

GETTING STARTED

The importance of the school environment

There is no environment other than schools where we can guarantee that almost every child in the UK can be reached and informed about the key issues regarding alcohol.

A positive school climate is a protective factor against risky behaviours, including alcohol use. Schools reach young people at an age when they are trying out and developing individual identities. For this reason, after parents and carers, schools have the greatest potential to influence the future behaviour of students.

Headteacher or PSHE Lead

General recommendations for good practice

- o Before implementing lessons on alcohol you may choose to organise a meeting in school with participating teachers, the relevant governor, parent representatives and the Head Teacher to explain about the resources you are using and what will be covered. This may include all PSHE areas and OFSTED requirements and will help show evidence of health and wellbeing as well as safeguarding outcomes for the School Development Plan, OFSTED, etc.
- o If possible, demonstrate using alcoholeducationtrust.org which carries all the lesson plans and worksheets and circulate the booklets [Alcohol and you](#) and [Talking To Kids About Alcohol](#). (To order email kate@alcoholeducationtrust.org).
- o Share resources and ideas with other schools and PSHE providers.
- o Consider organising a feedback session with year groups. You could put on an exhibition of posters designed by the pupils and invite the parents or include a *Talk About Alcohol* parent talk as part of a parents' or Meet The Tutor evening. Email kate@alcoholeducationtrust.org to organise.
- o Make parents, pupils and teachers aware of the School Alcohol Policy as part of the programme. You can find a model at alcoholeducationtrust.org/teacher-area/school-alcohol-policy/, see also [Appendix 1 - School Alcohol Policy notes](#).

Before you begin

For all topics in PSHE, it is recommended that ground rules are referred to at the beginning of each lesson, which should include respecting each other's opinion, asking questions in turn, neither disclosing personal information nor asking personal questions. Lessons should include signposting to within school, local and national organisations for help for those who may have concerns about alcohol and its effects on themselves, their friends or family. It is good practice to have a question box, an 'ask it basket' where students can post

questions about anything worrying them and you will do your best to answer them in a subsequent lesson. Make it clear that you have a duty to disclose any safeguarding issues but you are there to support, refer and inform as appropriate.

Achieving cultural or individual change via the classroom is a tall order. Drinking is a largely social habit, and in a young person's world is often associated with recreation, rebellion, maturity, sexuality, relationships and emotional problems. For education about alcohol to be effective, the reality of a young person's world has to be built into the programme and valued and reflected in the teaching method. Most teenagers have a positive perception of alcohol through their family, peers and role models, therefore alcohol education has to revolve around creating a responsible attitude to alcohol by exploring the issues relevant to the group.

Research shows that if alcohol education through school is going to have an impact, the message that responsible drinking doesn't have to mean having less of a good time must be key. Rather, education messages should emphasise that you are more likely to have a good time if you are in control. The materials also emphasise the harm that the misuse of alcohol causes in society and that alcohol is a drug that is potentially addictive.

'The starting point for a fresh approach to prevention is the recognition that simply giving people information and urging them to be healthy does not work.... We need to encourage and release the energy, skills and desire for good health that they already have.'
(National Social Marketing Centre, 2006).

Learning objectives

To understand

- o how alcohol affects the body (short and long term).
- o units of alcohol and the strength of different alcoholic drinks.
- o how long alcohol stays in your system and what factors affect this.
- o alcohol related law and the life changing consequences of breaking laws.
- o the social norms surrounding the frequency and acceptance of drinking to drunkenness.
- o that alcohol is a drug that is potentially addictive.
- o the nature and scale of the societal impact of excessive drinking.

Knowledge of risk is not necessarily protective, it needs to be coupled with measures to encourage pupils to resist social influences and peer pressure.

Behavioural objectives

The key aims of The Alcohol Education Trust are:

- o to delay the age at which teenagers start drinking, with the aim of achieving the Chief Medical Officers'

(CMO) guidance that an alcohol free childhood is the best option

- o to help ensure that when or if they choose to drink, teenagers do so responsibly
- o to reduce the prevalence of excessive drinking and the antisocial consequences of drunkenness and the associated risk taking and health harms.

Many of the life skill elements of the lesson plans and worksheets cover issues that are relevant to risk taking and the importance of taking personal responsibility in general.

NOTE: All background information and references to scientific information and Government guidelines can be found on the website at alcoholeducationtrust.org.

Plan ahead

- o Make a time plan based on the number of hours timetabled for alcohol and distribute to colleagues involved.

(See the recommended year group lesson planning on [page 107](#)).

Photocopy the relevant resources from this book, or they can be downloaded from alcoholeducationtrust.org, ordered by year group recommendation or by subject.

- o Assess the space allocated for PSHE, regarding computer access or the need for photocopied resources.
- o Lessons should combine a baseline icebreaker activity, information, skills and activities. Skills-based teaching that involves students in practical activities increases their interest and learning. Teaching methods that allow students to practice behaviours that are relevant to their experience, in a low risk situation, using realistic scenarios, provide important experience that they can take with them to real life situations. Each area of our website highlights relevant activities and film clips.
- o Avoid a judgemental approach as far as possible, avoid identifying pupils who are drinking. Promoting drink free behaviour and responsible use does not mean exposing those who have experimented.
- o Be sensitive to pupils whose parents have a drink problem, are alcohol dependent or get drunk in front of them. (See [Useful contacts and sources of information](#) on the inside [back page](#) for those who may need help).

