

Keep them talking

**a resource
for staff**



**Education
& Training**



Keep them talking

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For more information on drug education in NSW government schools refer to
<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/learning/yrk12focusareas/druged/index.php>

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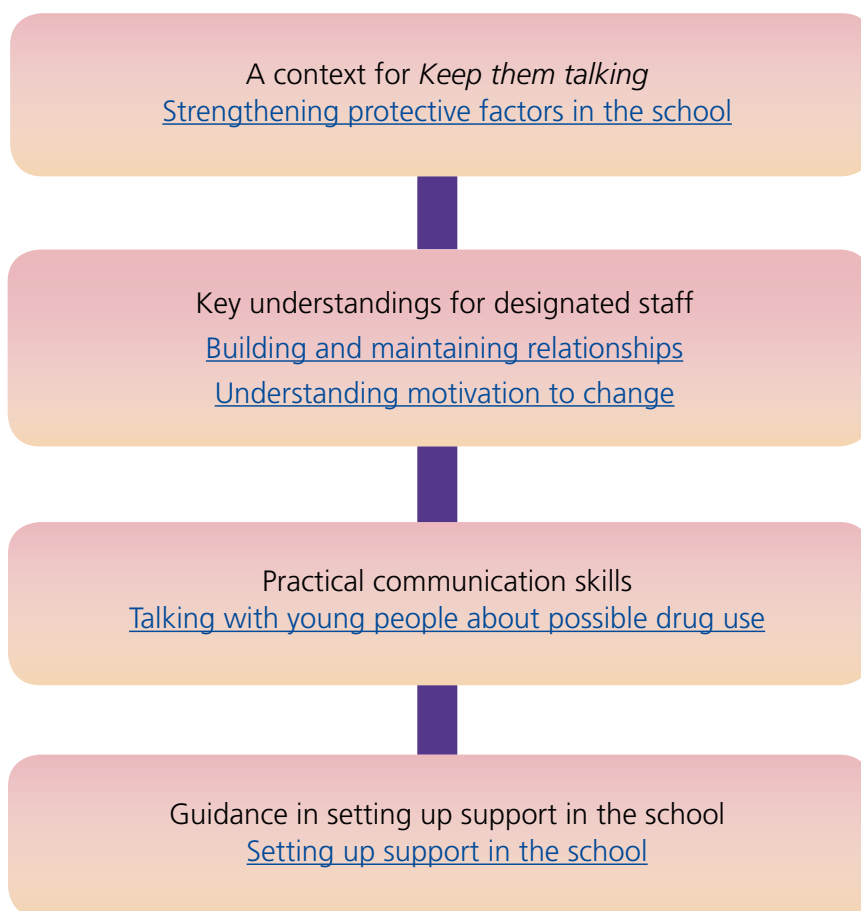
What is this about?

Keep them talking:

- is a resource for secondary school staff to use as part of a whole school approach to supporting students at risk of drug related harm. It should be used in conjunction with [Young People and Drugs: a guide for schools to support students](#) (*Young People and Drugs*), available on the NSW Department of Education and Training internet site
- has a focus on developing ways to raise and respond appropriately to sensitive issues, such as drug use with young people
- is recommended for designated staff with specific student wellbeing responsibilities such as members of the school welfare or learning support teams or those with a mentoring role.

Teachers will learn some important elements related to change and motivation. They will also learn about additional skills for communicating with young people about sensitive issues. These skills will enable designated staff to feel more confident to approach a young person and to intervene appropriately. However, their role is not that of a counsellor. Students with more complex issues such as co-existing mental health problems or in need of long term support, should be referred to the school counsellor.

This resource provides:



Strengthening protective factors in the school

Why is a connection with school important?

Having a positive connection to school and to at least one significant adult are major factors in:

- preventing alcohol and other drug problems in adolescents
- protecting young people who are experiencing a range of problems, including drug related problems.

If young people feel good about school (connect with their peers, schoolwork and teachers) they are more likely to be able to develop independence and function successfully as young adults. Lack of attachment to school can expose students to higher risks of developing problematic drug use.

Students transitioning to secondary school are more vulnerable to disconnection or isolation. They have to come to terms with more complex structures and make large social adjustments with peers at a time when they are striving for greater independence. They may need additional strategies to support them through this vulnerable stage – see support materials, [Primary – secondary transition](#).

Making student connectedness a priority will build a school's capacity to:

- retain vulnerable students at school
- reduce their risk profile
- promote resistance to drug use behaviours.

This will help form the basis of longer term resilience in adulthood.

(Midford & Munro, 2006)

How can schools strengthen connectedness?

