



Alcohol education:



What really works in schools?

Do you know what really works in school alcohol education? With so many programs to choose from, it can be confusing.

This resource draws together decades of research to offer schools, teachers and parents guidance on choosing a suitable program for your school.

A major systematic review of research on alcohol education programs in schools was recently undertaken by the National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) at Flinders University.

If you are looking to introduce or revise alcohol education in your school, this information booklet will help you choose a program that has been found to be effective.



NCETA

*Australia's National Research Centre
on AOD Workforce Development*

**National Centre for Education and
Training on Addiction (NCETA)**

Flinders University

www.nceta.flinders.edu.au

Ann M Roche

Nicole Lee

Jacqui Cameron

What works?

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If you are looking to introduce or revise alcohol education in your school, this information booklet will help you choose a program that has been found to be effective.

Many programs have been developed over the years but only a small number have been evaluated, and of these very few show evidence of effectiveness¹.

Out of a total of 39 programs reviewed, only 3 were found to have good evidence of effectiveness. Climate Schools, Project ALERT and All Stars have enough trusted evidence to be confidently implemented.

Four other programs showed some positive effect on alcohol-related measures.

Climate Schools

Australia

The Climate Schools: Alcohol and Cannabis course comprises two sets of six 40-minute online lessons aimed at decreasing alcohol use and cannabis use. Each lesson includes a 15–20 minute Internet based lesson that is completed by students individually. Students follow a cartoon storyline of teenagers experiencing real life situations and problems with alcohol and cannabis. The second part of each lesson involves set activities delivered by the teacher to reinforce the information learnt in the cartoons.

Project ALERT

USA

Project ALERT uses a social influence model, seeking to motivate young people to resist pro-drug pressures and to help them identify and combat those pressures. Project ALERT was revised and strengthened with the addition of parent involvement activities, material on alcohol use, and a lesson designed to help smokers quit.

All Stars

USA

All Stars' primary focus is on reducing risky adolescent behaviours, particularly tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and inhalant use, and sexual activity. The program's goal is to address the mediators of risky adolescent behaviours, such as normative beliefs, lifestyle incongruence, and a commitment to not use drugs. This program is most successful when delivered by teachers, not 'experts'.

¹ Full details of the review and its findings can be accessed at www.nceta.flinders.edu.au

What doesn't work?

Two programs showed **evidence of harm** (that is, they may increase alcohol use behaviours):

- *Peer Acceleration Social Network (Project TND)*
- *Take Charge of Your Life (TCYL)*.

One program showed **little or no evidence of positive effects**:

- Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE).

Twenty-nine programs had **inconclusive evidence** and cannot be recommended until further evidence supporting their effectiveness is produced.

How the 39 alcohol education programs were rated

Table 1 shows the 39 programs reviewed, ranked by how strong the evidence is, whether the programs were effective and the quality of the research. Outcomes included reductions in alcohol-related behaviours (such as underage drinking, binge drinking and harms) and increases in knowledge about harms.

Three-star programs: *Good evidence of a range of positive alcohol outcomes*

Three programs had evidence of good outcomes: Climate Schools, Project ALERT and All Stars.

Two-star programs: *Evidence of some positive effects on alcohol outcomes*

Four programs showed some positive outcomes on alcohol reduction measures and may be effective, but should be further evaluated in the schools in which they are implemented.

One-star programs: *Little or no evidence of effect on alcohol outcomes*

One program had no evidence of effect on alcohol outcomes.

? programs: *Evidence of effect on alcohol measures was inconclusive*

The evidence for effect on alcohol measures was inconclusive in twenty-nine programs because the research was of poor quality or there were inconsistent effects in multiple studies or there was only one study. Future research may find a positive effect, but currently there is not enough evidence to recommend these programs.

X programs: *Evidence of alcohol-related harms*

Two programs showed some evidence of harm, such as an increase in drinking in those that received the intervention. These programs are not recommended.

