

Efficient needs assessment in schools

Alcohol and Drug Prevention Briefing Paper

March 2014

This briefing paper is **part of a series** produced by Mentor ADEPIS on alcohol and drug education and prevention, for teachers and practitioners.

Questions for schools

1. Where should teachers begin?
2. What is needs assessment within alcohol and drug education?
3. How can needs assessment inform alcohol and drug education programme planning?

Effective alcohol and drug education

Effective alcohol and drug education develops pupils' skills, knowledge, values and attitudes helping them build resilience and navigate a world where alcohol and drugs are used. It can help in delaying the onset and reducing the use of legal and illegal substances among young people.

An effective programme of alcohol and drug education needs to be tailored to meet pupils' requirements and priorities, meaning that both pupils' needs and learning processes must be regularly assessed.

Needs assessment planning for alcohol and drug education

To ensure the development of an effective alcohol and drug education programme, teachers and responsible members of staff have to be able to build on pupils' current knowledge, skills, values and pro-social behaviours – both in terms of alcohol and drugs, general life-skills and values. Consideration of these different areas should be the starting point for an accurate, needs-led and age appropriate programme of alcohol and drug education. How can schools collect information and analyse pupils' current knowledge, skills, values and behaviour?

A needs assessment should be structured to address the following:¹

- The current knowledge and use of alcohol and drugs in the age group
- The risk and protective factors that affect the use of alcohol and drugs in the age group
- The consequences of alcohol and drug use in the target group

There are different and complementary ways to make an assessment, which include:

- Accessing and analysing existing sources of data and intelligence on levels of use and problems
- Informal observation of the school community (including community and family risk and protective factors)

- Carrying out formal needs assessment activities (including group workshops, interviews with pupils and school surveys)

Analysing external sources of information

National and local data around alcohol and drug use and trends among young people are widely available and reviewed on an annual basis.

Some Alcohol and Drug Data Sources for England

Home Office <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/alcohol-and-drug-statistics>

Office for National Statistics <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/taxonomy/index.html?nscl=Drug+use%2C+Alcohol+and+Smoking>

Health and Social Care Information Centre <http://www.hscic.gov.uk/article/3743/Smoking-Drinking-and-Drug-Use-among-Young-People-in-England>

Local Alcohol Profiles for England <http://www.lape.org.uk/>

Public Health England <http://www.nta.nhs.uk/statistics.aspx>

Child Health and Maternal Health Observatory <http://www.chimat.org.uk/substanceuse>

Prior to designing a school needs assessment and a programme of alcohol and drug education and prevention, teachers and subject leaders may want to refer to external resources, such as the [“Smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England report”](#), produced on an annual basis by the Health and Social Care Information Centre – or the Public Health England annual report on [“Substance misuse among young people in England”](#).

National statistics can provide useful and rich information on trends in the use of alcohol and drugs, the types of substances used by specific age groups, regional differentiation, places where alcohol or drugs are commonly used, and the acceptability of alcohol and drug use among young people.

Risk and protective factors

When considering the causes and likelihood of alcohol and drug use, it is important to understand and assess the risk and protective factors that may be shaping pupils’ lives.

Risk and protective factors can have a major impact on individual choices and risky behaviours. Research suggests that the

Protective factors	Risk factors		
	Belonging to a vulnerable group	Social and Cultural Factors	Interpersonal and Individual Risk factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive temperament • Intellectual ability • Positive and supportive family environment • Social support system • Caring relationship with at least one adult • In education/ employment/ training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looked after children • School non-attenders • Mental health problems • Drug misuse by parents • Abuse within the family • Homeless • Young offenders • Young sex workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High levels of neighbourhood poverty and decay • High levels of neighbourhood crime • Easy drug availability • Widespread social acceptance of alcohol and drug use • Lack of knowledge and perception of drug-related risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Physiological and psychological factors • Family dysfunction • Behavioural difficulties • Academic problems • Association with peers who use alcohol and drugs • Early onset of tobacco smoking • Early onset of alcohol and drug use

Table 1: Risk and protective factors

absence of protective factors and combinations of risk factors increase the chances of an individual's involvement in alcohol and drug use as well as other risky behaviours.²

Table 1 details factors associated with protecting young people from the risk of alcohol and drug problems and factors that may increase the risks.³

Informal observation and formal needs assessment should be used to determine and analyse the range of risk or protective factors affecting individual pupils as well as the broader school community.