The significance of the group

A school class often reflects society at large, namely students with a wide range of family situations and social backgrounds, including those who may have parents with drinking problems at home. Everyone has

experiences and opinions that can bring important aspects to the discussion – religious beliefs, immigrant experiences, social backgrounds, gender, hobbies, etc. There are a number of differences that can be utilised in discussions. Classes also create their own behavioural patterns. Labels and roles are quickly assigned. Some are viewed as nerds, others as emos, and so on. Some are rowdy and others are silent, silenced or bullied. Using props such as a blow up microphone, a ball or dice to randomly allow students to speak in turn can be helpful in avoiding more vocal students dominating.

In order for a discussion about values to be successful, ingrained patterns must be broken. Another important aspect to consider is that many young people or teenagers often look at things dichotomously, i.e. issues often become either 'black' or 'white' in conflict situations. Everything is divided into opposites – right or wrong, dumb or smart, attractive or ugly, good or bad. This is why it is important to avoid this type of reasoning and to use follow-up questions to create opportunities for a more nuanced discussion.

Two way process – assess what your pupils already think or know

Another common phenomenon is that young people sometimes want clear instructions and will expect you as a supervisor to have an explanation for everything that happens. This presents an obvious danger; that the class or the group becomes a jury, judging other people's values and you are given the role of judge with all the right answers. It is therefore important that you and your students work together to create clear ground rules at the outset for the discussion, such as avoiding personal disclosure and having a questions box. Students may want to add or remove ground rules as different topics are discussed.

Asking questions

Join in yourself - By joining in the discussions and giving oral, relevant examples, you can encourage active participation. Assessing pupils' perceptions and knowledge before imparting information is key. These are what we call baseline or icebreaker activities, see [page 7](#) for ideas and activities.

Silent pupils - General silence before the first sessions on alcohol can be awkward, both for pupils and teachers. We have a selection of 'conversation starter' film clips and 'ice breaker' activities available on alcoholeducationtrust.org to help get the conversation going.

The right to pass - If you ask about experiences, thoughts or feelings, you must give pupils the right to refuse. Rephrasing the question can often help and depersonalise the situation.

Avoid ridicule - If you notice humiliation or laughter, deal with it immediately and turn the spot light on them. Your role is to give the group the security and confidence it needs to encourage interpersonal skills and respect for different lifestyles and opinions.

Set goals

The recap sessions - games and activities including a quiz and myth busters - offer a useful measure of whether the key messages have got through! The fact sheets can be photocopied to ensure pupils have the correct information in their files to refer back to as well. Leaving enough time at the end of the lesson to allow feedback and evaluation of what has been covered or what else pupils would like to know will help you plan and assess knowledge gain. Again a prop such as a beach ball, foam dice or blow up microphone can be passed with a question such as 'what fact most surprised you today' or 'name a new piece of Information you learnt today'. This can be done In small groups, on post It notes etc. sheets can be photocopied to ensure pupils have the correct information in their files to refer back to as well.

Skills and group activities

Different methods

The *Talk About Alcohol* programme and its websites alcoholeducationtrust.org and talkaboutalcohol.com consist of a large number of exercises and worksheets. These exercises are designed to inspire active discussion among young people on the complex problems associated with alcohol. Various types of method can be used to launch a discussion. The following section contains a short description of the most common methods that can be used in lessons.

Group discussion circle

Holding discussions in an informal circle, away from desks helps pupils relax, speak more freely and listen more intently.

Leading group discussions

Begin by leading the group into the discussion topic. Clarify the scope of the topic and the specific issues that will be discussed. Also explain the objective of the exercise and give clear instructions so that everyone understands what you will be doing.

- o Keep the discussion on track – While it is important to keep the discussion on track, spontaneous discussions are important. However, you must be clear in your instructions so that the topic you are dealing with is really discussed and so that fundamental values are put to the test. Some discussions tend to “drift off” in another direction. In this case, it is important to determine whether or not this detour is significant to the issue or if you can come back to it at a later time.
- o When one person dominates – It can be difficult

to get everyone to participate in a discussion. This can become particularly pronounced when dealing with sensitive issues, when the students settle into distinct and expected roles. Try to give everyone a chance to speak and avoid ending up in a situation where two strong wills are dominating the discussion. 'Hot seat exercises' may be used here to break down the opinion hierarchy.

- o When someone is silenced or becomes silent - It is easy to miss the quiet ones. One way to circumvent this is to ask questions and make eye contact. Sometimes someone may become silent because of a hasty or thoughtless comment or because someone else is dominating the conversation. Many then become embarrassed or insecure and don't express their opinion or values. It is therefore important to ask questions that do not single anyone out, but are instead based on an assumption or opinion about people's behaviour. If a question is sensitive and no one dares to participate in the discussion, you can instead turn the question around. "Why do you think that it is difficult to discuss this issue?", "Could it be that people avoid difficult decisions because of...?"