

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



Hertfordshire Drug Education Forum

Key Principles

- Drug education should enable children and young people to develop their knowledge, skills, attitudes and understanding about drugs and appreciate the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, relating this to their own and others' actions.
- Given that drug problems rarely occur in isolation, drug education programmes, resources and support services need to consider a holistic approach rather than focus solely on drugs.
- When planning drug education programmes, organisations need to establish and take account of children and young people's existing knowledge, beliefs, experiences, understanding, level of maturity, religion and cultural backgrounds.
- Drug education programmes aimed at children and young people should consider the importance of the transition from primary to secondary schools. Drug education in Years 7 and 8 should reinforce and build upon drug education in primary schools.
- Staff working with children and young people must have general drug awareness and a good understanding of their organisations drug and other related policies. This understanding should include managing drug incidents, local and national support services and resources, identifying and responding to a young person's needs.
- Organisations (including schools, further educational settings) working with children and young people should ensure that young people have access to up-to-date information on sources of help, which is prominently displayed.
- Drug education programmes should include details of services and helplines, explain how they work and develop children and young people's confidence in using them.
- Drug education programmes should be evaluated to find out how effective the teaching activities and materials have been in achieving the aims of the programme and meeting the needs of the target audience.
- Drug policies need to be reviewed and updated to ensure that content is current and that they are effective in practice. A policy should be clear about the definition of a drug incident and have agreed responses and procedures for managing drug incidents. These should be understood by all including staff, parents, young people, youth workers etc.
- After a careful investigation to judge the nature and seriousness of a drug related incident, there should be a range of responses in line with local protocols. Sources of help (e.g. specialist drug agencies, helplines, websites or family support groups) for children, young people and parents/carers should be made available from the onset.
- External contributors should not be used as substitute teachers, nor should they constitute the entirety of a drug education programme. When working directly with young people they should add a dimension to the drug education programme that the teacher/youth worker etc alone cannot deliver.