

Delivering alcohol and drug education: Advice for teachers

Alcohol and Drug Prevention Briefing Paper

MAY 2015

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. What are the key principles of alcohol and drug education?
2. How do we get ready to teach?
3. What teaching methods shall we use?

Adrian King – 2004

Reviewed by Mentor-ADEPIS May 2015

The underlying principles of alcohol and drug education

- **Alcohol and drug education needs to start from where children are and appeal to their integrity:**

Gleaning starting points from the pupils themselves ensures relevance. Try to convey trust that the pupils will develop the competence they need.

- **Alcohol and drug education needs to start early and be revisited continually as experience, understanding and needs change**

At Key Stage 1, the focus is more on skills and staying safe than drugs. Skills need to be practised, situations talked about, options considered. To examine and re-

examine issues as children move through their school career extends their comprehension as their confidence grows, their experience expands and their horizons broaden. By Key Stage 4, the emphasis is on taking full responsibility for themselves, for their health, and the safety of themselves (and sometimes those around them,) as they approach adulthood.

- **Alcohol and drug education needs to take an unobtrusive place in more general PSHE:**

Do not treat alcohol and drug education as an isolated 'subject'. The skills and self-knowledge it encourages are widely applicable. 'Set' your alcohol and drug education sensitively in the context of references to current, wider life experiences with which your pupils can identify.

- **The skills needed to teach about alcohol and drugs are the same skills required for addressing any element of PSHE:**

Alcohol and drug education does not require unique skills. If you can facilitate discussion, listen carefully, remain impartial when you need to, use approaches which are non-threatening and which actively involve your pupils, and if you know your pupils' needs, you can deliver alcohol and drug education.

- **Teachers who know their pupils well are ideally placed to provide sensitive alcohol and drug education:**



Judge carefully when your pupils are ready for ideas or information, whether, for example, questions are genuine or merely provocative, and temper your input accordingly. This is always much harder for visitors who don't know the pupils as you do.

- **Teachers don't need to be drugs experts to teach about the subject:**

Knowing the children and using relevant teaching styles is the vital expertise needed to teach alcohol and drug education. When reliable information becomes relevant, seek it.

- **A focus upon exploring attitudes and values, and developing and practising skills is likely to be more beneficial than information-giving alone:**

Be ready to challenge young minds' early ideas in ways which do not demean or otherwise discourage openness. Pupils may wrongly assume their peers concur with their views, so take this opportunity to strengthen positive social norms.

Encourage your class to express their many opinions, and so test such assumptions and ensure each pupil receives 'input' from many sources, not just you. Don't forget that 'drug facts' form only a small part of alcohol and drug education.

- **Approaches which are interactive and facilitative are more effective in gaining co-operation and making lasting changes:**

If your pupils are kept active and are not mere recipients, their learning is likely to be deeper, more personal, and longer-lasting.

Questions to ask your school

- **Can the school show you a copy of your LEA's guidance on drug education?** If not, contact the LEA and speak to the specialist adviser.

- **Can the school show you a copy of the DfES guidance on drug education?** Although newer, briefer documents have superseded it ([DfE and ACPO drug advice for schools](#)) it is worth seeking out a copy of the 2004 DfES document '[Drugs: Guidance for schools](#)'. The guidance is more than 10 years old, but its sections

dealing with classroom practice and internal procedures for authorising drugs within school and managing incidents that fall outside such authorisation are still valid and very useful.

- **Can the school show you a copy of the school drugs policy?** If not, enquire about its current stage of development or review, and be ready to check that your alcohol and drug education plans are in line with the school's expectations.

- **Is it clear where in the time-table alcohol and drug education will be delivered?** The ideal pattern is for it to dovetail with other PSHE issues and **not** be dealt with in isolation. You may find you can assist the school to review how alcohol and drug education is provided. If not, you will need to know how much curriculum time will be available.

- **Can the school indicate whether there is any in-service training available to you locally or further afield?** If not, ask the Local Authority or other specialist drug adviser. You may need to check there is a budget available to pay for this.

- **Can the school indicate whether there are good alcohol and drug education teaching resources you can use?** And is there a budget for purchasing new materials if necessary? You may want to look at websites like [ADEPIS](#), [The Alcohol Education Trust](#), [The Christopher Winter Project](#) or [The PSHE Association](#) which provide information and evidence-based resources.

Questions to ask yourself

- **Do you feel ready to teach alcohol and drug education?** If not, reading this document may help together with undergoing some training. Consulting the pupils is vital, and when you come to do this it will give you plenty of ideas about what will be helpful to include and issues to explore with them. Read the local and national guidance, too, particularly Sections 2 and 3 of the 2004 DfES booklet 'Drugs: Guidance for Schools'.

