

Quit Support Program



DEN File # 21

Suspend smoking, not the student

Are you looking for an effective strategy for the smokers in your school?

Tried suspension with little to no effect?

Worried about protecting the younger students and the image of your school?

Here is a new initiative to help you address the issue of smoking in school. It employs proactive methods to reduce the incidences of 'smokers' flouting school rules, and Department of Education policy and breaking the law.

It has successfully supported students that smoke by helping them to engage in a more positive way with staff and their learning experience and has shown improvement in the way students relate to others and the value they place in school.

A Tasmanian Initiative

This Tasmanian initiative, which has been running since 2007 has reduced smoking outside of school and in some years has reduced smoking at the school by 80%

Drug Education in Schools

The program is based on the following principles of drug education in schools and is designed to develop the key protective factors assigned to reduce risky behaviours.

- Teachers are best placed to provide support and relevant information to these students as they already have a relationship with the students.
- The program's educational information sits in accordance with developing skills in critical thinking, complex thinking and resilience. It reinforces positive behaviour in class, during school time, whilst representing the school in activities and when in school uniform.
- Parents are proactively engaged to support their children in this program. This school and community collaboration further supports these students outside of school days.
- This strategy optimises the student's experience of school, develops self-efficacy and relationship building skills.

- The framework focuses on the human side of addiction and not the enforcing of laws and rules. Embedded in the strategy is the principle that when students have an addiction and need support, they deserve support and understanding. This comprehensive whole school approach role-models effective community strategy. It demonstrates the positive influence of belonging to a community on a person's sense of identity.

Key Protective Factors

The key protective factors that have been identified as reducing harmful drug use in young persons:

- **Connectedness** to family, school, friends and community
- **Resilience** (the ability to bounce back from adversity) and resilience training builds on the capacity of the young person to manage successfully the challenges and threats of life
- **Self-worth** combining healthy values and beliefs
- **Positive engagement**

The Program

The program grew out of continual frustration that suspending the smokers did little to change behaviour in the long term.

The focus of the program aimed at managing disruptions that occur from addiction behaviour which was often worse on Mondays after increased weekend smoking.

The resultant program was more far-reaching than this, with reduction and cessation of smoking, increased attention and learning, increased parent engagement, positive improvements to health and the powerful effect of peer preference which influenced the choice of parents, siblings, boy/girl friends to also reduce or stop smoking.

At the core of this program is the belief that smoking is a symptom of other issues.

The design of the program facilitates the "way in" to develop a meaningful connection with a student allowing so much more than the smoking behaviours to be addressed in the longer term.



..... more about the program

The aim is to support students to get through the 20 minutes it takes for nicotine cravings to build, peak and begin to subside. During this time they can be restless, argumentative, angry, disruptive and unfocussed and so the possibility of effective learning are very low.

Like most habituated addictions, smokers usually get through a craving by satisfying it with another smoke. And smoking is highly addictive.

This program introduces the notion

“What if I could find a way to work through the craving and not smoke?”.

It challenges their way of thinking and allows them to see they do have another choice.

Allowing students to get through this short patch, ‘out of class’ means less disruption for teachers and other students. It maximises learning for the individual, for other class members and increases effective teaching time.

Leaving the class for a few minutes (within predetermined guidelines) allows their personal stress levels to reduce. The walk to their support person helps to distract them, and assists to regulate their heightened state. The contact they initiate with their support person reinforces the connectedness and adds to the resilience training.

Why should these students get special treatment?

These students have identified that they need support to cope with their addiction whilst in school time. As with any student who is identified as requiring support we have a duty of care.

A regular Smoker in Adolescence is:

- 2 times more likely to diet severely
- 3 times more likely to exhibit psychiatric morbidity
- 7 times more likely to be a heavy drinker
- 9 times more likely to have unprotected sex
- 19 times more likely to use cannabis weekly

(Royal Children’s Hospital 1993-9)

In 2011, around one-third of Tasmanian school students aged 12 to 17 years had smoked at least part of a cigarette in their lifetime; specifically:

- **23% had smoked in the past year**
- **12% in the past four weeks, and**
- **9% in the week prior to the ASSAD (2011 survey (the tenth in a series of surveys on smoking and alcohol behaviours among Australian secondary students))**

Results

This successful Tasmanian program has helped many students achieve significant improvements in regard to health and learning outcomes. Combine this with a change in attitudes of students, staff, parents and the broader community. Significantly it has markedly changed the culture of how disruptive or badly behaved children are viewed by teaching staff and other students. Can your school suspend its traditional beliefs regarding smoking and reduce the number of student suspensions?

A resource kit is currently being developed.

For further information or to request training and resources contact:

Drug Education Network 1300 369 319

www.den.org.au/schools

Department of Education 1800 816 057

www.education.tas.gov.au/About_us/contact-us/Pages/Contact-Us.aspx



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“Helping a student quit smoking is probably the most important action I can support any one of my students to achieve”

Secondary school teacher, Tasmania