Schools and teachers can strengthen a student's social support and connectedness. They can target 'connectedness' at both an individual and environmental level (school organisation, welfare structures and curriculum) to increase social cohesion, promote wellbeing and protect against social exclusion.

Some suggestions as to how this might be achieved at a whole school level follow.

Quality learning and teaching

1. Explore new and different ways to actively engage students.
2. Deliberately and explicitly teach for academic achievement to provide opportunities for recognition.
3. Promote a sense of self efficacy and self worth through positive learning experiences.
4. Provide individual feedback on student learning to promote self responsibility.
5. Provide opportunities for student voices to be expressed and heard to promote contribution to school decision making.
6. Provide meaningful experiences and participation opportunities.

Connectedness to peers

1. Teach and build on prosocial skills.
2. Encourage prosocial peer relationships. This helps support positive health decisions and encourages young people to self regulate their behaviour.
3. Make some adjustment to school structures where appropriate, to retain vulnerable students and keep them connected with their peers.
4. Encourage students to participate and become involved in extra curricula activities with their peers.

Connections to significant adults

1. Show an interest in young people and actively listen to them.
2. Reinforce positive relationships between teachers and young people to increase opportunities to help vulnerable students.
3. Look beyond a young person's negative behaviour and provide nonjudgmental support.
4. Avoid punitive responses in managing problematic behaviours, wherever possible.
5. Encourage and support young people to make links to employment, further education and community.

Why involve the community?

School leaders and teachers need to be involved and work in partnership with the school community on alcohol and drug related issues. Collaborative development of the school drug prevention strategy and the communication of it to the wider community help build a sense of shared understanding.

Effective involvement of the school community will:

- take into account the needs and values of the school community
- help support good practice in drug education
- reinforce connectedness for students
- enable staff to better understand the complex nature of drug related incidents
- help staff to give appropriate support to students.

Why are classroom relationships important?

Classroom teachers are in a unique position to develop an ongoing relationship with students. They are regularly within reach if a young person wishes to talk to them and they can observe the wellbeing of an individual student.

The classroom teacher may be the first to notice or have concerns about changes in a young person's behaviour or attendance patterns. They can observe how a range of issues, such as general health and wellbeing, academic progress, peer relationships and possibly family situations may be affecting the young person.

Classroom teachers also have the best opportunity to discuss issues of concern with their students. When a young person raises sensitive issues such as drug use, and teachers respond in a confident and appropriate manner without condoning, moralising or passing judgement, they are in a good position to provide support.

Increased social capacity is a protective factor against a range of problems, including drug use. Classroom teachers can positively influence young people to participate in socially valued tasks to help strengthen empathy and self efficacy. They have the capacity to build on the prosocial skills of young people both within the classroom and outside it.

Social skills can be developed through explicit tasks involving collaborative work with others. Young people can also identify strengths and discover new talents and interests when encouraged to actively participate in school and community activities.

How can a mentor help?

Mentoring programs have been effective in reducing drug use and related behaviours among young people, particularly when they lack a positive adult in their life (Spooner, 2008). This nurturing relationship can provide guidance and emotional support to a young person.

A mentor style relationship with a teacher can be a valuable mechanism for support of a young person, particularly when they are ready to undertake behavioural change. For these young people, having a teacher who shows interest in them and who actively listens to them can be instrumental in making positive and lasting behaviour change.

Care needs to be taken to ensure that a mentor is able to look beyond a young person's negative behaviour, empathise with their situation, and provide nonjudgmental support.

Mentoring may not address the needs of all young people. It needs to be part of a strategy of support for a young person at risk, not the only intervention.

Any mentor arrangement requires clear guidelines to ensure appropriate relationships and expectations of the young person and the mentor. These include:

- planning in advance
- the consent of the young person and parent
- training for the mentor
- a trained supervisor to support and monitor the mentor program.

More information about mentoring can be found in the [Guidelines for mentoring and supporting students](#).

Schools without a formal mentoring program can still provide appropriate support to young people at risk of drug related harm. Staff can contribute with supportive behaviours that demonstrate respect, empathy and understanding.

Information related to 'Silent Mentoring' may be useful in connecting with hard to reach young people. This involves identifying young people who seem disconnected from school or their peers. They are matched with a silent mentor who makes an effort at least three times a week to informally reach out to them. This may be simply by making eye contact, putting themselves in close proximity to the student, using their name or making 'I noticed statements'. For example, 'I noticed that you like reading books about sport'. For more information see [Making Connections Through Silent Mentoring 5 keys for building relationships with 'hard to reach' students](#) by Michael McQueen.

Building and maintaining relationships

How to connect with young people

School is a social environment that provides students with opportunities for sustained connections with caring adults. When positive and high expectations are established in a supportive teacher-student relationship it will help guide behaviour and challenge students.

