

# CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEACHING ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS EDUCATION

The early and middle secondary years have been identified as a crucial time to consolidate alcohol and other drugs education as the number of students who have been exposed to and/or have used drugs is relatively low. It is also a time when adolescents are beginning to assert their independence, making more personal decisions and challenging the constraints of parental guidance. It is for these reasons (and many more) that alcohol and other drugs education in the early and middle secondary years must be factual, real, relevant and skills-based.

### TO CONSIDER

- How alcohol and other drugs prevention education is taught is as important as what is taught. Students need both time and opportunity in classroom activities to explore their own beliefs about alcohol and other drugs and also practise skills such as problem-solving, assertive communication, help-seeking and decision making in alcohol and other drugs related situations that may occur in their own social settings.
- Teaching alcohol and other drugs education can involve discussing sensitive issues which may make some students in the program uncomfortable. It is therefore important to establish a safe and supportive environment where students can explore their own knowledge, understandings, values and beliefs before starting alcohol and other drugs education.
- Set clear ground rules about discussing student drug use experiences before commencing alcohol and other drugs education. Encourage students to respect a person's privacy by not using names when talking about experiences and be prepared to protectively interrupt those students who may disclose sensitive information. If disclosure does occur in the classroom, teachers should tactfully but firmly interrupt the student, acknowledge that they have heard the student and indicate to the student that they may want to discuss this later. Straight after the lesson, arrange a time for a follow-up conversation.
- Staff should not disclose personal stories about drug use experiences.
- Give students opportunities to consider when, where, how and by whom there may be pressure to try alcohol and other drugs. Consider situations that involve both overt pressure from peers or family and also covert pressures where students put pressure on themselves to use alcohol and other drugs, perhaps to please or be like friends or family.
- Incorporate learning opportunities that correct inaccurate beliefs about the normality and acceptability of drug use. Normative beliefs are most relevant when the forms of drug use in question really are uncommon and not widely accepted among young people, but might be thought to be more common. Using current prevalence data such as that collected through the Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey can provide an accurate indication as to the extent of drug use in particular age groups and challenge and dispel some myths surrounding alcohol and other drug use.
- Inaccurate and sensationalised media reporting on the effect alcohol and other drug use (including methamphetamine use) has had on individuals and the community may impact students' understanding of alcohol and other drug use and the potential effects. It is important that the facts are presented, myths de-bunked and students provided with sources where they can get accurate information and help, as required. It is also important to acknowledge there will/may be pockets of higher prevalence use than national/state averages in some locations and educating accordingly will be important.



## VOLATILE SUBSTANCE USE (VSU) EDUCATION

Schools should not engage in broad, classroom based prevention education about volatile substance use (VSU) nor make direct reference to volatile substances as potential drugs of intoxication for risk of promoting awareness of easily accessible substances and their psychoactive effects.

Education around VSU should only be provided in the context of intervention support (one-to-one or in small groups) with those identified as using or being at risk of using these substances.

SDERA's *Wraparound* program provides further information on volatile substances and their use and includes processes to follow to provide appropriate support when VSU is suspected.

Schools should actively participate with SDERA and engage with other stakeholders, such as the Community Alcohol and Drug Service (CADS), or relevant local support services in a whole-of-community approach, where appropriate and when there is incidence of VSU in the local area.

Additional VSU information is available on the WA Mental Health Commission's website [Volatile Substance Use in Western Australia](#)

## DRUG TALK – INFORMATION SCRIPTS

The drug information scripts available as PDFs on the *Drug Talk* webpage are a valuable source of information about different drugs eg classification, what they are, effects of use, legality etc. The information script, *The effects of drugs*, outlines the models that help to better understand drug use and is a useful starting point for building alcohol and other drugs knowledge (eg Thorley, Zinberg, 4 Is etc).

Teachers are encouraged to access the above information scripts and the supporting interactive videos before planning and teaching their alcohol and other drugs program.