



Talking about drugs among peers

One of the best ways to break the silence about drugs and drug abuse is to create the right conditions for young people to discuss, in an informative way, the whole range of issues surrounding substance abuse. Likewise, giving young people a central role in drug abuse prevention programmes as peer workers or educators is also one of the most effective methods of passing on positive health messages and preventing drug abuse.

Peer education is based on the communication principle that people are more likely to listen to and act on information if it is presented to them by someone they can identify with, respect and look to as a role model. Here are some things you should keep in mind when designing a peer-based drug abuse prevention programme:

Characteristics of a good peer-to-peer programme

In a peer group of mixed cultures not everyone will have the same attitude about drugs. An effective peer-to-peer (P2P) programme should be sensitive to the cultural norms that impact drug use and take into account the developmental stage of those who are taking part in the programme. It should be fun, creative and interactive using various delivery methods to involve young people, including theatre, sport, Internet, dance, music, etc.

Because young people are often cynical about drug abuse information provided by health authorities, it is important to present a factual and balanced view of drugs and their true consequences so that young people can respect the programme and make informed decisions. A P2P programme should also engage young people by showing them how to deal with risky situations in a way that relates to the real life experiences they are likely to face.

Designing and planning a good P2P programme

Planning is probably the most important step in any P2P programme, and it should involve all stakeholders to gain their support and commitment. Assigning roles to young people, staff and members of the community will encourage a high participation rate and make the programme more successful.



Selecting peer educators

Peer educators need to possess and project a positive attitude. They need to be good listeners, share at least some of the target groups' worldview and be able to communicate their ideas in a positive and non-judgmental way. They should also be able to empathize with their peers. The ability to understand how another young person is feeling and communicate positive drug prevention messages to that person can be a significant opportunity to bring about change.

Why use P2P education?

When implemented appropriately, peer education can be one of the most effective and empowering methods of working with young people across a range of social issues, like drug prevention, youth health, crime and violence.

It is an effective way of sharing knowledge

As a method for sharing information and knowledge, peer education has been shown to be very effective. Young people are more likely to listen to people like themselves. Peer educators are not only able to get information to 'hard to reach' peers, but are also able to convert dry information into useful knowledge because they understand the context in which their peers can use that information.

It is more credible because it is based on first hand experiences

One of the most powerful features of P2P education is the opportunity for participants to get to know each other and to share stories and experiences. For instance, a peer educator talking to a group about drug prevention is able to refer to local situations and stories where prevention has worked or not worked and the reasons why. Credible information delivered in a non-threatening and honest way can have a tremendous impact.