Teachers can help develop and build on a young person's strengths, interests and goals. They can also help them to recognise and believe in their own capacity to make positive changes.

The work of Michael McQueen helps teachers reflect on how engagement with young people can be increased. As a social researcher, he promotes strategies for bridging the generation gap.

McQueen suggests that students of 'Generation Y' (born early 1980's – late 1990's) or 'Generation Z' (born late 1990's on), can present challenges for teachers born in an earlier time with different life experiences, expectations and perceptions. The following examples illustrate this.

- **Respect:** roles or titles do not necessarily establish authority or credibility in the eyes of these young people. In the classroom, this may be reflected in an attitude of 'I don't care how much you know until I know how much you care'. Adults need to be authentic, genuinely interested and transparent in order to earn respect.
- **Patience:** for young people whose experience involves food available in one minute and fast acting painkillers, it may be hard to wait or deal with setbacks. This may mean that they are more prone to frustration when trying to make things happen or get results.
- **Communication:** mobile phones and other technologies allow these tech-savvy young people to be continually connected and provide an extension of their identity. Teachers can engage with young people by proactively finding out about and showing genuine interest in the things that interest them without trying to be 'too cool'.
- **Risk:** these young people have grown up somewhat protected from hardship but in an age of perceived 'fear', for example from terrorism or litigation. They understand that risk may lead to danger, harm or disappointment so may be reluctant to take risks themselves. Young people will benefit from being given permission to make mistakes and encouragement to deal with consequences. Teachers can help them to develop self reliance by supporting them through difficult times and recognising their positive choices.
- **Future:** these young people often hear that they will probably have five or more careers, not jobs. Their futures are likely to be characterised by uncertainty with numerous opportunities and pathways. Short term goal setting with an optimistic approach to frustrations and challenges may have more relevance than long term goals.
- **Relationships:** young people may be less connected to community in a face-to-face way and have reduced opportunity for relationships with caring adults as they generally spend time communicating through devices. Positive affirmation, recognition and encouragement will help adults to engage with these young people.

Adapted from: The Nexgen Group. 2010

How to build relationships with young people

'Research has shown that there are three fundamental skills to making effective relationships. These skills can be best described under three headings – respect, empathy and genuineness. These are known as the REG principles, and are crucial in working with young people as they support the developmental needs of adolescents. Demonstrating respect, empathy and genuineness supports their needs to feel powerful, autonomous, competent and cared for. Some examples of how these principles are put into action are listed below.

Respect is conveyed by:

- giving positive attention
- active listening
- giving your time
- basic courtesies, eg offering a chair
- being nonjudgmental – expressing a desire to understand and accept (but not necessarily agree with) reasons behind a student's behaviour
- being inquisitive (showing interest) but not interrogatory
- resisting the temptation to try to convince students to change their thoughts or behaviour
- not interrupting or talking over the student
- being thoughtful, eg remembering concerns a student may have and enquiring as to how that is going
- showing concern.

Empathy is conveyed by:

- spending time listening
- frequent reflection and validation of a student's feelings
- demonstrated respect for a student's unique strengths and reserves
- paraphrasing to check you are on track
- awareness of cultural and other differences.

Genuineness is conveyed by:

- responding naturally
- sharing feelings appropriately
- being spontaneous
- verbal behaviour that is consistent with non-verbal behaviour
- not being defensive
- not pretending to be someone or something you are not
- being honest and upfront with others
- sharing your real feelings or thoughts in a caring and assertive manner
- not saying things you don't believe simply because you think others would want to hear them.

In good communication, respect is shown for the student and their views, strengths and choices. Treat the student as a decision maker with reasons for their choices and work on examining the balance of the costs and benefits of actions.'

(Keeping in Touch (the KIT), 2006).

Additional tips that can help teachers build more supportive relationships and facilitate communication with students follow:

- involve young people in decision making processes
- ask effective and strategic open questions (who, what, when, where or how questions)
- acknowledge that the internet provides access to more information than we can provide
- give priority to the teaching of critical literacy skills, self directed learning and questioning to help students determine the accuracy and reliability of information
- keep an open mind and be flexible
- avoid assumptions
- keep a sense of humour and be willing to laugh at yourself.

How to 'really' listen and keep them talking

It is important in building a supportive relationship that young people feel that they are really being heard and not judged. Simple conversations involve people taking turns and adding personal perspectives or experiences, opinions or stories. A different approach may be required when talking with students about issues of concern.

A useful summary of the underlying skills needed when talking with a young person about these issues follows. Using these skills will help to create a relationship in which the young person may be willing to continue to talk and work towards changing their behaviour.

