

DISCUSSION GUIDE:

THE STORY BEHIND THE STEREOTYPE

The facts and realities of ice dependence and recovery



**STRUGGLE
STREET**



The Difference is Research



This resource has been designed to complement segments from the SBS series *Struggle Street (Season 2)*, produced by KEO Films Australia. It highlights some of the challenges and misconceptions around the drug 'ice' and people who use ice in Australia. It addresses commonly asked questions about ice, ice dependence and recovery. It was developed by researchers at the National Health and Medical Research Council Centre of Research Excellence in Mental Health and Substance Use and the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales in partnership with SBS Australia.

How To Use This Resource

This resource has been designed to prompt discussion around ice use, dependence and recovery. We recommend you watch [the video resource](#) titled "The Story Behind the Stereotype: The Facts and Realities of Ice Dependence and Recovery" beforehand and familiarise yourself with the material in the discussion guide.

The content addresses some very complex issues and sensitive themes including; drug use, homelessness and poverty. The resource has not been designed to use with children under the age of 15. For evidence-based information for school-aged children, parents and teachers about alcohol and other drugs, please visit Positive Choices: positivechoices.org.au

If you would like more information about ice and the issues raised in this resource go to cracksintheice.org.au

If you are looking for support for yourself or a loved one please visit cracksintheice.org.au/when-and-where-do-i-get-help

Before You Begin

Set some discussion ground rules:

- Be respectful: each person has their own beliefs and values.
- Value diversity: each person has their own world views, experiences and opinions.
- Listen politely: each person has a right to contribute without pressure or intimidation.
- Respect privacy: each person has the right to uphold their privacy. This can take two forms – confidentiality and personal privacy. The best discussions occur when people feel safe and respected. Do not speak about other people (or their stories) outside the discussions and respect the right of others to listen to the discussion without personally having to contribute.
- Be responsible: share feedback with thoughtful consideration and a positive attitude towards others.
- Be brave in sharing experiences, ideas and opinions.



Watch the video titled 'The Story Behind the Stereotype: The Facts and Realities of Ice Dependence and Recovery' before using these discussion questions

01 WHAT IS THE DRUG ICE?

Discussion Starters:

- Can you recall from [the video](#) what type of drug ice is (a stimulant, depressant, or hallucinogen?)
- Why might ice have strong physical effects for some people?

The Facts:

- Ice, or crystal methamphetamine, is a stimulant drug and type of methamphetamine.
- Methamphetamine typically comes in three different forms (ice, base and speed) that vary in their appearance and potency.
- Crystal methamphetamine (ice) is often a purer form of methamphetamine, meaning it gives a stronger and longer lasting 'high', has more potent and serious side effects and has a greater potential for the user to become dependent on the drug and to experience other long-term physical and mental health problems.

For more information and to continue the conversation visit:
cracksintheice.org.au/what-is-ice

02 ICE CONTINUES TO MAKE HEADLINES IN AUSTRALIA, BUT JUST HOW MANY AUSTRALIANS ACTUALLY USE THE DRUG?

Discussion Starters:

- Can you remember from the video how many Australians reported using ice in the past year?
- Was this more or less than you expected?
- How does ice use compare to use of other drugs?
- How often do you think most people use ice?
- Does the information you hear about ice impact how you think about the drug?
- Do you question what information is presented publically?
- Where would you go to find trusted information about ice?

The Facts:

- Methamphetamine (including ice, base or speed) is **not** the most commonly used drug in Australia, only about 1 in 70 (or 1.4%) Australians have used methamphetamine in past year.
- However, the harms associated with methamphetamine use are high and there has been an increase in methamphetamine-related helpline calls, drug and alcohol treatment episodes and hospital admissions

for methamphetamine related problems, as well as methamphetamine-related deaths in recent years in Australia.

- Rates of methamphetamine use are higher among rural and remote areas of Australia compared to regional areas and major cities.
- Overall rates of methamphetamine use in the general population have remained stable or declined over recent years. However, crystal methamphetamine (ice) is becoming the most popular form of methamphetamine being used.
- Of those who have used ice, about 1 in 5 use weekly or daily.
- Alcohol, tobacco and some illegal drugs (cannabis, ecstasy, cocaine) are used more commonly than ice.
- Excessive coverage and sensationalised portrayal of the most extreme consequences of use (e.g. violence, psychosis) is common and can promote fear and stereotyping. Only a small number of people who use ice will experience some type of aggressive or psychotic symptoms.
- Fear and stereotyping can compound the problem and may prevent people from seeking help.

