

# Making it inclusive: Alcohol and drug education in multicultural settings

## Alcohol and Drug Prevention Briefing Paper

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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. How to deliver culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education?
2. How to represent the needs of various cultural groups?
3. How to effectively engage with parents or carers from diverse cultural groups?

Multiculturalism is one of the key strengths of Britain. A great variety of cultures, beliefs and values enrich the British culture. However certain attitudes may at times clash with the variety of backgrounds constituting modern Britain. One example is the use of alcohol. Alcohol is readily available and its use (in moderation) is socially acceptable in the UK, often being associated with socialising, celebration and relaxation.<sup>1</sup>

When delivering alcohol and drug education in multicultural settings including classrooms, teachers will need to tackle sensitive issues. Not all pupils are comfortable discussing certain topics, and some parents are reluctant to allow their children to explore certain themes.

Every child is entitled to receive equal educational and developmental opportunities within formal education,

including relevant education around alcohol and drugs, sex and relationships, as well as other sensitive issues they may experience in their transitions to adulthood.

How do we ensure pupils receive relevant education, in the context of cultural difference, equality and diversity, which prepares them for the challenges and opportunities they will face throughout their lives?

### Equality and diversity

Equality does not mean 'one size fits all'. Equality is valuing diversity, individual differences and talents, whilst protecting individuals against discrimination. This means providing equality of opportunity and fostering good relationships between diverse people, in a culture and society where everyone can participate, thrive and contribute.<sup>2</sup>

### Identity and culture

An individual's identity is complex. It is shaped by various external and internal factors and is formed over time, as an individual develops relationships with different groups and settings.

Culture, religion and ethnicity are among many factors that shape an individual's identity, and affect the way this very identity is used to take part in other sub-cultures or groups.

Culture is a dynamic and responsive



concept, influenced by external factors and changes over time. It is a core definer of individual identity, enabling us to develop our sense of self.

Individuals may belong to multiple cultural groups – or cultural identities – which might be defined by ethnicity, religion, linguistic background, country of origin, parental country of origin, age, common history and shared customs.<sup>3</sup>

Values, such as beliefs, ideas and attitudes held common by a particular group, are a core definer of culture and identity.

When delivering alcohol and drug education in the classroom, culture and identity are factors that need to be constantly assessed and considered.

However, individuals may not hold the same values as other members of the same cultural groups – a feature especially evident in multicultural societies like modern Britain.

## Cultural diversity in England

Individuals who migrate from one country to another will have diverse cultural identities. Individuals' identities are shaped by the values and beliefs prevalent at home and in the surrounding community. An individual who migrates will over time internalise different features of the host culture, which are not necessarily compatible or in line with those shaping the culture of origin.

Regardless of the family's cultural or religious background, children and young people living in Britain will come across alcohol and drugs. The use of alcohol and drugs may be perceived differently by young people to their own family's cultural values. All young people are at some risk from harm associated with their own or other people's alcohol or drug use.<sup>4</sup>

*“For example, a young person may identify with the cultural values and practices of his or her family, but also be influenced by the values and practices of his or her peer group. If alcohol use is a common behaviour within the young person's peer group, a high level of cultural identification may not stop this young person from drinking with his or her friends, even if the use of alcohol is not an accepted practice within their*

*culture”.*<sup>5</sup>

For this reason, it is paramount that alcohol and drug education “start at primary school before drinking patterns become established and should be revisited as pupils' understanding and experiences increase” (DfES 2004). It is also crucial that alcohol and drug education is delivered to all pupils and is inclusive of cultural differences and beliefs.

## Risk factors increasing vulnerability of young people from different cultural groups

‘No man is an island’ and all individuals are part of different systems such as family and society, through which they are influenced, and which they influence in return. To understand an individual's behaviour, we must consider the attitudes, values and behaviours of the family system as well as other systems to which the individual belongs.

There are various risk factors (Table 1) which, in combination, increase the chances of an individual's involvement in alcohol and drug use as well as other risky behaviours.

In considering the issue of risk and resilience a useful model is to look at how ‘stressors’ can impact on an individual. Horizontal stressors are those that are more predictable (e.g. birth, a new sibling, aging parents, bereavement and illness). Vertical stressors, conversely, are those that tend to be inherited or passed down (e.g. religious or political allegiances, an inability to speak about certain subjects for example sex, family history and mental ill health etc). Where horizontal and vertical stressors coincide, anxiety and therefore vulnerabilities increase. Young people from some cultural groups may be exposed to additional risk factors caused by the interaction of horizontal and vertical stressors. These include:

- Intergenerational conflict, specifically in relation to different views about certain social issues and related cultural acceptability;
- Transition and resettlement;
- Racism, which can result in poor self-esteem and poor relationships;

Table 1: Risk and protective factors

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

- Cultural identity and identity construction (specifically during the process of adolescent development);
- Social inequality.