- **Do you know how much of the subject you will be 'covering' and how long this is supposed to take you?** Do you know what has been done before, perhaps by

another teacher in another class or school, and upon which you are intending to build? If not, contact the relevant people to check what has been taught or explored.

- **Do you have a clear idea of what your alcohol and drug education is intended to achieve? Are you clear about your planned learning outcomes?** Make sure that the overall aims are realistic, and that you will be able to assess whether or not you have reached them at the end! If not, revise them, or speak to the person who set them and discuss how to refine them so that they become achievable. Section 2.1 of the DfES guidance may help you set sensible aims that aren't too ambitious.

Getting ready to teach

There are several ways to consult pupils, assess their needs and knowledge. For primary school children one of the most effective strategies is to use the Draw and Write Investigation Technique. Older pupils, may also be able to write (and draw) answers to key questions to reveal what they know and where their questions lie, but they may also be able to discuss in a group what kind of alcohol and drug education they feel would be useful to them.

You can find out detailed information on effective ways to assess pupils' needs in the ADEPIS briefing paper '[Efficient needs assessment in schools](#)'.

What you need to have before you start

- A copy of '**Drugs: Guidance for Schools**'; a copy of the school drugs policy setting out arrangements for alcohol and drug education; good resources; skills; confidence; a planned programme; and, if possible time-tabling which recognises alcohol and drug education is an **integral** part of PSHE, and not a subject to be taught separately.

What you need to do before you start

- Refer carefully to the school drugs policy on drug education.

- Use the feedback from consulting your pupils, the resources and the National Curriculum PSHE framework, to plan your programme. The PSHE framework can be found on the [PSHE Association](#) website.

- Ensure you have realistic and measurable aims and learning outcomes.

Alcohol and drug education teaching methods; and a tip

Classroom Climate

The 'climate' in any PSHE class may prove the crucial element for success. Encourage openness, trust and security. Involve the pupils themselves in suggesting ideas for improving the climate and help them set ground rules to provide a framework for behaviour which will encourage minority views or personal experiences to be shared without a feeling that it risks derision. Suggest they outlaw belittling put downs, criticism which is not constructive, and personal disclosures about drugs.

Human Bingo

To help a class get to know each other, provide a page with a series of half a dozen statements "Find someone who..." for each pupil. Avoid personally probing questions at this stage. Choose language and statements that fit your class. Examples might be:

"Find someone who:

...hates rock music

...supports Manchester United

...finds it hard to make friends

...enjoys helping people

...you've never talked to - and have a chat!

...could explain how to use the internet safely

...has just learned a new skill

...finds games like this a bit boring"

Allow five minutes to enable milling and mixing at a relatively superficial level to get the class used to moving around and interacting. With suitable statements, you could also use it as a means of setting the scene for a new subject.

Pooling ideas

To generate ideas on any subject and allow everyone to contribute, write the subject on the board as a heading. Ask the class to call out examples of what comes to mind in one minute, with no comment or discussion allowed. Write down every contribution, encouraging lateral thinking. The class can then prioritise contributions to help build an agenda. Follow up discussion enables exploration of one or more ideas without focus on its generator.

Work in groups

If your class are old enough to be given a task to complete by themselves in a small group, there can be tangible advantages. When forming groups, avoid putting all 'talkers' together. The usual seating arrangement may be a good basis for structured group tasks but varying this can ensure social contact spreads more widely than friendship groups. An instruction such as 'Draw (or write) three things you think your parents wouldn't want you to do' could lead to group discussion about disapproval, fairness, health, safety, freedom, limits and rules. A broadly similar range of issues can be raised and discussed in Year One as in

Tip

When chairing a discussion, or punctuating input with questions, be ready to probe and prompt in order to bring about particular insight. But beware giving the message that only one view or impression should be taken from any input or experience, still less that this should necessarily accord with your own.

Acknowledge diversity of response and opinion, and encourage pupils to think for themselves. Use open-ended questions to recognise and elicit individual views.

Use '...do you think' and '...did you find' to seek points of view rather than 'right' answers. Use closed questions only to draw attention to important facts. 'Thinking time' is important, too. An obvious pause after a request for a response has been put will tell pupils you are genuinely wanting them to think and then answer.

Year Six, and in Year Seven as in Year Eleven though complexity and perspective will alter as the children grow and as issues are re-visited. If alcohol and drugs figure in their suggestions, be ready for them, but if not, the other issues are all relevant. There is no need to force the pace.

