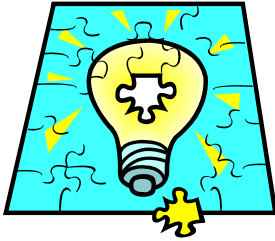




Manitoba Addictions Awareness Week



Addressing Drug and Alcohol Issues : Things to Keep in Mind

Why address drug and alcohol issues ?

The reality is that young people learn best, not from an outside expert, but from listening to and talking with each other. Their classroom teacher, who they already have a relationship with, is the ideal person to facilitate this process. In this kit, you will find accurate and objective information, as well as reliable information sources, to supplement your knowledge on alcohol and other drugs. More importantly however, is not **what** information you have to offer your students, but **how** that information is shared. Following are some highlights of basic principles found to be helpful in addressing this subject with youth. These principles are supported by research on effective drug prevention programming.

Check your local policy !

The learning activities suggested in this section include potentially sensitive content. Before implementation, teachers are advised to check with the school administration for school/divisional/district guidelines and procedures related to providing a parent option.

Confused?

It can seem mind boggling when you consider all of the approaches available in facilitating a drug education/prevention program. Being asked to teach drug and alcohol education can rattle the most seasoned teacher. Many feel out of their depth, unsure where to start and where this topic may lead. Teachers may feel - "I'm not an expert" - and may shudder when they remember their own experiences as a student receiving "the drug talk".

What is the best approach?

- ✓ Avoid scare tactics and "just say no" messages.
- ✓ An objective balanced approach is best if the message is to be seen as credible.
- ✓ Many adolescents will experiment with alcohol, other drugs and gambling. Simplistic messages ignore the complex factors that contribute to experimentation or abuse of substances.

SOURCE: *Addressing Drug and Alcohol Issues in the Classroom* (Handout), AFM Youth Unit, 2003, based on information from *Preventing Substance Use Problems Among Young People: A Compendium Of Best Practices*, 2001.

What is the best teaching style?

Provide accurate, relevant and age appropriate information.

- ✓ Information shared in a nonjudgmental, objective and empathic manner is essential to developing a supportive atmosphere that invites students to share beliefs and experiences.
- ✓ Small group activities can be helpful in creating a supportive, open environment.
- ✓ Effective prevention programs emphasize the use of facilitative rather than directive skills - ask what students think rather than sharing your own opinion.
- ✓ Effective prevention approaches involve a series of discussions and activities such as peer- to-peer discussions and small group activities. Students need an opportunity to process this information with their peers; interactive learning techniques allow students to integrate drug and alcohol issues into their own beliefs and experiences.
- ✓ Teachers can highlight key ideas, clarify responses or correct any misconceptions.

What if personal experiences are shared?

In an open, supportive climate, it is not unusual for some students to share very personal experiences. This can sometimes alarm us. It is important to provide a clear message that personal sharing is o.k. Some students may only require an opportunity to name their experience, for most students having you validate their thoughts or feelings is all that is required.

Others may need more structured support - fellow teachers, school guidance counselors, social workers, local **NNADAP workers** or staff from the **Addictions Foundation of Manitoba - Youth Community-based Services** may be able to provide further support when needed.

What is the role of a guest speaker?

A guest speaker should support and enhance educational activities already being undertaken in this subject area. A speaker may provide some short-term gains but will have limited long-term impact without other educational strategies being employed. To make most effective use of a speaker, plan carefully.

- ✓ Discuss with the guest ahead of time what messages he/she plans to convey to ensure that they are consistent with the approach you have already taken with your class and your school's policy.
- ✓ Assess the needs of your classroom to match the type of speaker that would be most beneficial. For example: Recovering addicts may be an appropriate choice if you are working with students who you suspect are harmfully involved with substances, however to provide such a speaker to students who have limited experience with substances could result in a scare tactic approach.
- ✓ For further information on planning for a guest speaker - see *Section 4 Resources* of this kit - item 4.2 *Do You Want A Guest Speaker?*
- ✓ For contact information on guest speakers/topics - see *Section 4 Resources* of this kit - item 4.3 *Speaker's Forum* and *Section 5 Workplace* - item 5.1 *Lunchbox Series*.