When delivering alcohol and drug education in a multicultural environment, teachers and practitioners should take account of family systems, stressors and additional risk factors.

### How to deliver culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education in the classroom:

#### School governing bodies

Governing bodies and proprietors have a vital role in making sure every child gets the best possible education.<sup>6</sup> It is a core responsibility of governing bodies to ensure a school ethos where acceptance, inclusion and sensitivity are at the forefront is developed.

#### School policies

It is good practice and important to regularly review the school policy around equality and diversity and to ensure this informs alcohol and drug education and PSHE provision. It

is advisable for schools to consult specialists and to value and implement their advice on equality and diversity.

Whilst reviewing the school policies, pupils' and parents' views must be sought, included and applied, in respect of equality, diversity and inclusion. Governing bodies, local authorities and proprietors should annually publish information to demonstrate how they meet the general public sector equality duty.<sup>7</sup>

### Culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education in the classroom: Tackling discrimination, bullying, harassment and victimisation

When planning a classroom-based alcohol and drug education programme, teachers should assess where young people are in their knowledge, understanding and tolerance of alcohol and drug use.

Needs assessment is vital in order to understand a pupil's current knowledge, attitudes and behaviours in relation to alcohol and drug use and related issues. An efficient needs assessment aimed at exploring knowledge and understanding, will also shed light on pupils' personal perception of specific issues relative to the

cultural groups they may belong to (this could include values and beliefs deriving from various ethnic, religious or national identities, as well as other sub-cultures strictly linked to pupils' day-to-day lives and relationships with peers, inside and outside the school).

An efficient needs assessment, together with day-to-day observation of pupils, and knowledge of pupils' circumstances and history, will give teachers awareness of a student's values and sensitivities. Needs assessment is therefore the starting point to understand cultural diversity in the classroom, and the basis upon which teachers should develop inclusive teaching methods. For further information on how to undertake a needs assessment, please refer to this [briefing paper](#).

## Tips for developing a culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education programme

Within a multicultural context, it is advisable to implement culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education programmes.

## Securing a safe space for discussion through clear and agreed ground rules

Creating a safe space for discussion means ensuring young people feel safe and comfortable in discussing sensitive or controversial issues, expressing their views and exploring their thoughts and feelings honestly and openly, without fearing judgement by others.

In order to do so, teachers and students should agree ground rules for discussion, which are vital for debating sensitive matters and minimise the possibility of racially based comments or stereotyping during group discussions. Ground rules for discussion should be set **in collaboration with pupils**, and should cover the following:

- Establishing what constitute positive behaviours for interacting with others in a safe space and what constitutes negative and unacceptable behaviours;
- Ensuring that all participants have equal rights and responsibilities in the space of discussion;

Research from the USA indicates that tailored and culturally sensitive programs made greater gains in delaying drug uptake. Specific strategies involved:

- Adjusting the reading level of materials in relation to students' learning needs, skills, and levels of understanding or mastering the language;
- Using graphics and stories representative of the cultural groups involved;
- Using age-appropriate and culturally-relevant language to make it more accessible to the students;
- Choosing role-play scenarios that are relevant to the students' experience;
- Using examples appropriate to the cultural groups involved.

*Two approaches to drug use prevention were tried with young people from minority backgrounds in New York (Botvin, G., 1995, 'Drug abuse prevention in school settings', in Drug Abuse Prevention with Multiethnic Youth, Eds G. Botvin, S. Schinke & M. Orlandi). These were a generic skills training prevention approach and a culturally focused prevention approach. The major difference between the approaches was the way they were taught. The culturally focused approach used mediums such as myth and contemporary story telling.*

*Drug related high-risk problems that were actually faced by early adolescents in the environment of New York were posed. Both approaches were successful but there was lower drug uptake and drug use over time with students who received the culturally focused intervention.<sup>8</sup>*

- Exploring boundaries between the safe space and everyday life – specifically in the context of agreeing and ensuring that information shared in the classroom will not be used against the individual by peers outside the classroom;
- Encouraging young people to share their honest views and opinions in a respectful manner.<sup>9</sup>

### Young people as a source for cultural knowledge

Needs assessment will provide considerable insight into the classroom's cultural richness. Teachers should regard young people's values and beliefs as a source of cultural knowledge to further explore specific issues and learning opportunities in the classroom.

### Interactive learning activities and participation

Interactive teaching and learning activities are a fundamental requirement for effective alcohol and drug education, and are especially effective in classrooms with young people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Interactive activities and group discussions allow cultural differences and similarities to be explored sensitively, but also enable teachers to clarify perceptions and correct potential misconceptions or stereotypes around cultural or religious diversity, as well as around alcohol and drug use. Interactive teaching also allows differentiated learning opportunities, which is indispensable for effective alcohol and drug education.

