Positive Choices
Drug and Alcohol Information
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Factsheet

Talking to a young person about e-cigarettes/vaping



Evidence ratings:

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

Year:

Targeted Drugs: Electronic Cigarettes/Vaping

Tags:

Origin: Australian

Cost:
Free

Talking to a young person about e-cigarettes/vaping

School staff are a really important source of information for students – whether it be to ask questions, confide personal issues, or share concerns. When this happens, school staff can assist the young person with accessing appropriate information and support. If a young person asks or confides about e-cigarette use, or you suspect it, it is important to be ready to have the conversation.

It is also important to remember that different schools will have different policies and approaches and you should be aware of these and ensure you respond accordingly.

Talking about e-cigarettes

If you are approached by a young person seeking information about e-cigarettes, or are discussing them with a class, here are some tips to help you communicate effectively:

Gather information

- Gather information to make sure you understand what e-cigarettes are, their effects, and the laws for the use of e-cigarettes in your area. Some resources include:
  - Drugs A to Z: Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping factsheet
  - Webinar: E-cigarettes and vaping in young people – where to from here? (Dr Emily Stockings)
  - Factsheet: E-cigarettes, vaping, and the law
  - Video: Vaping – Respect Your Brain

Address common myths

- There are many myths about e-cigarettes, and it is valuable to address these directly with students. For example:
  - **Fact:** Many e-cigarettes are incorrectly labelled and contain nicotine even if they say they don't.
  - **Fact:** Legal e-cigarette products can only be purchased from a pharmacy.
  - **Fact:** It is illegal to sell e-cigarettes to anyone aged under 18 years of age, unless they have a prescription.
  - More myths and facts are available in our Drugs A to Z: Electronic Cigarettes and Vaping factsheet and E-cigarettes, and our vaping and the law
  - Discuss how to say no if they are offered an e-cigarette. The Making Choices factsheet shares some options that can help young people handle these situations.

When you think a young person is using e-cigarettes

If you are concerned about or approached about a student's e-cigarette use, here are some tips to effectively communicate with and support them:

Arrange a suitable time to talk

- Arrange a suitable time to talk where you will have some privacy and won't be interrupted

Avoid making assumptions

- Ask about their e-cigarette use; don't make assumptions that they are using e-cigarettes. Try to find out what their life is like. Be relaxed and give them a chance to express their views. This helps to maintain trust.
  - It is also important to remember that many young people who try e-cigarettes will only try a few 'puffs', while others may use them more regularly and develop nicotine dependence (see glossary).
  - In some cases, a student may have been prescribed e-cigarettes by a doctor to help them quit smoking tobacco cigarettes.

Express concerns but avoid being judgemental or confrontational

- The conversation will be most effective if you avoid judging or lecturing. This can be extremely difficult! But you are more likely to get through to the young person if you have a two-way conversation rather than lecture them
- Listen to the young person and express your concerns in a supportive and non-confrontational manner. Evidence suggests that "motivational" rather than confrontational conversations are most helpful. Watch Making the Link for video demonstrations of how to have motivating conversations with young people
- Use statements including "I" as this doesn't put the blame on them. Instead of saying, "You make me feel worried when you use e-cigarettes" say something like "I feel worried about your e-cigarette use"
- Remind them of their good qualities. Young people will be more likely to listen and take advice on board if they feel valued and respected
- Be trustworthy and supportive so they know that they can rely on you in a time of need and that what they tell you is kept confidential (unless concerns for safety override)

Supporting a young person to quit e-cigarettes/vaping

A young person may also approach you because they want advice or support to quit vaping/e-cigarette use.

Discuss barriers

- Discussing why they use e-cigarettes can help you identify barriers they may face when trying to stop. It can help to think of ways to overcome these barriers. For example, you could brainstorm different ways to deal with pressure from peers or alternative activities to help them relax.
- It may be helpful to provide achievable and specific targets for reducing e-cigarette use.
- Remind them that it is human to make mistakes, and not to be too hard on themselves. Let them know that help is available.

Getting support

- Quitline can also provide support over the phone (13 7848), and Aboriginal and multilingual counsellors are available.
  - Quitline counsellors can also provide support and guidance to teachers and parents who are concerned about a young person.
- A GP or health worker can provide cessation support for people who are dependent (see glossary) on nicotine.
  - The Royal Children's Hospital have shared some questions you can ask to help identify nicotine dependence.
- If they do not want to change, encourage them to learn how to reduce their risk of harm until they're ready to quit. Let them know you are available to talk in the future.

E-cigarettes/vaping resources

There are a number of evidence-based resources available here.

Quitline provide further information and guidance about supporting teens to stop vaping, both online and over the phone (13 7848). You can also request a callback online. Aboriginal and multilingual counsellors are available.

Tackling Indigenous Smoking have developed some vaping resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

- Vaping and E-cigarette Activity Book
- E-Cigarettes and Vaping

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.

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