

Schools play an important role in supporting the development of knowledge, understanding, behaviours and skills that enable students to make responsible, healthy and safe choices.

Effective school drug education uses a whole-school approach to health promotion, prevention and early intervention, based on the principles of [harm minimisation](#), as defined by the Victorian Department of Education. School drug education encompasses all policies, practices and initiatives connected with the prevention and reduction of drug-related harm, and the building of resilience in individuals and school communities.

Engaging students in drug education activities builds their capacity to:

- identify risky situations
- make healthy and safe choices
- make informed decisions
- develop strategies to prepare them for challenging situations.

These activities contribute to reducing the incidence of drug use and the impact of drug-related harm.

Drug education is an essential focus area of Victorian Curriculum's [Health and Physical Education](#), which supports the wellbeing of children and young people. Schools should implement an ongoing and embedded approach to drug education as an integral part of the schools' health-curriculum program. The school drug education should include explicit and developmentally appropriate teaching and learning opportunities aligned to the Victorian Curriculum F–10.

Educational strategies should take into account the school environment, culture and attitude of the local community towards the use of various drugs, and reasons students may be likely to use drugs. Such strategies will also need to provide:

- opportunities for students to develop resiliency skills that enable them to better cope with change and effectively manage everyday stressors
- a harm-minimisation approach that encompasses a range of strategies, including non-use which aims to reduce harmful consequences of drug use
- clear expectations on positive behaviours, boundaries and respect for others
- information on the consequences of drug use and safety messages about risks.

Delivery of school drug education

A comprehensive whole school approach is widely acknowledged as best practice in working holistically to promote student health and wellbeing. Through the inter-relationship of evidence-based practice, curriculum, effective pedagogy, ethos and a positive and supportive environment, school drug education is consolidated by effective links, connections, and partnerships with family and the community. Research demonstrates that drug education is more likely to achieve positive outcomes when schools, parents/carers and communities work together to plan, implement, support and sustain drug education strategies and practices within the school community.

Schools that deliver drug education, within a broadly defined health curriculum, make a greater impact on students. In these schools, there is recognition that drug education is more than

teaching essential information only in a discrete subject, such as health. School drug education includes an emphasis on:

- developing students' life skills and protective behaviours
- promoting the range of relationships in which students can engage
- ensuring that students are connected to their schooling
- external influences such as, media, family and peers

Evidence suggests that school drug education delivered by their teachers is most effective because they know their students and have already formed a relationship with them. Teachers are also best placed to provide young people with the skills and knowledge to make sound choices and decisions (see Principle 10 from the Australian Government's [Principles for School Drug Education](#)). If schools choose to engage external agencies or speakers, they must use their professional judgement to determine if they:

- are appropriate for the age and development of the students
- align with school community culture, attitudes and context
- include safe drug education messages.

A range of resources to assist teachers is available on the [Department of Education and Training's website](#), under teaching materials for health and physical education.

Effective school drug education

According to the Victorian Government (State of Victoria, 2018a), the available evidence-based research suggests that effective drug education programs should:

- increase students' knowledge, social and life skills, and refusal skills towards licit and illicit drug use
- include content relevant to young people's experiences and interests
- contain highly interactive pedagogies that engage students in problem-solving and critical thinking
- commence activities prior to initial experimentation and continue as young people grow and mature
- provide significant coverage of relevant issues complemented by follow-up sessions
- position drug education within a broader health and personal learning curriculum that focuses, among other things, on mental-health issues such as stress and coping
- respond to cultural and social needs of the school community
- engage parents or carers.

Using a harm-minimisation approach

Schools use a harm-minimisation approach to review and implement drug-education programs and activities. According to the Victorian Government (State of Victoria, 2018a) this entails that programs and activities:

- are comprehensive and evidence-based
- promote a positive school climate and relationships
- are targeted to needs and contexts identified through consultation with students, staff and parents or carers



- embed timely, developmentally appropriate drug education programs within a curriculum framework that utilises effective pedagogy.

The aims of harm minimisation stop and reduce drug-related harm, including:

- prevention through education and creating respectful and safe schools
- early intervention to prevent later harmful drug use.

In addition, harm minimisation:

- ensures the response is well managed
- student wellbeing is paramount
- uses partnerships with parents or carers, and the police when necessary
- ensures the response does not cause any secondary harm such as social stigmatisation, reduced self-worth and associated truancy.

Please see further information on the [Department of Education and Training's website](#).

Principles for school drug education

The most effective drug-education programs originate from an evidence-based understanding of the factors contributing to problematic drug use, and the strategies that help to prevent such use and the associated harms. The Australian Government's [National Principles for School Drug Education](#) reflect the best practice in drug education and should be considered when planning whole-school drug-education strategies.

Comprehensive and evidence-based practice		
<i>School practice based on evidence</i>	Principle 1	Base drug education on sound theory and current research, and use evaluation processes to inform decisions
<i>A whole-school approach</i>	Principle 2	Embed drug education within a comprehensive whole-school approach in promoting health and wellbeing
<i>Clear educational outcomes</i>	Principle 3	Establish drug education outcomes that are appropriate to the school context and contribute to the overall goal of minimising drug-related harm
Positive school climate and relationships		
<i>Safe and supportive environment</i>	Principle 4	Promote a safe, supportive and inclusive school environment as part of seeking to prevent or reduce drug-related harm



<i>Positive and collaborative relationships</i>	Principle 5	Promote collaborative relationships between students, staff, families and the broader community in the planning and implementation of school drug education
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Targeted to needs and contexts

<i>Culturally appropriate and targeted drug education</i>	Principle 6	Provide culturally appropriate, targeted and responsive drug education that addresses local needs, values and priorities
<i>Recognition of risk and protective factors</i>	Principle 7	Acknowledge that a range of risk and protective factors impact on health and education outcomes, and influence choices about drug use
<i>Consistent policy and practice</i>	Principle 8	Use consistent policy and practice to inform and manage responses to drug-related incidents and risks

Effective pedagogy

<i>Timely programs within a curriculum framework</i>	Principle 9	Locate programs within a curriculum framework, thus providing timely, developmentally appropriate and ongoing drug education
<i>Programs delivered by teachers</i>	Principle 10	Ensure that teachers are resourced and supported in their central role in delivering drug-education programs
<i>Interactive strategies and skills development</i>	Principle 11	Use student-centred, interactive strategies to develop students' knowledge, skills, attitudes and values
<i>Credible and meaningful learning activities</i>	Principle 12	Provide accurate information and meaningful learning activities that dispel myths about drug use, and focus on real life contexts and challenges

References

Commonwealth of Australia 2004, *Principles for School Drug Education*, Department of Education, Science and Training, accessed 23 October 2018 <http://apo.org.au/node/33720>

State of Victoria 2018a, 'School policy drug use', Department of Education and Training, accessed 23 October 2018 <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/principals/spag/safety/pages/druguse.aspx>