Literature

Children's literature is a hugely rich area to explore and a great medium for considering situations, characters, actions, options, outcomes, etc. which can develop - through "What if...?" Or "Supposing you..." - into real-life possibilities. Choose (or make up!) stories which paint realistic and plausible pictures with the possibilities of open endings and interpretations, rather than any which consist of rather obvious adult messages masquerading as fiction. Particularly try to avoid doom and gloom stories telling of the dire consequences of drug taking, or dealing simplistically with the 'yes or no' choice in responding to peer pressure to take alcohol and drugs. Try reading out short scene-setting sections to paint a vivid picture of characters and backdrop, and to pinpoint your chosen situation, dilemma, etc. Prompt by asking the children what they have understood to be going on, and to say something about each of the characters. You might invite them to draw or write a 'picture' of each, and consider what feelings might be involved in the storyline, what options it presents, what outcomes might occur. Try to draw out their current level of understanding, add to it from your own wisdom and by carefully chosen prompts which encourage contributions from the class. Drama can further enrich the learning possibilities.

Drama

Drama (or 'Let's pretend!') can be used to extend the exploration process, and is perhaps potentially the most powerful of all PSHE methods.

"OK Narinda, pretend you're Lisa in the story. What can you make her say to Toni that you think would help? Who'd like to be Toni? OK, Sara. Be ready to answer Lisa; just say what you think Toni would have said. Narinda, how do you think Lisa would

be feeling...?” etc.

The question, “How would you feel if...” may be answered by someone filling that person’s ‘shoes’ and for the class to explore how it feels from close up. Temporarily ‘freezing’ a scene can make a space for discussion, a chosen situation being explored as presented or re-run from a variety of perspectives. Say: “Let’s look at that again. But this time...” encouraging pupils to suggest changes. Scenes that refuse to resolve in a single, satisfactory way will help prepare children for real life! It is important to keep in mind that if one child takes on a role, you ensure the others in the class do not confuse character and player, but instead recognise the player is exploring the feelings and opinions of someone else. This will be more straightforward if the role is somewhat caricatured, but harder for some class members if, say, a male classmate ‘plays’ a fictitious boy his own age with quite different opinions. It is therefore essential to ‘de-role’ the players after using these techniques by, for instance, inviting them to tell the class their name, and something else which makes them different from the character they were playing, and then to ensure there are no emotional leftovers from the scene(s) just played.

Attitudes/opinions Checkout

Ask the group to think of statements about an aspect of drugs. Each should express an opinion, not a fact, (controversial, provocative, or not) though the person thinking of them does not necessarily need to agree with the opinion the statement expresses. Ask pupils to write each statement on a different piece of paper or sticky Post-it™ label. ‘Drugs aren’t always bad’ ‘f you find a dropped syringe and needle, you should never touch it’ etc.

• **Method 1** Collect the papers and read them out one at a time (anonymously!) Participants have to move to parts of the room labelled ‘agree strongly’ ‘agree a bit’ ‘disagree strongly’ ‘disagree a bit’ and finally ‘unsure’. They can then challenge or interrogate each other according to where they stand. (One person speaking, the rest listen). Middle ground may be omitted if it seems to provide too tempting a cop-out. This activity works best with groups who

know each other well enough to risk expressing a minority view rather than following friends to the popular part of the room

• **Method 2** Collect the papers and then divide the class into small groups before redistributing papers among the groups who then have to reach a consensus about which of the above labels best fits each statement. A flip chart sheet for each group marked with columns as above provides a space to stick the Post-it™ notes.

Both methods allow for swift exploration of a range of ideas, charting the spread of opinion or examining the need for more knowledge. Check with the class at the end to discover what they have learned.

Research

Get members of small groups to research one aspect of a subject and present their findings to the class. Examples:

- Groups collect resources and magazines aimed at informing young people about alcohol and drugs. Are the facts presented reliable? Do they seem to over-emphasise the forbidden, or the dangerous aspects of the subject, at the expense of objective information? Or are they straightforward, seeming to trust the reader with the facts? Are they interesting? Should they be interesting?
- What drugs are people allowed to use? Find as many names as you can. Are ‘legal highs’ OK? Are medicines always OK to take? Suppose there is someone else’s name on the bottle or packet? Ask at home, or ask a chemist and see what advice you can find out about medicines. Can you also write a list of drugs people are not allowed to use? Could some of the names be on both lists? Does that make any sense?
- What about the drug Ecstasy? Where are the dangers? Can they be reduced? Can Ecstasy ever be safe? How many people have died? How does this compare with the number of deaths from hazardous or extreme sports, for example? ...or from alcohol? How legitimate is it to compare numbers of deaths in this way?

Quizzes

Quizzes which are set by pupils to challenge pupils and plumb knowledge can be fun. However, they are better as a way of consolidating learning rather than introducing it. Get the children to concoct their quiz questions using information that has emerged in previous sessions. If questions are to be less restricted, they may need vetting, so be prepared to intervene to avoid anything being asked which you feel inappropriate. One advantage of such quizzes is that they can indicate where learning has occurred and where gaps exist. Another is that language is appropriately crafted by the pupils themselves. Avoid true/false quizzes - they can teach or reinforce false information! Help the children explore how they might (ever) need to apply their knowledge. This is where discussion and consideration of the pupils' own experiences, fears and expectations is vital - and it may be better approached through literature or drama.