Expressing empathy:

- listen carefully to the young person and let them know that you hear/understand their situation
- demonstrate respect by not interrupting
- adopt a curious, interested approach without being intrusive or interrogatory
- reflect and confirm their feelings
- try to be warm
- check body language, facial expressions – these can undo what you are trying to do.

Listening actively:

- concentrate on really understanding what the young person is saying
- repeat what the young person has said by rephrasing in your own words – this shows that you have listened to what was said and allows them to correct anything that is misunderstood
- summarise – this can link all that has been said in an objective way and allow some discrepancies to be realised.

Clarifying:

- reflect their comments back to them – ask questions like 'Is that right?' or 'So you are saying that ...', 'What do you think about this?'
- check that you got the meaning of what was said. That is, check your perception of what you have heard them say – this helps to avoid making assumptions.

Using open ended questions:

- avoid using questions that provide for 'yes/no' answers
- use statements such as 'What else?', 'What might?', 'How could?', 'How does?'
- avoid placing the young person in a passive role that allows them to produce only short answers.

Being accepting of the young person:

- leave out your own opinion, even if you totally agree or disagree with what you hear or even though you may not approve of his or her behaviour
- avoid labelling the behaviour as a 'problem'. This may result in them rejecting further discussion
- avoid blaming or attributing fault as this may elicit defensive reactions from the young person
- avoid conveying the impression that you have all the answers
- encourage them to take responsibility for any change.

Avoiding arguments:

- reflect what they are saying and then change course if a young person is unwilling to consider a particular course of action
- avoid taking sides as they may debate the other side. This can entrench the behaviour rather than helping to develop some discrepancy.

Asking permission:

- obtain permission before giving advice eg 'Would it be O.K. with you if we talk about the effects of ...?'
- avoid telling them what to do – this helps redress the potential power imbalance.

The simple acronym EARS can be used as a prompt.

Express empathy

Avoid arguments

Reflect the conflict

Support the young person

Understanding motivation to change

How do we change behaviour?

The stages of change model described in [Young People and Drugs](#) illustrates the dynamic nature of change.

Behaviour change is a process rather than a single event and the stages of change help to clarify this understanding. Stages in the cycle of change include:

1. Precontemplation – not viewing the behaviour as being a problem
2. Contemplation – awareness that the behaviour may lead to problems
3. Decision – deciding what changes should be made
4. Action – implementing planned changes
5. Maintenance – continuing the changes
6. Relapse – reverting to previous behaviour

(DiClemente, & Prochaska, 1998)

Young people may pass through some of these stages more than once when they attempt to manage a change in their drug use behaviour. However, this may not be in a linear progression and each person may experience the process differently.

Motivating change

Teachers can play a role in motivating and supporting young people to make changes to their behaviour. However, those young people who have complex issues or who do not have the confidence or skills to put change in place, should be referred to the school counsellor who has additional training in motivational interviewing and can support them to take action.

Talking with young people in a nonjudgmental but directive way can help to facilitate motivation to change. However, to use this skill effectively requires training and practice.

Young people will often be ambivalent about changing their behaviour. Behaviour change is more likely when this ambivalence can be explored and developed. Creating a state of ambivalence can help to move a young person from one stage to another. Realising some discrepancy through discussion can highlight the differences for the young person between their goals and the behaviours associated with the use of a drug.

Ambivalence is good! It is where the problems of the behaviour, as well as its benefits, are being contemplated. This means that the young person is having an internal struggle because they can see both benefits and costs of changing their behaviour. This discrepancy is the first step in making a change (Miller, W. & Rollnick, S., 2002).

Change often occurs when the perceived costs of maintaining the behaviour outweigh its benefits. This may include acknowledging:

- their reasons for their drug use behaviour
- the barriers that could make changing difficult for them
- the benefits of changing their behaviour.

Feeling ready, willing and able

It is important to understand that young people usually do not make lasting changes until they feel motivated to do so. It is also necessary to gauge whether they are likely to be successful in their attempts to change.

The information below describes three critical elements required of young people before they can achieve a major change.

Readiness to change involves being 'ready, willing and able'.



Ready

- Young people need to see a discrepancy between the behaviour and other goals or values.



Willing

- They have to consider change important.



Able

- They need to be confident they have the skills to achieve change. Then they are "on the brink of readiness" to take action.

Adapted from: Miller, & Rollnick, (2002) *Motivational interviewing: preparing people for change*. The Guilford Press. New York.

Young people do not achieve readiness to change by simply being given good reasons for doing so. Strongly arguing for change may even be counterproductive, in that it could elicit defensive responses which entrench the behaviour further. Nor does either 'blame' or 'shame' necessarily result in change.

Talking with young people about possible drug use

Having a helpful conversation

The general principles of talking to young people about possible drug use are outlined in *Young People and Drugs* on pages 18 to 20.