Table 1. Ratings of effectiveness of 39 alcohol education programs for schools

	Effectiveness	Alcohol Education Program
★ ★ ★	These programs have been shown to have a positive effect in studies that are well conducted and can be trusted to guide practice.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Climate Schools 2. Project ALERT 3. All Stars
★ ★	These programs have been shown to have some positive effect in studies that were reasonably well conducted.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Life Skills Program (ISPY) 2. Life Skills Training (LST) 3. School Health and Alcohol Harm Reduction Project (SHAHRP) 4. Unplugged EU-DAP
★	These programs have little or no evidence of positive effect on alcohol reduction in studies that were well conducted.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Drug Abuse Resistance Education (DARE)
?	These programs had inconclusive evidence because the research was of poor quality or there were inconsistent effects in multiple studies or there was only one study.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Adolescent Alcohol Prevention Trial (AAPT) 2. Alcohol Misuse Prevention (AMPS) 3. Choice 4. Drugs At Work (DAW) 5. Gatehouse 6. Healthy Schools and Drugs 7. Keeping it REAL 8. Life Education Victoria (LEV) 9. Oleweus Prevention 10. Peer Led FAS/FAE 11. Peer Support 12. Personality Risk Factors 13. Positive Adolescent Life Skills 14. Positive Youth Development (PYD) 15. Prime For Life 16. Project PRIDE 17. Protecting You Protecting Me (PY/PM) 18. Reduce Risk Increase Student Knowledge (RRISK) 19. Reinforcing Alcohol Prevention (RAP) 20. Say Yes First 21. School Based Education 22. School Based Resilience Intervention 23. Skills For Adolescence 24. Social And Emotional Learning (SEL) 25. Social Norms Analysis Project (SNAP) 26. STEP II 27. Towards No Drug Abuse (TND) 28. Transtheoretical Model 29. Wise Mind
X	These programs have been shown to have a negative effect.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Peer Acceleration Social Network (Project TND) 2. Take Charge Of Your Life (TCYL)

How to choose an alcohol education program for your school

Six essential features of a school-based alcohol education program

Alcohol programs should:

1. **be based on accurate information, supported by good quality research** and based on an understanding of child and adolescent development
2. **go beyond providing 'factual' information about alcohol** and drinking and focus on harm minimisation rather than on resisting social/peer pressure to assist young people to question their assumptions, develop a sophisticated understanding of the social context of drinking, be aware of social acceptability and norms
3. **use a range of diverse and interactive teaching styles** that are appropriate to the developmental level of the students and focus on increasing understanding of issues related to alcohol consumption
4. **have clear, appropriate, achievable goals and objectives**, so that schools are able to evaluate ongoing outcomes of their school's alcohol education programs
5. **be supported by adequate teacher training and support** that covers both program content and delivery, ensuring that staff are confident and enthusiastic about their role
6. be consistent with **a whole-of-school approach** that enhances student **resilience and social connectedness**, and promotes strong, effective communication between students, parents and staff.

Four features of school based alcohol programs to avoid

Caution should be exercised when considering alcohol programs or resources that:

1. are based largely on 'factual' aspects of alcohol (such as physical effects), particularly if these are delivered in a didactic manner - students are more receptive to approaches that are active and interactive
2. primarily seek to enhance self-esteem, psychological wellbeing and/or social competence, sports participation or enhance resistance skills without also providing normative education

3. rely on the use of 'scare tactics' – highly graphic and disturbing messages can be easily dismissed as unrealistic when they do not fit with students' own lived experiences and are not effective in reducing risk
4. are not integrated into the curriculum or learning program, such as one-off presentations delivered by experts or celebrities, or by individuals that have been personally affected by alcohol. Guest speakers are appealing to young people and teachers but have not been demonstrated to be effective in changing attitudes or behaviour.

Other considerations

1. **Unintended consequences:** Young people see 'risk' differently to adults. For many young people, risk is a positive thing and something to be embraced, not avoided. Placing too much emphasis on the 'dangers' associated with drinking can increase the likelihood of harms for young people
2. **Differential reception:** Information will be received differently depending on past experiences and students are sensitive to any perceived hypocrisy by adults, particularly if the 'dangers of alcohol' aspect is over-emphasised. A 'do as I say' style of communication may backfire
3. **Perpetuation of stereotypes:** Educators, teachers and others should be mindful of the language they use when speaking about alcohol consumption. For example, adults should avoid implying that '*alcohol consumption*' is the same as '*alcohol abuse*'; suggesting that someone who occasionally drinks to excess is an '*alcoholic*'; or employing stereotypes such as '*all teenagers binge drink*'. This can have important implications for the normative climate of the school, and have the unintended consequence of reinforcing inaccurate stereotypes of young people.



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