How should school teachers plan a needs assessment?

Different levels of needs assessment can be used to evaluate the current situation depending on the school's objectives and priorities. Needs assessment can be divided into universal needs assessment and individual screening. Whilst the former is generally used to inform programme planning for a classroom or school, the latter is preferred to confirm knowledge or information previously collected about a specific pupil, thought to be at risk or vulnerable, in order to develop a targeted intervention or referral to external service providers.

Universal needs assessment for primary and secondary schools - where should teachers begin?

Day-to-day observation and knowledge of pupils' circumstances, backgrounds and values should be the starting point for an efficient needs assessment and an effective alcohol and drug education programme.

Through observation teachers will often notice potential risk factors, for example that a pupil is a young carer, or is an informally looked after child, or holds risky attitudes.

Prior to any sort of needs assessment, teachers have to make sure there is a trusting, open and honest atmosphere, to ensure pupils respond honestly to questions.

Universal needs assessment

A universal needs assessment is used to gain a clearer picture and understanding of the situation and background information of the target group in the school. It also helps to highlight specific individual needs, which may be followed up through the use of screening tools.

This sort of assessment should be structured to collect information about the alcohol and drug situation in the school community. Questions to consider whilst planning include:

- What are the risk and protective factors for the pupils?
- How many pupils use alcohol or drugs?
- What are the most widely used drugs (including alcohol) in the school community?
- How much do young people already know about the effects (including the social effects) of alcohol and drug use?
- What are pupils' attitudes, and values towards alcohol and drug use?
- What are pupils' perceptions of trends and acceptability of alcohol and drug use amongst their peers?⁴

Draw and write/ Draw and tell

Draw and write, or draw and tell methods are a well developed way of exploring pupils' knowledge, understanding and/or values. Draw and write is a technique that allows assessment and class-based research to inform class-specific programme planning, and to assess pupils' learning throughout the programme.

②



This young, once pretty girl is the kind of person that dropped the bag of drugs. She is an anti-social dropout-she has a quick temper and as you can see, she is short of money. She uses drugs regularly, and she steals to keep alive. The money she gets from selling the items she uses to get heroin from her dealer, who I will call Frank Frank sells drugs at 50 pounds a packet. The effects of drugs are upon her.

A Way In: Williams, Wetton and Moon, 1989, Jugs and Herrings

Whilst initially designed to meet the needs of the youngest pupils and overcome their inability to respond to complex questionnaires, draw and write can be used with a wider age range and in a variety of contexts; from primary schools, to secondary schools, and even with adults.

Draw and write techniques start with a series of 'invitations to participate' using open ended questions related to the topic of concern. Pupils respond by drawing and then writing (or dictating to a scribe) about their picture. When used for assessing knowledge related to drugs, teachers tell the pupils a story about two children of their own age who, when walking home one day, find a bag with drugs inside it. The pupils are then asked to draw and write what they think was in the bag.⁵ This is followed by a series of questions about the person who dropped the bag and what they would do with the contents, as well as asking what the child would do in similar circumstances.

