
The Principles of Good Drug Education (Written by the Drug Education Forum)

Choosing the best approach to drug education is a key task for educators. There is no shortage of guidance, information, and materials but choosing the most relevant and supportive for the group or groups you lead depends on a number of factors.

This document aims to help you understand the principles that lie at the heart of good practice; those that follow have been adapted from the latest best-practice evaluations carried out in the UK, Canada, Australia, the USA, by the United Nations and in other countries.

The Principles

1. Environment: Good drug education is...

Underpinned by a whole-school approach

Enhanced by family-based prevention programmes

2. Planning: An appropriate curriculum is...

Relevant and responsive to the developmental stage and circumstances of the children and young people

Taught in the context of other personal, social and health issues

Manageable given available resources

Informed by programmes that produce achievable outcomes

Developmental: re-visited, consolidated and extended throughout childhood and youth

Supported by appropriate training

Evidence based and/or evaluated

3. Practice: The educator...

Creates a comfortable classroom climate

Uses interactive teaching styles

Is responsive to different cultural views and realities

Includes a normative component

Keeps up-to-date with evidence

4. Content: The selected materials and activities ...

Explore attitudes to drugs and drug users

Provide children and young people with opportunities to develop social skills

Use credible, reliable and up-to-date sources,

Explore, contrast, and, where appropriate, support (or challenge) attitudes to self and others, to drugs, to drug use and non-use, and to drug users and non-users

Strengthen protective factors

Minimise risk factors

5. Evaluation: The programme is informed by...

Assessment

Monitoring

Impact evaluation

(The Drug Education Forum)

Hope UK Core Principles:

We have been working in this field for more than 165 years, and the principles we work to include:

1. The work we do is informed by best practice.
2. Equipping young people to make drug-free choices is not about just providing them with information about drugs, it is about helping them develop the skills and knowledge they need to manage situations and circumstances they find themselves in.
3. We work in a non-judgemental and inclusive manner.
4. Our work will always be interactive – taking into consideration the fact that different people like to learn in different ways.
5. We will always work hard to create safe learning environments, taking into account the needs of the learners we are working with.
6. We will work with the inviting organisation to plan activities that are suitable and relevant to the groups or individuals we are working with.
7. We prefer not to do ‘one off’ activities – unless what we are doing is part of a wider plan implemented by the host organisation.

Risk and Protective Factors:

When planning drug education interventions, it is helpful to have an understanding of the risk and protective factors for young people, regarding the potential for drug use – especially harmful use.

Vulnerability Factors:

- Lack of knowledge about substances and their consequences
- Genetic predisposition
- Personality traits (e.g. impulsivity, sensation seeking)
- The presence of mental health conditions and behavioural disorders
- Family neglect and abuse
- Poor attachment to school and the community
- Social norms and environments conducive to substance use (including the influence of media)
- Growing up in marginalized, stigmatized and deprived communities

(From ‘What we have learned over the last ten years: A summary of knowledge acquired and produced by the UN system on drug-related matters’, March 2019)

Protective Factors Include:

- Psychological and emotional well-being
- Personal and social competence
- A strong attachment to caring and effective parents (or a caring relationship with at least one adult)
- Strong parental monitoring with clear family rules
- Family involvement in the child’s life
- Attachment to schools and communities that are well resourced and organised.