

## Drug Education

## Approaches to School based alcohol education

The **whole-of-school** approach to drug education can help protect all students from a range of health related risks, including drug problems by providing:

- caring relationships, high expectations and opportunities for meaningful participation
- a safe and positive school and classroom environment
- opportunities for fostering learning, resilience and wellbeing
- opportunities to teach drug education across the curriculum.

A whole school approach means that the school organisation, support structures, policies, and curriculum are all designed to enhance students' learning and wellbeing. A school environment where trust, respect and caring are reinforced, support is provided and diversity is valued provides the ideal conditions for the social, emotional and cognitive development of students.

The school's practices and programs need to support drug education in the classroom.

**Early classroom-based approaches** to alcohol use prevention were grounded in learning theory, which assumes that students are rational information-seekers and decision makers and that once they receive the appropriate information, their behaviour will simply follow. These early programs were developed to disseminate information about alcohol, warn students of the negative consequences of alcohol use, and suggest healthy alternative behaviours. While these types of programs have reported some success in changing knowledge, attitudes or beliefs, there is little evidence to support changes in alcohol-related behaviour (Botvin, 2000; Botvin & Griffin, 2007; White & Pitts, 1998).

**Informational approach** remains relatively widespread, and many classroom-based programs are either based on it or retain elements of it. However, many of the more recent approaches place less emphasis on knowledge acquisition and more emphasis on skill development (including resistance skills and harm minimisation) and also focus on social influences to locate alcohol use within a wider social context.

### Social Norms approach

The social norms approach aims to change incorrect perceptions about peers' drinking behaviours and attitudes. The social norms approach is underpinned by social scientific literature that demonstrates the influence of the perceptions of what others think and do (see for example Berkowitz, 2005). It represents a departure from much 'standard' alcohol prevention work with young people that focus on educating them about the risks and consequences of consumption. Social norms interventions seek to identify and correct any misperceptions that exist among the target group, so that the social environment can become more supportive of safe (and non-) consumption of alcohol.

The approach involves, inter alia, the repeated administration of an anonymous survey at the target sites at multiple time points, and the dissemination of data-based, positive 'key messages' to the target group, with the intention of correcting misperceptions and affirming 'healthy behaviours'.

The social norms approach has been implemented in the US, UK and Europe; and in schools in Tasmania, Australia (Social Norms Analysis Project, SNAP). The early US based work was mostly conducted with college-age students (Haines & Spear, 1996; Wechsler et al., 2003) but high school interventions are rapidly growing in popularity.

Cross link to Normative/social norms information.

### Family-based Approaches

It is often argued that it is unreasonable to expect schools alone to influence adolescents' attitudes and behaviours regarding substance use when young people are exposed to a wide variety of influences outside the school environment (Homonoff, Martin, Rimpas, & Henderson, 1994).

### Community-based Approaches

Alcohol education programs that are delivered at the level of the community and target broader social, environmental, political and legislative factors that may impact on adolescents' use of alcohol. They are examined in light of the contribution they might make to the issue of young people and alcohol, and also to assess the scope that exists for schools to be able to be able to work with or relate to these programs.

The rationale for employing a community-based prevention approach is that problems associated with alcohol use are generally widespread in a community and not restricted to a particular subgroup; they are often culturally-embedded; and environmental factors that facilitate alcohol-related problems can be addressed at the community level.

### Combined Approaches

More recently, there has been a movement towards combining single focussed education programs that target individual behaviour into a comprehensive multiple component approach (Aguirre-Molina & Gorman, 1996; Flay, 2000; Stigler et al., 2006). Ecological approaches to prevention take into account the multiple spheres of social influence on young people, including family, school, peers and community. Using a classroom-based program as a base, adolescents' social environment is addressed, including whole of school programs, family programs, mass media and community interventions. Social cognitive theory suggests that young people are more likely to adopt healthy behaviours when they are exposed to positive role models; their environment facilitates healthy behaviours and inhibits unhealthy practices; and there are opportunities for them to engage in healthy prosocial activities (Bandura, 1989). Combined approaches include school and community-based interventions, school and family-based interventions and a combination of all three.

### Other Approaches

A range of other approaches and tools that may also impact on adolescent alcohol use have been developed and some of these have been introduced to varying degrees in Australia.

Three other approaches and tools are described and listed below :

#### Universal media messages

There is little evidence that universal media messages alone change drinking behaviour in adolescents or adults. However, when combined with other strategies and enforcement of legislation (e.g., drink driving), they may increase awareness and knowledge about alcohol-related issues

#### Internet

Given the ever-increasing advances in information and communication technology as well as greater acceptability of, and accessibility to, the internet, web-based information and interactive communications systems offer some advantages over traditional health promotion delivery systems.

#### Peer led approaches

Peer education is widely used within ATOD education both within Australia and overseas

(Australian Drug Foundation, 2006; Cahill, Murphy, & Kane, 2005; Goren, 2006; McDonald & Grove, 2001). Peer education is “based on the premise that it is possible to harness the naturally occurring influence of peers on young people’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviour”

(McDonald et al., 2003, p9). Information, affective or psychosocial approaches to alcohol education may all include a peer education component. Some information-based approaches in schools simply replace an adult teacher with a peer educator (Baklien, 1993; Mellanby, Newcombe, Rees & Tripp, 2001) whilst other approaches utilise the peer component in a more sophisticated manner such as in theatre or other artistic endeavours (Berlin & Hornbeck, 2005; Cimini, Page, & Trujillo, 2002). Regardless, careful planning of peer-led activities is essential (Skinner & Roche, 2005).

### Summary of other approaches

Among the different other approaches to adolescent alcohol use, internet-based programs appear to be the most promising. While most evaluation studies on web-based programs have been conducted in US college students, there is some evidence that Australian high school students find the approach acceptable and respond positively to the messages.