



Recommended program

## 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).

The trial of this program has finished. The evidence will be updated as further results become available.

### 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

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- 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.

## Evidence Base

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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. This study is listed below.

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

## Sources

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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).