Differentiated learning accommodates the learning needs of all students, so that pupils are stretched and challenged, through differentiated guidance, and by adapting teaching methods to pupils' various skills, levels of understanding and learning speeds.

Examples of classroom differentiation methods are:

- Providing pupils with multiple assignments tailored for students of different levels of achievement;
- Allowing students to choose ways to learn

- and to self-assess their learning process;
- Having high expectations of all students;
- Providing pupils with opportunities to explore topics where they have a strong interest and find personal meaning.<sup>10</sup>

### Ensure cultural sensitivities are addressed

Teachers and practitioners looking at developing culturally sensitive educational materials should consider the following:

- Base the information provided in the classroom on an appreciation of diverse cultural attitudes around alcohol and drug use, as well as sex and relationships issues;
- Explore and discuss different religious perspectives around topics like alcohol (e.g. some religions prohibit the use of alcohol, whilst others advocate drinking in moderation) or relationships;
- Avoid stereotyping and making generalisations, making sure that any resource does not make assumptions about alcohol and drug use or attitudes towards alcohol and drug use;
- Choose discussion scenarios that reflect or are relevant to students' experiences;
- Involve local cultural groups in developing resources and gathering of additional information, when required;
- Enable young people to draw on popular cultural role models, where appropriate;
- Involve parents and wider community groups.<sup>11</sup>

If culture-related sensitivities arise when discussing a particular topic in the classroom, the teacher should encourage discussion among pupils, ensuring any stereotypes are challenged and that diverse opinions are respected. When conflicting issues arise, young people should be encouraged to research and verify the information shared in the classroom.

Teachers and practitioners should also be aware of potential sensitivities related to combining alcohol and drug education with sex and relationship education. In some cultures, this may not be seen appropriate. It is crucial to:

- Consider various religious festivals (e.g. avoid talking about sex and relationships during the holy month of Ramadan, or other similar religious festivals);
- Inform parents before delivering sex and relationship education and actively involve them to seek their opinion on the matter.

In this context, although sex and relationships education is approached in a non-religious context in the classroom, it is important for teachers to acknowledge that certain religions prohibit pre-marital sex, extra-marital sex and same sex relationships.<sup>12</sup>

It should be stressed that parents and carers have the legal right to withdraw their children from sex and relationship education and religious education. However, if this happens, teachers should remind parents and carers about the school's commitment to ensure all children and young people learn in a safe, supportive and knowledgeable environment, and that different subjects are explored within the context of, and with respect for equality and diversity.

## Involve parents

At times, teachers or practitioners may find that some parents or carers are reluctant to allow their children to be taught about alcohol and drugs, mainly because of cultural or religious sensitivities, but also because of misinformation and misunderstanding of what alcohol and drug education is.

Many parents find it difficult to talk to their children about alcohol and drugs and this may be particularly difficult for some. This could be for a variety of reasons:

- Young people may be perceived to know more than they do;
- There may be an element of shame in discussing certain topics that are taboo;
- Alcohol and drugs may not be discussed within the specific community.

To avoid misunderstanding, parents and carers should be kept informed with relevant information about topics covered during alcohol and drug education in the classroom. It is good practice to make

resources, information and services available in different languages, in order to tackle potential linguistic barriers and miscommunication.

## How to inform and involve parents of various cultural backgrounds:

Schools should always seek actively to involve parents and carers in the delivery of alcohol and drug education. This not only will clarify misconceptions around alcohol and drug education provision, but also allow the delivery of culturally sensitive education. To engage positively parents, teachers and practitioners should:

- Consult local parent and community groups to develop culturally appropriate ways to involve parents in alcohol and drug education. For example, hold meetings in an environment comfortable for the parents.
- Be honest and transparent – explain to parents and carers that an evidence-based alcohol and drug education in school will challenge myths and misconceptions disseminated, for example, through peer interactions, social and mainstream media.
- Provide parents and carers with drug education information in their own languages wherever possible.
- Encourage parental involvement in alcohol and drug education. For example, use homework activities where students interview or discuss aspects of drug education with their parents.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Considering and appreciating cultural diversity can help improve the delivery of alcohol and drug education and make a real difference in pupils' lives.

To ensure the delivery of culturally sensitive alcohol and drug education, schools must promote inclusion and equality of opportunities. Pupils' needs, values and beliefs should be constantly assessed, acknowledged, and valued as fundamental to develop positive and supportive learning environments – whilst open communication with parents should always be sought, and nourished to avoid corroboration of misconceptions around alcohol and drug

education.

Alcohol and drug education with students from all cultural backgrounds is more likely to be effective when it is an interactive process of learning based on current and relevant content, and activities that allow the development of social and life skills.

For further information on effective alcohol and drug education take a look at the National [Quality Standards](#).

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## 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](http://mentor-adepis.org). For further information, contact:

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