Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
Get informed, stay smart, stay safe

Factsheet

How schools can protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from drug harms



Evidence ratings:

This resource has undergone expert review. See our Help/Q&A section for more details.

Year: Year 7–8, Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Drugs (General), Tobacco

Tags: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, school culture, positive cultural identity

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Attachments

How schools can protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from drug harms

Key Messages



How teachers and schools can protect students against alcohol and drug related harms

The school's social environment is a key influence in the development of young people. It is an important setting to promote health and wellbeing.**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people have indicated that schools and teachers are their preferred and most frequently accessed source of health-related information.**

School-based factors, such as teaching approaches and the school environment, create a greater sense of community, attachment and performance, which are associated with reduced alcohol and drug related harms. It is important to **create a school culture in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel welcome** This can be achieved when schools and teachers positively promote cultural identity and a school environment without violence, racism and discrimination. It also helps to promote positive and high expectations for their students' potential to achieve.



What can schools and teachers do?

Here is a list of what schools and teachers can do to help students:

- Teachers should express beliefs that each student has the capacity to reach their goals. Set high and realistic expectations of achievements for all students.
- Encourage students to engage in extracurricular activities (e.g. sports or cultural activities).
- Incorporate and celebrate cultural identity and diversity in all school processes and activities in and outside the classroom.
- Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander role models and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within the school.
- Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their family and community.
- Teachers should aim to have community involvement in the planning and delivery of school processes and curriculum. This can assist in integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, ideas and content in the lesson plans and processes. For example, by getting to know the parents and community members, and valuing the input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and Aboriginal Education Workers.
- Employ and support quality teachers who have experience in cross-cultural settings and can tailor their teaching to the cultural background of the students.
- Build relationships with students that have warmth, humour, are friendly and supportive, and set high, but reasonable expectations for students.

Correcting common misconceptions about drug and alcohol use

As a teacher, you can help students by correcting common misperceptions that young people have about alcohol and other drugs. Myths about prevalence contribute to risk through normalising use and normalising the impacts of risky drinking or “binge drinking”.

One of the most widely held misperceptions is the idea that it is common or normal to use drugs. In fact the vast majority of young people have never tried an illegal drug. Also, while there is a stereotype that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people drink alcohol, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people abstain from drinking than other Australians.

When talking to young people about drug use, it is best to openly communicate the facts without lecturing or exaggerating. See ourMythbusters factsheet for facts to teach your students.

Evidence Base

This factsheet was developed following expert review by researchers at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use at the University of Sydney, the National Drug & Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales, the National Drug Research Institute at Curtin University and Gilimbaa Indigenous Creative Design Agency (2018). Input was received from external Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal experts on theExpert Advisory Group.

The summary of what teachers and the school can do is based on conclusions reached by the following studies:

Harslett, M., Harrison, B., Godfrey, J., Partington, G., & Richer, K. (2000). Teacher perceptions of the characteristics of effective teachers of Aboriginal middle school students. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 25*(2).

Ockenden, L. (2014). Positive learning environments for Indigenous children and young people. Resource sheet no. 33. Produced by the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

McCuaig, L., & Nelson, A. (2012). *Engaging Indigenous students through school-based health education. Resource sheet no. 12* Canberra: Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.

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