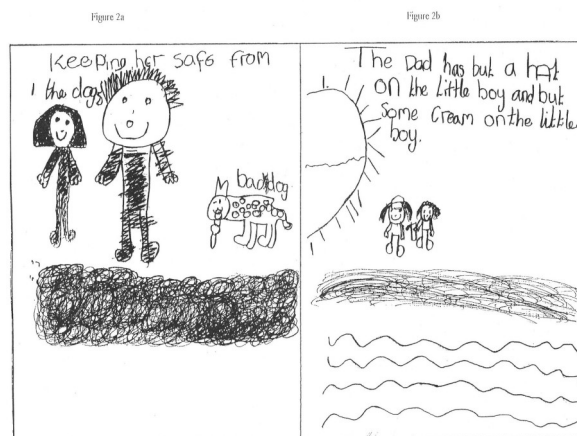
The draw and write technique can enable teachers to gain an overview of pupils' knowledge about specific substances, as well as the range of understanding, values and beliefs among their peers. This technique has some advantages over structured surveys or questionnaires which constrain pupils to predetermined answers.⁶

Needs assessment, assessment for learning, and summative assessment are essential to inform and review a school alcohol and drug education programme, and the draw and write technique functions well for all three types of assessment. Draw and write activities should therefore be repeated at the end of the programme to assess pupils' learning as well as changes in knowledge, values and beliefs.

Other activities, such as poster-design, graffiti sheets, role-playing, group discussions or quizzes with age-appropriate content can also be used as interactive assessment tools informing both programme planning and pupils' skills and learning.

A needs assessment tool, such as the draw and write, can also point out additional needs in relation to specific vulnerable pupils. For instance, some pupils may show detailed knowledge of specific substances or alcohol or drug related risky behaviours. When this happens, it is crucial for teachers

to test their assumptions in relation to potentially vulnerable pupils. Detailed knowledge about specific substances does not always imply the presence of serious risk factors in a pupil's life. For this reason, informal and formal needs assessment techniques must not exist separately within a school context.



The above image shows how draw and write can be used both as assessment for learning (Figure 2a) and assessment of learning (Figure 2b). On both occasions, the child was asked to draw and write about how adults look after a child on the beach on a very hot and sunny day. (McWhirter, J.M., Collins, M., Wetton, N.M., Bryant I., and Newton Bishop J.A. (2000) Evaluating safe in the sun, a curriculum programme for primary schools *Health Education Research: Theory and Practice* 15(2) 203-217).

Surveys and questionnaires

Surveys and questionnaires are an effective way of exploring pupils' behaviours and attitudes. Although they are a more closed approach, they do allow collection of detailed quantitative and qualitative data around pupils' behavioural and lifestyle choices.

Although often used to inform programme planning for alcohol and drug education, health related surveys and questionnaires are often broader and cover different issues related to other health behaviours, such as personal background, emotional health and well being, sex and relationships, food and exercise, and family life.

These provide useful information to better structure alcohol and drug education programmes, whilst enabling the identification of specific groups or individuals who may need further support, targeted interventions or referrals to external providers.

Case study: Frederick Gough School (secondary) - Scunthorpe, North Lincolnshire

Every 3 years, all secondary schools in North Lincolnshire carry out an adolescent lifestyle survey, which is then analysed by the local public health team and the results are shared with schools on an individual basis. This allows the schools to measure their results against countywide data and - for some questions - national data, as well as measure back to previous surveys. It is a board survey and 3 of the 14 sections are on tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs (also including the so called “legal highs”).

From the three sections on tobacco, alcohol and drugs schools can measure:

- How useful students are finding the lessons
- What the most commonly misused drugs and related trends are
- Whether drug use is decreasing

All three sections also include reflections on social norms. Through the data collected teachers can understand what topics to cover and in which year group. They can also measure what is happening in the school against other local secondary schools. The survey helps the school to understand what risks students are taking outside of school so that they can better prepare to approach these topics in the classroom and more broadly.

“The school survey is very helpful as I can keep really up to date and teach in an age appropriate way. If, through the survey, I see that I cannot cover a certain topic that requires more expertise I can bring local agencies, involve counsellors or school nurses. I can also share the data with the heads of the year, to provide them with a general picture of what is happening outside the school with their students. This also allows me to share information with parents. Through the school survey we have also been able to trace that alcohol and tobacco use has gone down a lot since 2004.”

