



Talking about drugs in the school

Talking about drugs and discussing problems in the school setting can help young people make healthy choices.

The realistic role of school: education

Schools cannot fix homelessness, stamp out violence, prevent AIDS or end drug abuse. However, schools have the power to improve student knowledge and skills and encourage the development of sound values.

Guiding principles for school-based drug education

1. What school-based drug education programmes can do

Schools can influence behaviour through the development of knowledge and skills, the cultivation of values, the promotion of partnerships between pupils and teachers, and the creation of a climate of support for personal and academic growth.

2. Don't just talk about drugs, talk about health

Drug education is best included in the context of schools' health curriculum and should address all substances, not only illicit drugs. It should also incorporate other issues of importance to young people, such as adolescent development, stress, sexuality, home/school collaboration and personal relationships.

3. A nourishing school environment

A sense of belonging to both family and school are major protective factors against risky behaviour in young people. Schools in which students are made aware of clear rules, reward structures and unambiguous sanctions, experience less disorder, as do schools where students feel that they belong and that people in the school care about them.

4. Building partnerships

Students, parents and the wider community should be involved in planning and implementing school drug education programmes. Programmes that are initiated and implemented in consultation with parents are not only more successful but also empower parents.

5. Interactive teaching and learning

With a focus on relevant life contexts, real life challenges and personal and interpersonal competence, drug education is more successful when it is student-centred and uses interactive methods to stimulate participation. Small groups that encourage peer exchanges, discussion, brainstorming, decision-making, assertion training or role-playing new skills are effective approaches.



6. Responsiveness and inclusiveness

Schools' drug education programmes are more effective when they respond to levels of drug use among individual students and society as a whole, to risk and protective factors and to gender, ethnicity, culture, language, developmental levels, religion and sexual orientation. Interaction with students should acknowledge their backgrounds and experiences and give them an opportunity for meaningful input into drug education programmes.

7. Supporting educators and programmes

The impact and sustainability of programmes are enhanced by supporting teachers with ongoing technical advice, networking, opportunities to share both successes and problems and, more importantly, support from school leaders.

8. Strategies, resources and drug outcomes

Superficially attractive, stand alone, one-off or quick fix alternatives have limited success. Drug education programmes should have sequence, progression and continuity over time, buttressed by adequate human and financial resources.

9. Evaluation

Drug education processes and outcomes should be regularly monitored and evaluated to provide evidence of their worth and to improve the design of future programmes.

10. Managing drug-related incidents

Some responses to drug use may marginalize and stigmatize students. Policies and procedures for managing drug-related incidents at school that are made widely known and understood result in productive responses rather than inappropriate, punitive, ineffective, exclusive or unjust actions.

