



Parent Involvement in Drug Education

**Guidelines
for Schools**



Introduction

This brochure provides schools with a set of guidelines to assist with effective parent involvement in drug education. Some of these guidelines are also applicable to a school's general parent involvement. They are consistent with the *Principles for school drug education* produced by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training.

Why focus on parent involvement in drug education?

Parent involvement in schooling improves the resilience, health and academic performance of students. Support networks, attitudes, attendance, homework habits, relationships and retention rates are strengthened when schools and parents work together (Davis, 1991; Henderson and Berla, 1994, Griffith, 1996). A partnership approach will help protect young people against a range of harms including the misuse of alcohol and other drugs (Fuller, 2001, Dishion et al. 2002).

Parents directly influence the behaviour of their children through their own behaviours and attitudes, as well as their family relationships. Involving parents in their child's learning can help to reinforce school policies and practices. It also assists schools to understand the profile of families and their needs within the school community.

What is parent involvement?

Parent involvement in drug education is a mutually supportive partnership between parents, schools and students that promotes student health and wellbeing. Where possible, the inclusion of the local community in this partnership is also highly beneficial.

Parent involvement occurs along a continuum from occasional participation in school programs to parents and the school working in partnership on issues impacting on their child's learning, health and wellbeing. Parent and family engagement activities should be comprehensive and promote inclusive strategies. Schools also need a variety of approaches; one size does not fit all.

A whole school approach to parent involvement

Drug education is most effective when it is part of a whole-school approach to health and wellbeing. A whole school approach should include the involvement of parents in a wide range of school activities, policies and processes to ensure comprehensive promotion of student health and wellbeing.



Guidelines

one

Parent involvement in drug education should be a part of the school's wider parent involvement activities.

two

Communication is the key strategy for effective parent involvement in drug education.

three

Schools should foster the development of strong relationships with parents and the wider community to enhance a student's sense of connectedness to family and school.

four

Schools and parents should work in partnership to ensure that drug education is more responsive to student needs.

five

Schools should employ a range of strategies to involve a broad cross-section of parents.

six

Parent involvement in drug education should recognise diversity.

seven

Parent involvement in drug education should be appropriate to the age and stage of development of students.

ONE

Parent involvement in drug education should be a part of the school's wider parent involvement activities.

Strategies for involving parents and forging positive partnerships should be supported across the whole school community to promote health and wellbeing, and to minimise drug-related harm.

By integrating activities within a whole school framework, drug educators contribute to building a respectful approach to involving parents. Taking a whole school approach is also more likely to ensure that the information flow is more effective and that parents' input is valued and utilised more broadly across the school.

➔ Implementing Guideline One may include:

- embedding parent involvement in drug education within school policies that promote health and wellbeing
- conducting a review of existing opportunities for parents to be involved in comprehensive programs that place drug education within a broader health context
- developing an action plan to involve parents in multifaceted learning activities.



TWO

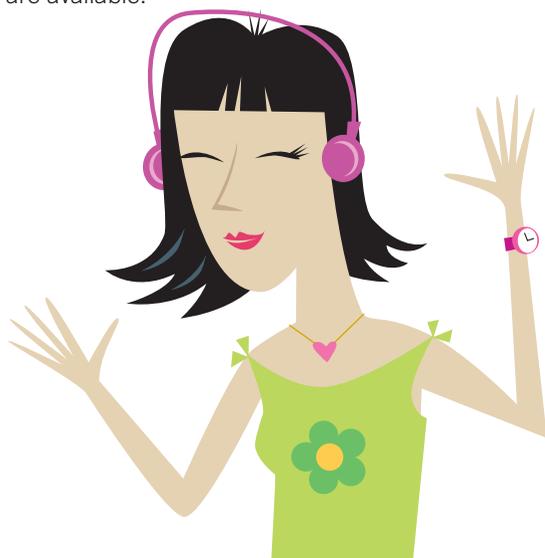
Communication is the key strategy for effective parent involvement in drug education.

To optimise communication between schools and parents, it is necessary to focus on both school to parent and parent to school contact points. Offering a variety of programs to involve parents, ensuring a welcoming office, establishing a parent network and resource centre and nominating a parent contact person are ways of enhancing communication with parents.

Utilising multiple communication strategies has a greater likelihood of reaching parents than relying on one format, such as the school newsletter.

➔ **Implementing Guideline Two may include:**

- offering a range of opportunities for positive communication within the school setting and also with the broader school community
- informing parents of the options for contacting school staff
- conveying information regarding school policies, programs, activities timetable and schedules including a list of the most suitable times staff are available.



THREE

Schools should foster the development of strong relationships with parents and the wider community to enhance a student's sense of connectedness to families and schools.

