



The Illicit Project: Trial Opportunity



Evidence ratings:

This resource is currently under evaluation. See our [Help/Q&A section](#) for more details.

Year: Year 9–10, Year 11–12

Targeted Drugs: Alcohol, Cannabis, Drugs (General), "Party Drugs"/MDMA/Ecstasy

Tags: The Illicit Project, harm reduction, older adolescents, neuroscience

Time Allocated: 1-6 lessons

Origin: Australian

Cost:

Free

Attachments

 [The Illicit Project Information Pack](#)

About

Positive Choices is supporting a trial of **The Illicit Project**, a new neuroscience-based harm minimisation program targeted at older adolescents (grades 10-12).

Schools in NSW are invited to be involved in a trial of the program.

See below for more information about the program and contact program co-ordinator Ms Jennifer Debenham (jennifer.debenham@sydney.edu.au) if you would like to be involved.

Developers

The Illicit Project was developed by researchers based at the Matilda Centre for Research in Mental Health and Substance Use, the University of Sydney. The program and trial are supported by *Positive Choices* to address the lack of evidence-based drug prevention programs for older adolescents.

Format

This internet-delivered program comprises of **three 40-minute online modules** that focus on:

1. Alcohol and the developing brain.
2. Recreational drugs and harm reduction.
3. Addiction, mental health, and wellbeing.

The workshops include:

- Cinematic, animated explainer videos.
- Interviews with neuroscientists and drug experts.
- Interviews with young people.
- Interactive activities to apply learnings.

The modules are summarised in a one-page handout that students can take home and keep for future reference. The program requires minimal teacher involvement, with the exception of a short group debrief at the completion of each module.

Summary

The Illicit Project is a neuroscience-based drug and alcohol harm minimisation program targeted at adolescents in senior years of school (grades 10-12). The program engages adolescents by promoting understanding of how the adolescent brain develops, as well as the short and long-term effects of alcohol and other drugs on the brain.

The program was co-designed by a team of neuroscientists, mental health experts, artists and students. It supports students transitioning out of school and aims to minimise the risky use of drugs and alcohol by:

- Upskilling young people in harm reduction and drug literacy skills.
- Increasing understanding that drugs and alcohol affect the adolescent brain differently, as the brain is still under construction and not complete until age 25.
- Leveraging positive psychology to inspire young people to respect their brains.
- Engaging young people through relevant stories and peer role modelling so they can better navigate complex social situations.

Expected Benefits

- Reduced uptake of alcohol and other drugs.
- Increased knowledge and skills around drug harms (drug literacy).
- Increased willingness to seek help.
- Decreased stigma around mental health and substance use.

Get Involved and Join the Trial

Developers of **The Illicit Project** are currently inviting schools in NSW to participate in a trial of the program. The trial will begin in Term 4 2020 and aims to determine the effectiveness of the program in minimising harm due to alcohol and drug use.

More information about **The Illicit Project** and the trial opportunity, is available in this information pack. Additionally, if you are interested in participating in the study, please contact project co-ordinator Ms Jennifer Debenham via [email](#).

Evidence Base

The offline version of **The Illicit Project** is supported by evidence from an uncontrolled pilot study, involving 169 students, which suggested the program increased drug literacy, and was well-liked by students.

The evidence will be updated as results from the trial become available.

Debenham, J., Birrell, L., Champion, K., Askovic, M., & Newton, N. (2020). A pilot study of a neuroscience-based, harm minimisation programme in schools and youth centres in Australia. *BMJ open*, 10(2).

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