For more information and to continue the discussion visit:
cracksintheice.org.au/how-many-people-use-ice

03 WHAT ARE THE EFFECTS OF ICE?

Discussion Starters:

- What are some of the reasons someone might take ice? What leads someone to start using this drug?
- If you were to think of someone who had just taken ice how do you think they might be feeling? How would they be acting?
- How long do the effects of ice last?
- If someone used ice heavily over a long time how might this impact their health?
- How does ice affect the brain?

The Facts:

- There is no single reason why people use ice. Usually several things act in combination. Common reasons for drug use include: to try and have fun and feel good, to forget or help cope with problems, or to fit in/feel part of a group. For more information visit: cracksintheice.org.au/why-do-people-use-ice
- The effects of ice often last for between 4 and 12 hours depending on how much ice is consumed.
- Although the effects of ice are usually felt quickly (within minutes if it is smoked or injected, or about 30 minutes if snorted or swallowed), it can take 1 to 2 days to entirely leave the body.
- A 'comedown' phase or 'crash' is often experienced by ice users as the drug starts to wear off. These feelings can last a few days and symptoms can include: feeling down, decreased appetite, exhaustion, increased need for sleep and irritability.
- 'Withdrawal' refers to unpleasant symptoms experienced by users who are dependent on ice. These symptoms can last for several days or many weeks, depending on the severity of use. Withdrawal symptoms can include: headaches, anxiety, aggression, restlessness, cramps and vomiting.

- Ice has a number of short term effects (e.g. headaches, dry mouth, reduced appetite, increased energy) and long term effects (e.g. dependence, malnutrition, dental problems, stroke).

Ice Also Has Effects On:

- **The brain:** ice triggers the release of two chemicals in the brain, called dopamine and noradrenaline. These chemicals are also released during pleasant activities and are responsible for making us feel alert and excited. Flooding the brain with these chemicals can cause an ‘overload’ in the system. Ice also stops the brain from reabsorbing these chemicals which lowers their supply in the brain. This is why people often feel irritable and low for a few days after taking ice.
- **Mental health:** some may experience mental health problems while using ice or during the ‘comedown’ or ‘crash’ phase. Symptoms usually last a few days to a few weeks. However, in a few people mental health problems persist and develop into mental disorders.

For more information and to continue the conversation visit:

cracksintheice.org.au/how-does-ice-work and cracksintheice.org.au/mental-health-effects

04 IS IT POSSIBLE TO RECOVER FROM AN ADDICTION TO ICE?

Discussion Starters:

- Do you think it is possible to stop taking ice once a person develops dependence on ice?
- What might make it harder to quit?
- What factors might help?
- When is someone considered in recovery from ice dependence?

The Facts:

- When someone is dependent on ice it means they have become reliant on the drug and find it difficult to function without it (also referred to as an addiction). Someone who is dependent will spend a lot of time thinking about ice and may also find it difficult to cut down or go without ice.
- Yes, it is possible to recover from dependence on ice. It won't necessarily happen in a short period of time. It will take commitment and support and sometimes intensive treatment.
- A number of services throughout Australia provide information, support and treatment options for people who are experiencing problems with ice and other drugs.
- Treatments that have been shown to help with recovery from ice and other drug dependencies include motivational interviewing, cognitive behavioural treatment and other psychological interventions.
- Although it can be difficult to seek help, in most cases the sooner someone reaches out for support, the better.
- A local doctor can be a good starting point – they can discuss your concerns with you and provide referrals to other services that you or a loved one might need.
- A number of factors can influence a person's recovery process including finding stable employment, having a stable housing environment and the strength of their support network.

- Having a supportive person in your life (family, friend or health professional) can make recovery much easier than attempting to quit on your own. Support for family and friends can be found at: cracksintheice.org.au/families-friends
- Recovery from alcohol/other drug use problems, particularly ice use problems, is a complex and dynamic process, with improvements, setbacks, stabilization, and starting over all part of the experience. These stages will not always happen in a set order, and complete abstinence from ice is not the only way to define recovery.
- The recovery process is unique to each person and includes the steps they are actively taking to improve their health and wellness overall. This also includes the steps they are taking in their lives to 'get ready' to quit or cut down on their use, and the support they are seeking to help this process. Recovery often starts long before an attempt is made to quit or cut down on use.

For more information and to continue the conversation visit: cracksintheice.org.au/when-and-where-do-i-get-help and [what treatments are available](http://cracksintheice.org.au/what-treatments-are-available)

Want more tools to help with community forums and events? Visit the Cracks in the Ice Community Toolkit cracksintheice.org.au/community-toolkit

Want to hear more about ice addiction and recovery? Watch these three minute videos:



The Truth About Ice



The Truth About Addiction

References:

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- Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, National Wastewater Drug Monitoring Program, Report4, March 2018, www.acic.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3726/f/nwdmp4.pdf?v=1522809564
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This resource was developed in June 2018. The information and resources were accurate and reflected best available evidence at the time of publication.