Teachers who are skilled at talking with young people may be able to help them to make a decision about changing their behaviour in relation to drug use. However, care needs to be taken to ensure they are motivated to change rather than have their resistance increased. Young people should also be encouraged to be responsible for their own behaviour and the changes that they make at every stage of the process.

The way a teacher responds is very important. Always try to be nonjudgmental, so that the young person is able to say what they really mean rather than trying to hide aspects of their behaviour or please the teacher. With practical training teachers can enhance their communication skills to:

- establish rapport
- provide appropriate information and referral
- support progress.

Having a sensitive conversation about possible drug use with a young person can enable school staff to obtain a clearer view of the situation, express their concern, refer appropriately and be in a better position to provide support. Young people may appreciate their teacher's concern for their wellbeing when it is perceived to be fair and nonjudgmental.

If preliminary discussions with the young person indicate that there are serious drug use problems, or problems unrelated to drug use, teachers should suggest a referral to the school counsellor. School counsellors have additional training to assess and further support students who have drug and alcohol problems, including knowledge of available community supports.

What is a brief intervention?

A brief intervention involves a short conversation of between five and 30 minutes with a young person about drug use, and one or two follow up support sessions.

Brief intervention has been reported as appropriate for young people, and particularly suited to a school setting. This is largely because many of them are non-dependant drug users only needing short sessions to motivate change (Spooner, 2008).

It is important that teachers participate in training prior to using a brief intervention approach with young people. The skills need to be clearly understood and practised before use with those who are at risk of drug related harm. This training does not mean teachers should assume the role of a school counsellor.

Two brief intervention strategies that support teachers to talk with students about issues related to tobacco and alcohol use have been developed. *Keep Left: Smoking cessation in schools* includes background information for teachers, a structured conversation and resources that teachers can use with young people. *Alcohol – My Reality* includes background information, a structured conversation for teachers and a web based interactive quiz for young people.

Things that might be tricky

The following information from [Drugs in Schools: Procedures for managing drug related incidents in schools](#) provides clear guidance for teachers in responding to information about possible drug use that may be revealed during a conversation with a young person.

2.5.3 Responding to information about possible drug use

Teachers have a duty to ensure steps are taken to protect children and young people against any risk of harm which is reasonably foreseeable. Duty of care is exercised daily through the supervision practices within a school and the way information about students is assessed and acted on.

Information concerning possible drug use by students is an example of a situation where a teacher's response must be carefully considered. Where a teacher reasonably suspects, based on personal observation or knowledge, that a student is involved in drug related behaviours, the teacher must inform the principal.

The purpose of informing the principal is to ensure that appropriate actions are taken. Appropriate actions might include:

- speaking with the student about concerns
- discussing concerns with parents/carers
- monitoring the situation
- referring the student to the school counsellor for assessment of drug use problems
- self referral by the student to the school counsellor.

The limits of confidentiality

Issues of trust and confidentiality can arise during discussions with young people and are addressed in *Young People and Drugs*. See *Confidentiality and privacy*, page 18 and *Involving parents and caregivers*, page 23. Some additional issues regarding confidentiality and privacy may also need to be considered.

If the young person's own drug use is involved, staff members may need to inform the principal and enlist parental support to help them avoid or reduce the harms. This is particularly the case if the young person:

- has been referred to the brief intervention because they have broken the school rules and their parents will be informed as part of the school procedures
- will have ongoing involvement through the brief intervention process, including possible time out of their normal school routine or lessons.

While teachers cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality the young person's privacy should be protected. They should understand that:

- the details of what is talked about in the session are private, and will not be discussed outside the conversation without the permission of the young person, unless it involves any disclosure of information that affects their safety or wellbeing or that of others.
- they should respect other people's right to privacy by using as far as possible generic terms, such as, 'someone who...' or 'a person I know', rather than names.

Some schools might be aware of older students who self refer but do not want their parents to be informed. These young people should be encouraged to tell their parents themselves. They can also be referred to the school counsellor who can help them tell their parents and negotiate access to support, where appropriate.

Occasionally a teacher may gain information that indicates a young person is using a drug in a way that is likely to cause harm, although they have not acknowledged this. The issue should be raised with the young person and help or advice offered. However, if they are unwilling to accept support or deny the harmful use, informing their parents may not be straightforward due to a lack of evidence. Decisions about parental contact or further action regarding these young people should be made in consultation with other appropriate student welfare or executive staff.

While teachers can play a significant role in supporting a young person with problematic drug use, they may need to do so in consultation with the school counsellor.

