

Theme 2: Understanding drug use

Suggested content

Teacher notes

Drugs prevalent in our community

Types of drugs relevant to the local community may include:

- alcohol
- tobacco
- cannabis
- stimulants
- depressants
- hallucinogens

It may not be necessary to revisit the classification of drugs if this content is adequately covered in Years 7-10 PDHPE. The focus should be on the use of drugs which are prevalent among senior students and are more common in the school community. This information may become evident from the school needs analysis.

Effects of drugs on the individual

- physical
- psychological
- social
- economic
- emotional

Discussion of effects should focus on those drugs of relevance to the school community.

Responsible behaviour surrounding drug use

Levels of drug use for the individual

- no use (abstinence)
- safer use
- hazardous use
- harmful use

All drugs have the potential for harm. For any drug there is a continuum of use and an associated continuum of harm, from non-use to hazardous use. As use increases, so does the potential for harm.

Patterns of drug use

- experimental: curiosity, often not repeated
- occasional: certain occasions
- recreational/situational: certain activities, used for coping
- habitual: use of the drug becomes part of a behaviour pattern of developing dependence, e.g. smoking a cigarette only when having a cup of coffee
- dependence: the user needs or depends on the drug to function or survive

No use is abstinence. It is difficult to guarantee safe use so the term *safer use* is used. *Hazardous use* may cause harm depending on the person, drug and environment. *Harmful use* causes damage to the health of the drug user (physical and/or psychological) and generally has adverse social consequences.

Students should be able to discuss the levels of drug use with reference to different drug types.

What is responsible drug use behaviour?

How and when people use drugs (patterns of use) is an aspect by which students can analyse responsible behaviour.

Ways of reducing harms from all levels of drug use should be explored. For example:

- following manufacturer's instructions on medications
- nominating a non-drinking driver
- following standard drink guidelines.

Responsible behaviour surrounding drug use (continued)

Drug-free ways of handling situations

- pain (physical and mental)
- sadness and depression
- tiredness
- stress
- alienation
- boredom
- escape

Students may need to briefly revise why drugs are used. Emphasis then should be on the alternatives rather than the situation or reasons for use. However, the general community perception and acceptance of medication for minor illness and the use of alcohol to “relax” or as part of social events should be acknowledged and explored.

Hazardous and harmful drug use

The following examples are situations where the risk of harm to individuals is increased. The examples are suggestions only and will depend on the needs of the school community. There may be other forms of hazardous or harmful drug use which schools may wish to address. Information could be obtained from local newspapers, local health workers, the NSW Police Service and other community sources.

Binge drinking

- definition
- effects of binge drinking on the individual e.g. social, economic, health, physiological issues

There is no research to indicate safe drinking levels for young people. Binge drinking or hazardous drinking for adults is when people drink little or nothing for periods of time, then drink very heavily occasionally.

Research indicates that, whilst many adolescents act responsibly with alcohol use or abstain from alcohol, young people in this age group may be involved in binge drinking.

- influences on the type of alcohol chosen by males and by females e.g. advertising, media, environment, family, social, pressure to conform to dominant masculine and feminine images

Students should be given the opportunity to investigate the similarities and differences on what influences the selection of alcohol products by males as a group and females as a group.

- factors that contribute to binge drinking e.g. environment, type of alcohol, person, gendered behaviour

Other factors include the amount of disposable income, increasing independence, entering the job market, the perception that binge drinking is “normal” party behaviour and the influence of friends.

- what is responsible behaviour in an environment of binge drinking?

Issues about responsible drug use and strategies for reducing the harms should be addressed.

Hazardous and harmful drug use (continued)

Cannabis use

- short and long-term effects
- impact of cannabis use e.g. on relationships, on motivation (study, work, career), economic and legal consequences

Current research indicates that cannabis is the most widely used illegal drug among young people. The physical, social and psychological effects of cannabis covered in Years 7-10 PDHPE programs may need to be revised.

There is no known safe level of cannabis use.

Polydrug use (multiple drug use)

- definition of polydrug use
- effects of polydrug use
- preventing the harms of polydrug use e.g. by exploring rights and responsibilities, or through assertive behaviour, avoidance or knowledge

Polydrug use is the use of more than one drug or type of drug by an individual, often at the same time or sequentially, and usually with the intention of enhancing, or counteracting the effects of the drug. The term is also used more loosely to include the unconnected use of two or more drugs by the same person. It carries the connotation of illicit use, though alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine are the substances most frequently used in combination with others.

Revision of types of drugs and their effects may be required to explain and investigate the harmful effects of polydrug use. Research indicates that there appears to be an increasing trend among young people to mix different drugs.

Mixing of drugs can multiply the effects of each drug, increase adverse reactions and increase the unpredictability of reactions.

Goals and drug use

Impact of drug use on an individual's future

- education
- relationships
- health and well-being
- career
- gaining material possessions
- travel options and mobility

Students should consider the impact of drug use on their short- and long-term goals.