

Hertfordshire Drug Education Forum Position Statement on the use of 'Shock Tactics'

The Hertfordshire Drug Education Forum (DEF) does not support drug education that is purely based upon 'shock' tactics; one-off lessons; or teaching methods which aim to engender fear as an effective means of dissuading children and young people from substance misuse or changing their behaviour.

This approach does not meet children and young people's entitlement to accurate, credible, and objective education about drugs including alcohol, solvents and tobacco. Evidence has shown that this approach may contain information which is biased, exaggerated or even fabricated.

The way in which children and young people interpret and respond to a 'shock tactics' approach will also depend on their own beliefs and experiences, level of maturity and understanding. Therefore, a wide range of options, rather than just one response should be considered.

The DEF encourages teachers, facilitators and other professionals working with young people to consider the following advice.

Effective programmes of drug awareness should aim to:

- Provide a balanced view and a range of holistic approaches. One size does not fit all!
- Be delivered by professionals whose own training and knowledge is up-to-date and relevant.
- Attempt to balance 'negative' messages about drugs with 'positive' messages. (For example, the use of medicines, support for those who experience difficulties)
- Prepare children and young people for the responsibility they must learn to take for themselves.
- Consider why materials designed to scare, shock or provoke negative reactions from audiences are being used and in what context they are appropriate.
- Ensure that appropriate warnings are given prior to using resources or footage that may frighten or cause upset and that support and guidance is provided after their use, as necessary.

Involving ex-users in drug education should be considered very carefully. If they are to be involved, this should be because they are skilled in facilitating learning and competent to work with children and young people, not simply by virtue of their status as a former user.

If you are in any doubt about appropriate resources, messages or teaching methods, please do not hesitate to contact:

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Jane Holton – Project officer DEF: 01438 843 879

The Hertfordshire Drug Education Forum encourages those working with children and young people to become familiar with the DEF key principles.