. Sit down to supper as a family so you can have regular talks.
- Set an example: don’t ask your child to hand you your cigarettes or alcoholic drink, never drink excessively in front of your child, and stay clear of drugs.
- Keep an eye out for telltale signs like a drop in academic marks, problems at school, unsavoury friends, red eyes and the smell of alcohol, marijuana or cigarettes.

WHAT IS PSYCHOSIS?

This broad term describes symptoms that indicate a person is no longer in touch with reality. The person may hear or see things that aren’t there or believe things that are untrue (e.g. ‘there is an alien in my brain’). A psychiatrist will try to establish whether the psychosis was underlying and was merely switched on by drug use, or whether the psychosis will fade after days or weeks as the body gets rid of toxins.

ALCOHOL can wreak havoc and cause damage to the young brain. Chronic overuse can lead to psychosis, which may present in one of two forms. Either the user will hear very critical voices in their head, or the user’s brain can be so damaged that they become irrationally jealous of their partner. This may lead to physical abuse and even murder.

MARIJUANA interferes with all other neuro-transmitters in the brain. It is so damaging to the young brain that studies now prove that the IQ of young dagga users drops substantially – at a time when it should still be increasing. The risk of developing serious psychiatric problems due to marijuana use is highest in adolescents.

TIK (methylamphetamine) is extremely neurotoxic for the young brain and associated with multiple neurological and psychiatric problems, which may be permanent.

STIMULANTS (like ecstasy, cocaine and KAT) and drugs causing hallucinations (like LSD and magic mushrooms) are also bad news for the young brain and may lead to psychotic events.

34% OF TEENAGERS HAVE USED DRUGS*.

69% OF TEENS SAY THEY CAN BUY DRUGS AT SCHOOL.

22% OF PEOPLE IN TREATMENT CENTRES ARE UNDER 17.

How does Momentum Health help you?

Rehabilitation benefits may be covered on your medical scheme option. Please check your benefit guide for details.

sitive to certain substances, much more so than in adults.

The teenage brain is more vulnerable to drug-induced psychosis than ever imagined. A single dagga joint may be all it takes to trigger schizophrenia. Worst of all, it can happen to any youngster.

All adolescents are at risk, and those with a family history of psychiatric disorders, schizophrenia and bipolar mood disorder are at even greater risk. The younger a person is when they start using drugs and the higher the usage in volume and frequency, the higher the risk.