Surveys and questionnaires are useful if schools want to examine the school community’s behaviours, trends and if they want to compare collected data to national statistics or previous years’ results. UNESCO provides a [free needs assessment resource](#). Alternatively many local authorities carry out their own questionnaires, or commission others to do the same. Primary Care Trusts and local authorities also carry out the [Joint Strategic Needs Assessment \(JSNA\)](#), which can be a source of support to school needs assessment.

How can needs assessment inform programme planning?

Needs assessment provides data and useful information around pupils’ knowledge, behaviours, needs and priorities. Data analysis should therefore be used to plan and implement a programme of study looking at:

Knowledge:

- Improving what pupils already know about alcohol and drugs
- Correcting misconceptions around alcohol and drugs and alcohol and drugs use

Values and beliefs:

- Reinforcing positive social norms

Risk and protective factors / Behaviours:

- Understanding and intervening on risk and protective factors influencing pupils’ lives
- Meeting all pupils’ needs – avoiding stigmatisation of the most vulnerable
- Developing pupils’ life skills to challenge existing risk factors or risky behaviours

What to do if a pupil shows signs of serious issues

During needs assessments pupils may disclose information and concerns that are

signs of serious issues in their or their family's lives. If this happens, teachers should follow child safeguarding procedures outlined in the school safeguarding and alcohol and drug policies. (For further information see "[Identifying and supporting children affected by parental substance use](#)").

Individual screening tools

Alcohol and drug screening tools help teachers and those working with children and young people identify whether they have alcohol or drug related issues or needs. Screening can often be delivered off the back of previous needs assessments' results, which may have identified potential issues that need to be addressed at an individual level.

Different types of screening tools are available for teachers to use in schools, although prior training is strongly recommended.

Screening tools differ, depending on what they are designed to assess.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) recommends the use of existing screening and assessment tools to identify vulnerable and disadvantaged children and young people aged under 25 who are misusing – or who are at risk of misusing – substances. These tools include the Common Assessment Framework and those available from the National Treatment Agency [now Public Health England].⁷

For further information on screening young people please refer to "[Assessing young people for substance misuse](#)"

Conclusion

The different types of needs assessment described in this document provide various methods for collecting information on different levels for a situation analysis in the school context. They can all be used in planning and implementing effective alcohol and drug education, as they offer the opportunity to varying degrees to collect detailed and specific information on different aspects of pupils' knowledge, behaviour and needs.

A good situation analysis can help improve the delivery of alcohol and drug education and make a real difference in pupils' lives, as well as in the school's ethos and approach to PSHE education and safeguarding in general.

References

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2. Hale D, Viner R. Trends in the prevalence of multiple substance use in adolescents in England, 1998–2009. *J Public Health*. 2013
3. Frequently Asked Questions, The Principles of Good Drug Education, The Drug Education Forum, ADEPIS <http://mentor-adepis.org/frequently-asked-questions/>
4. Re-adapted from Planning Drug Prevention Interventions: Conducting a Situation Analysis, FRESH Tools for Effective School Health, www.unesco.org/education/fresh
5. Williams, Wetton and Moon (1989) *A Way In – Five key areas of drug education*. London: HEA
6. Jugs and Herrings: Needs assessment for drug education in primary school - <http://www.mentoruk.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2012/12/Needs-assessment-Jugs-and-Herrings.pdf>
7. PH4 Interventions to reduce substance misuse among vulnerable young people: guidance 28 March 2007

Further resources:

1. European drug prevention quality standards, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/manuals/prevention-standards>
2. The Prevention Hub, Mentor International <http://preventionhub.org/>

About ADEPIS

The Alcohol and Drug Education and Prevention Information Service is run by Mentor, the drug and alcohol protection charity, in conjunction with DrugScope and Adfam, and is funded by the Department for Education.



More resources and advice are available from mentor-adepis.org. For further information, contact:

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