TV, Video, CD-ROM

It can be tempting to assume attractive, professionally produced resources contain high quality alcohol and drug education material. This may not be so! View the material and assess its place, if any, in your work. Pre-record TV programmes, and view videos carefully before deciding whether to purchase them. Criteria for assessing the quality of drug-related resource are listed on pages 103 and 104 of *Drugs: Guidance for Schools*. Showing a short, carefully chosen section can often retain interest better than playing a whole programme; in fact pausing, repeating, omitting and re-ordering are all possible. Always follow up the viewing, asking pupils to reflect upon what they have seen and to explore its relevance *for them*. Ask questions like:

- What did you find interesting about the programme/video? Why was that?
- What purpose do you think the maker had in mind?
- If you had been (in that scene) what would you have done?
- What other things could you do or say (in that situation)?
- What have you learned from the

programme/video and what from our discussion?

The same advice to 'know your material' applies to CD-ROMs. They will be far more effective if they are truly interactive, requiring considered responses from a pupil rather than simply a choice of paths through an information presentation. CD-ROMs which can be regulated by the teacher to restrict pupils to selected material can help direct individual research for a pupil seeking information to bring back to others. Disadvantages of CD-ROMs include the fact that monitoring a pupil's progress and learning can be hard, and each machine will serve only one pupil, or a small group, at a time. Always consider carefully the context within which they are used. Remember all such media are an adjunct to more interactive class work with teacher support - avoid using them as a substitute.

Didactic Presentation

Though didactic input is a somewhat passive learning tool, it has value as a straightforward and often efficient information provider. Make it short and punchy, factual not preachy, and don't allow it to dominate and keep pupils inactive and uninvolved for long periods. Avoid long lists of dos and don'ts, or a complex series of facts which will be unlikely to be memorable. Choose carefully, e.g. teacher talk, pupil presentation of research, TV, school nurse talk, to both ring the changes and offer a credible source of valuable input. The trick is to make presentations short and relevant, timed to *follow* activity or an expression of raised interest to maximise attention and receptiveness. Always follow up to assess impact and discussion points, and to gauge needs still unmet.

Using visitors to help you

Though visitors or outside agencies can have value, great care is needed to negotiate suitable content and integrate their contribution fully into your programme, preferably through team teaching. Visitors are often invited to give 'expert' information about dangers of alcohol and drugs. However, the value of such narrow information-giving is often severely limited, and as soon as exploration and discussion

are added, the teacher is usually a better expert. Detailed advice about using external contributors is on pages 38-40 of *Drugs: Guidance for Schools*.

Reading and writing

There is little role for more formal methods such as individual reading and writing exercises in alcohol and drug education, although they have their place, particularly as pupils become more competent in these skills. For example, individual research and feedback can confer status and avoid the teacher always appearing to be the information giver. Individual reflection can also be important but interaction is often the catalyst for personal change, which is why we emphasise interactive methods so strongly here.

Round-up

At the end of **every** lesson, allow a minute or two (usually no more than 5) to enquire how useful the lesson has been. Allow different answers, including those reporting little value.

- “Have you ever been in that position - what did you do?”
- “Can you tell me a useful or important thing you have learned (in this lesson, from our discussion, etc.)”
- “How could you make use of what you have just learned?”
- “How could the lesson have been better?”
etc.

Relevance and learning will frequently differ from pupil to pupil and this is quite inevitable. Hearing how other pupils have responded to the lesson is part of their peers' learning.

Monitoring

In order to assess your success in reaching your stated aims, record what you do, and some representative responses the children give during the lesson and during the round-up. At the end of the programme, term or year, you will have records to refer to which will help the assessment process, and assist you in reviewing what you will do next

term or year in the light of the current programme.

What to do after you have finished

Evaluation

Ask yourself if you have delivered what you planned to deliver, and whether, through the pupil contributions you recorded in your monitoring, you can tell if the pupils have learned what you aimed they should learn. Consult your class anew (and for longer!) about what they have learned, and how useful they judge it to be. Did they enjoy the programme? Can they suggest improvements? If your aims were realistic, you may find you have been successful in reaching them. If you haven't been, ask yourself whether the programme, or your approach to it, need to be adapted in order to help you reach similar aims next time, or whether your aims need to be modified to make them more realistic, or both. Do your methods seem sound? Did the content seem right and was it reported relevant by your pupils? Do you need to review your resources? Or time-tabling? Record carefully the changes you think need to be made, as an aid to next term's/year's planning.

About ADEPIS

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Mentor

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

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