There is a growing awareness of the role of a safe and supportive school climate in helping to prevent and reduce drug-related harm. A young person's sense of belonging or attachment to his/her social environments, particularly family and school, directly influences emotional health and wellbeing. A positive school environment that nurtures strong engagement and relationships is associated with building students' sense of connectedness to school, helping to protect against a range of risk-related behaviours, including problematic substance use. A sense of connectedness to school, family or community is a key protective factor for young people.

➔ **Implementing Guideline Three may include:**

- encouraging social bonding activities between students, parents and the school
- involving parents in decision-making
- communicating policies and practices to the wider school community to ensure clear, consistent messages.
- promoting the benefits of parent involvement to the school community and to families.

FOUR

Schools and parents should work in partnership to ensure drug education is more responsive to student needs.

There is a strong agreement in research that for drug education programs to be effective they need to be based on the needs of, and be relevant to the students who will participate in these programs. Parent involvement in school drug education programs enhances communication between parents and schools, which helps to identify and address student needs. Informing, consulting and supporting families as part of the school's drug education process is likely to lead to better outcomes for students. To do this effectively, schools should:

- emphasise the strengths parents have to contribute to their children's learning
- respect the diversity of family backgrounds, and how this contributes to children's learning.

→ Implementing Guideline Four may include:

- consulting with parents to gain an understanding of their needs and what they perceive to be the barriers and enablers to their participation
- developing a policy and plan for involving parents to better address student needs
- provision of information about parent involvement to staff, parents and students
- promotion of activities and events
- formation of linkages with the local community.

FIVE

Schools should employ a range of strategies to involve a broad cross-section of parents.

Schools should encourage parents to be involved in supporting their children's education in the following ways:

- supporting their child's learning at home
- participating in school activities
- forming partnerships to aid decision-making.

Recognising the variety of ways that parents can be involved in supporting their children's educational progress will assist the school to develop appropriate strategies for enhancing that involvement. Utilising a variety of approaches for involving parents is also more likely to engage a cross-section of parents and be more effective than a single component strategy. Involving a broad cross-section of parents in drug education will ensure that the views of the school parent population are represented in policy and practice.

→ Implementing Guideline Five may include:

- involving parents in planning and implementing programs
- using a variety of strategies for informing parents about forthcoming events
- creating a variety of roles for parents within the school
- providing adequate training for staff and parents to ensure parent involvement is meaningful and well supported.



Six

Parent involvement in drug education should recognise diversity.

It is important to consider diversity including culture, language, family structures and socio-economic factors in the planning and delivery of activities for parents. Consideration should be given to the range of unique characteristics within a parent population and how these might impact on their involvement in responsive drug education that addresses local needs, values and priorities.

For parent involvement to be successful with families from diverse backgrounds 'there must be a genuine commitment to it at all levels of the school community, a commitment that is demonstrated in both policy and practice and reflected in the school environment' (Horacek 2001).

→ Implementing Guideline Six may include:

- developing relationships with a range of local community groups and involving representative community groups in planning
- involving the school in local community activities
- conducting activities in parent's first language and providing information in a range of community languages.



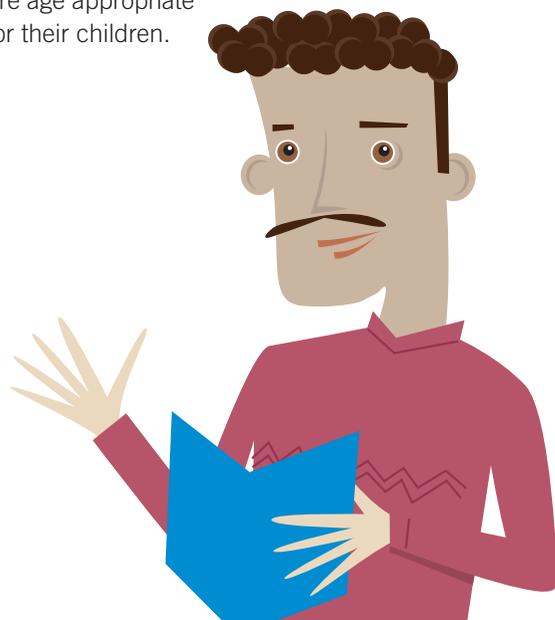
SEVEN

Parent involvement in drug education should be appropriate to the age and stage of development of students.

Drug issues should be addressed within a broader health context relevant to students concerns and stages of development. The timing and continuity of drug education is critical. Programs should commence before young people start to make decisions about drug use, be developmentally appropriate, ongoing and sequential, and provide for progression and continuity. The involvement of parents helps to ensure their understanding of developmentally appropriate drug education and is therefore more likely to result in the provision of consistent and effective harm minimisation messages.

→ Implementing Guideline Seven may include:

- ensuring the message communicated in parent involvement programs are consistent with messages communicated in classroom programs
- providing parent involvement activities that are age appropriate for their children.



References

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For further information about the guidelines, please visit the Department of Education & Training's drug education website at <http://www.sofweb.vic.edu.au/druged/>