Referral to the school counsellor is recommended when:

- there are concerns that the drug use may be a symptom of underlying school, family or mental health problems
- there are significant problems at school such as serious behaviour problems
- the drug use is associated with high levels of risk to the young person
- the young person's drug use is causing significant disruption to his or her school and social functioning
- the young person appears to be using drugs in an attempt to cope with his or her problems
- the young person appears dependent.

(Drugs in schools: Procedures for managing drug related incidents p.23)

If it becomes apparent during the initial conversation that more intensive support is required, discuss with the young person a referral to the school counsellor or another health professional such as their general practitioner. The teacher can continue to provide support and encouragement while other professionals are involved.

Keeping the boundaries

It is important for teachers to maintain appropriate boundaries with young people. Take care not to collude with the young person or condone the behaviours being discussed.

Staff have a dual role – they provide support but they must also enforce the school rules. They must meet their obligations set out under departmental policy and follow the school's procedures.

Keeping them talking

Talking with a young person about their drug use requires some planning. A student may be reluctant to discuss any personal issues with a teacher. They may believe that they do not have a problem or it is not the school's or teacher's business.

The first conversation is extremely important for 'breaking the ice' and when establishing a new relationship. Having a previously established rapport with the young person will make a conversation easier. Remember to use the skills outlined on pages 10 and 11.

It is important that the young person makes choices that they think will work for them. The teacher can help by providing information (see page 22), offering to follow up or facilitating referral to the school counsellor or other appropriate person.

The suggestions below will help the teacher, whether they have an established relationship with the young person or not.

Before approaching

Strategies

- Choose an appropriate time and place to avoid embarrassment.
- Take the young person aside discreetly.
- Allow time for discussion without interruptions.

Starting a conversation

Strategies

- Ask permission
- Give your reason for asking
- Briefly talk about what the concern is – the concern must be based on facts, not assumptions
- Mention your role, eg year adviser
- Show concern without accusing them of something

Examples of what to say

'I was wondering if we could spend a few minutes having a chat. I have noticed some things that concern me/someone has alerted me to... Is this O.K. with you?'

or

'Mrs X, the DP told me that you were caught smoking at school the other day. This is the third time I believe. As I'm your year adviser, she suggested I have a talk with you about your thoughts on this.'

or

'As I'm your year adviser I am concerned about things that might cause you some problems at school.'

or

'What do you think might be happening?'

or

'What do you make of this?'

'How do you feel about talking this through a little further?'

Explaining the limits of confidentiality

Strategies

- Be honest and explain the limits to your confidentiality (refer to pages 15 and 16)
- Acknowledge their concerns if they have any and reflect what they are saying. For example, having to let parents know, dobbing others in, not being able to go on the excursion or any particular harms that can impact on them
- Listen carefully and let them know that you hear and understand their situation

Examples of what to say

'I need to let you know that what we talk about will stay between us unless I think that you or someone else are going to be hurt in some way. Then I will need to tell someone so that you are kept safe. I will let you know if I need to talk to someone else.'

'Could this be a problem for you?'

'I can see that if ..., it could be a problem for you because ...'

'What else might concern you?'

Continuing the conversation

Strategies

- Adopt a curious, interested approach without being intrusive or interrogatory
- Express empathy throughout
- Listen carefully to what they say
- Stay calm to prevent the young person becoming defensive
- Avoid unsubstantiated accusations or the use of scare tactics
- Encourage the young person to take responsibility for their behaviour without making them feel they have to defend their position or the benefits of what they are doing

Examples of what to say

- 'Are you O.K. with talking about this for a few minutes?'
- 'In what ways might you be concerned about this?'
- 'Is anyone else concerned?'
- 'What about you and your friends, is there anything you might be concerned about?'
- 'What do you think you could do about this?'
- 'How could you do something about this?'
- 'What do you think about ...?'

Providing information

Strategies

- Even if the young person is unwilling to talk further about the issue, ask permission to provide some information, eg about reducing the harms or advising that help is available
- Suggest that they can come back when they are ready to discuss it
- Avoid offering solutions, however listen actively (see How to 'really' listen and keep them talking page 10)
- Remain friendly and nonjudgmental and be available to assist in future
- Plan a time to follow up

Examples of what to say

- 'I can hear that you don't want to talk about this now.'
- 'Would you be interested in some of the information I have collected about ...?'
- 'How useful do you think this information might be? What do you make of it?'
- 'If you don't mind I'd still like to talk at some stage about how you are going?'
- 'What do you think about catching up in a week or so?'

Making a referral

Strategies

- Explain to the young person that you would like to continue to support them, but you would also like to involve someone who has the skills and training to help them look at their behaviours and make safer choices

Examples of what to say

'How interested are you in making some changes or doing something about this?'

'I would like to stay in contact with you but I would also like to refer you to someone who has the training to help you make some changes to keep safer.'

'Do you have someone you would prefer to see?'

'I can make an appointment for you to see the school counsellor if you would like me to.'

'If you prefer, I can ask the counsellor who in the community would be best to help you.'

The above strategies and examples of what to say are of a more general nature in this resource. These strategies can also be found in the brief interventions for alcohol (*Alcohol – My Reality*) and tobacco (*Keep Left: Smoking cessation in schools*). In the individual contexts of these resources, the conversations are more structured.

While the strategies and examples above may be useful to keep a young person talking and connected if they wish to discuss other problematic drug use, a referral to the school counsellor or other appropriate health professional should also be discussed with them. Remember, a teacher with whom the young person has a connection can still provide ongoing support while another professional is assisting with more complex issues.

Following up

It is important to leave the young person with a sense of being able to reconnect again with the teacher following each conversation and to be able to raise issues in future.

If the young person is willing to talk further following the initial conversation, the teacher can:

- make a plan to speak with the young person after two or three days
- provide further support through an additional one or two conversations with the young person in subsequent weeks.

Lengthy or numerous conversations should be avoided, as they may become too time consuming for both the young person and the teacher. This may also help avoid a situation in which the young person could view themselves as being 'too closely watched' or 'monitored' or which can create resistance or build a sense of resentment.

When the young person is committed to changing behaviour, they are moving towards action in the stage of change process. The young person will require further support in this stage from someone trained to provide it, such as the school counsellor or a designated teacher with appropriate skills to implement for example, the targeted interventions for smoking (*Keep Left: Smoking cessation in schools*) or alcohol use (*Alcohol – My Reality*).

While young people should be encouraged to be responsible for their own behaviour and the changes they make, monitoring their progress may be a useful strategy. Teachers can:

- check on the young person to see how they are going
- check if they need any further support
- facilitate the use of other support avenues, such as parents, teacher mentor, a student 'buddy' or the school counsellor.

The [student record](#) can be used to document support provided for a young person. It is only to be used for the purpose of recording what resources the teacher has provided to the young person and to provide triggers to remind the teacher of previous conversations. Teachers can keep a record of:

- contact dates
- a schedule for the young person to talk further
- the information provided to the young person.

Offering information

Information giving is meant to 'sow seeds' and allow the young person to explore some possible reasons for making a change to their drug use behaviour.

It is important to gain a young person's permission before giving advice or providing additional information at any time. However, there is a place for sharing and exchanging information with the young person on particular issues.

The purpose of sharing information in this context is to:

- raise a young person's awareness of relevant issues
- increase awareness of the potential risks of drug use and associated behaviours
- create the possibility of the young person moving into a state of contemplation or deciding to try some changes
- support self efficacy in relation to the young person's own knowledge about drug use and the effects.

How to provide information

In the process of providing information, the teacher needs to maintain a position that does not create a power imbalance. That is, avoid telling the young person what to do or directing them how to change. An approach that can allow them to explore or identify some problem areas involves the following strategies.

1. Ask permission to provide information.
2. Ask the young person what they already know; for example, 'What do you know about the effects of...?'
3. Acknowledge any information and knowledge offered by the young person.
4. Offer external sources of information rather than your own verbal accounts – this helps to avoid the so called 'expert' situation; eg 'Would you be interested in some information I have collected on... and it's effects' or 'Would you find some strategies which can reduce harms useful?'
5. Check the young person's reaction to the information provided; 'How do you see this as helping you?'
6. Ask the young person to reflect on the information provided during a follow up conversation; for example, 'Tell me how you found the information I gave you about...?'
7. Make it clear to the young person that it is up to them as to what they do with what has been shared.

When young people find it difficult to talk

It is not easy to engage a young person in conversation about a sensitive issue. Some reasons for this difficulty and some suggestions for overcoming it are provided in the following table.

Reason	Suggestion
Lack of vocabulary to express themselves, particularly when discussing feelings	Use strategies that give options, lists of words or pictures expressing feelings, and asking the student which fits best for them, using scales (eg from 1 to 10 with one being the worst ever time and 10 being the best you could ever imagine) or metaphors.
Discomfort at being the focus of adult attention	Young people often feel more comfortable about talking when they are engaged in other activities. This is why it is so important for all school staff to have skills in responding, as it is those who are most engaged with young people that have the best opportunities to discuss issues of concern. Ask the student to help you with a task conducive to chatting while you work (e.g. packing away), or go for a walk with them. Don't be bothered if they fiddle with things (in fact have a few things around that they can 'play with', but nothing too distracting or noisy). Be aware of the environment and your body language (are they uncomfortable with your eye contact; would they prefer to get up and move around?).
Cognitive ability	Consider the cognitive ability of each student; students will have a wide range of comprehension and processing speeds. Check often for understanding and allow sufficient time for students to consider and process what you are saying. Structure your communication to the level of the student. Don't expect students to know or have a rational explanation for everything – do you?
Concerns about why you are asking and where the information will go	Explain why you are asking and what will happen to the information. Allow them to 'reject' your enquiry without seeming rude. (e.g. 'I appreciate that this is something that you may not wish to discuss, I am asking because... If you wish to think about it and let me know I am happy for you to come back later.')
They are starting to feel pressured or anxious	Slow down, or talk about something else for a while. Reassure them that they have choice about what happens. Acknowledge their feelings and explore what this is about.
Embarrassment	All of the above suggestions can help students cope with embarrassment. Importantly, don't be too demanding or pushy. Acknowledge the sensitive nature of their situation and reassure them that you will treat their issues respectfully. Often normalising situations ('most people feel embarrassed when discussing...') can be helpful. Consider whether there might be someone they would feel more comfortable discussing this with.
Fear of 'dobbing'	Sometimes students are concerned about revealing information that may get other students in trouble, either because they fear repercussions or because they believe it's the wrong thing to do. The threat of repercussions may be real or anticipated; either way they need to be taken very seriously. Repercussions may not just be fear of being physically hurt but also about being ostracised from friendship groups or losing face. This is very similar to issues raised with bullying, and staff are familiar with management techniques to reduce this.

(Keeping in Touch (the KIT), 2006)

Setting up support in the school

How to establish support

Young people may be identified for additional support through both formal and informal pathways. A member of the senior executive of the school may refer a young person as part of a return to school plan following suspension or as a follow up to a school discipline incident.

Alternately, when students and the school community have knowledge of the available support, the referrals may arise in a more informal way. A young person may self refer or a referral can be generated from the concern of a teacher, parent or friend.

To establish this additional support structure in the school, a range of considerations need to be addressed at the school level. It is recommended that decisions and actions be based on local school procedures and staff roles and responsibilities. The following aspects will need consideration prior to implementation.

Planning for implementation	Which teachers will be involved? Who can ask for additional support? How can we provide support? How can we promote support to students? How can we promote this additional support to parents and the community?
Referral to support	How will referral be coordinated across the school? How will young people be referred? How should the welfare team be involved in the referral process? How can we make staff and students aware of the referral process?
Involving parents	How can we make parents aware of this additional support? When will parents be involved in the support? How will we notify parents, if it is determined as appropriate? How can parents be involved? How can the school ensure parents get reliable information about drug related issues?
Implementation	How can we monitor student support? How can we gain feedback from young people, staff and parents about the additional support? How can we evaluate and review the additional support? How can further support for young people be coordinated if necessary?

There also needs to be a clear pathway to support for teachers who are involved in talking to students at risk of drug related harm.

- A process should be established within the school whereby the supervisor is aware that the conversation has commenced. The identity of the young person may not always need to be revealed at this time.
- Teachers need to ensure that if they become concerned about any aspect of their intervention, they discuss this with the relevant supervisor and consider referring the young person to the school counsellor.

Appendix 1

Sample: Information for parents

Information for parents Support for students

Our school is committed to ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of our students. As part of the school's broad welfare approach we are offering additional support for students.

This support will help students who may require further assistance in relation to health and wellbeing issues. Students may self refer or be referred by teachers or parents to benefit from the additional support offered.

Some teachers at our school have received extra training to provide this focussed support for students. This includes:

- listening to what the young person says when they may be experiencing difficulties
- clarifying what the problems actually are
- providing health information for example, harms of drug use
- discussing ways to stay safe (for example, to reduce or quit smoking)
- connecting the young person to helpful people
- helping the young person to make informed decisions
- encouraging them to seek further support if they need it.

You can discuss any concerns about your child or ask for more help and support by contacting the welfare coordinator, [teacher name], the school counsellor [name] or one of the teachers listed below:

[teacher's names]

Students may approach one of these teachers directly to discuss concerns about themselves. They may also share concerns for friends or others who are experiencing difficulties.

A young person who needs individual, specialised support will be encouraged to make an appointment themselves to see the school counsellor.

If you would like any further information, or wish to discuss this further, please contact [name of the welfare coordinator or deputy principal] on [school phone number].

[date of issue]

Appendix 2

Student support record

Student name	Contact dates	Comments
	1. 2. 3. Follow up.	For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spoke with week 2, Term 2• See again week 4• Gave 'Frequently asked questions' pamphlet
	1. 2. 3. Follow up.	
	1. 2. 3. Follow up.	
	1. 2. 3. Follow up.	

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