



YSO Policy: Drugs and Alcohol

This policy is from a YSO in Europe that focuses on healthy lifestyle promotion programs for youth. For this policy, BE SAFE recommends the following:

- Develop a thorough procedure for this policy;
- Be aware of the laws in your city and state, as well as the confidentiality policy and mandated reporting policy of your organization.

Policy

It is the responsibility of the youth worker –as an informal educator - to introduce issues relating to drug and alcohol use and its implications into the youth work program. These programs should be exciting and challenging, complementing the education that young people receive in school and from parents/guardians. Youth workers and managers should ensure that drug and alcohol education reflects the diverse attitudes of young people to drug and alcohol use, and is culturally appropriate.

Research shows that certain models of drug education can achieve modest reductions in the consumption of marijuana, alcohol and tobacco, and delay the onset of their use. Drug education can also help to reduce the risks associated with drug use, and help people to quit. Drug education should cover all drugs, focusing where appropriate on drugs of particular significance to young people. These include alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, volatile substances, and class A drugs. When planning, workers will need to take account of existing knowledge, understanding, and cultural norms, so that programs are appropriate to the circumstances of the target group. Particular attention should be given to the young people who are most vulnerable to drug misuse, ensuring that their specific needs are addressed. Research suggests that those most at risk include:

- those at risk of exclusion / already excluded
- from school
- persistent truants
- homeless young people
- young people in the foster care system
- children of parents with drug problems
- those in trouble with law or engaged in criminal behavior
- those who have been abused or have other mental health problems

If the youth worker in the course of their work believes a young person to be at risk of 'significant harm', they have the duty and responsibility to report this concern to their supervisor immediately so that the procedures within the *Mandated Reporting* policy can be implemented (*See Mandated Reporting policy*).

It is clear that not every instance of drug use will place a young person at risk of significant harm, and as stated it should be only in exceptional circumstances that sensitive information is passed on against a young person's wishes. Even then the youth worker must explain to the young person why this needs to happen. What is crucial is how to assess the likelihood of significant harm to a young person (or others) as a result of any disclosed drug use or drug related activity, and how best to assist them to access other services. It is also important to ensure that the young person stays engaged with the service. The youth worker must principally consider the health and safety of the young person when thinking





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about how to respond to a disclosure. The decision will be informed by the youth worker's professional judgment, and their knowledge of the young person and their situation. It is the responsibility of all Youth Service staff to ensure that young people are aware that possession, consumption, supply, or offer to supply of any illegal drugs or alcohol will not be tolerated on youth service premises or grounds. All youth services premises are also non-smoking areas. Drug related incidents include any situation where the above policy is not adhered to, but do not include personal disclosures of drug use covered by the confidentiality policy. Drug-related incidents include:

- Suspicion of drug use, supply or intent to supply on Youth Service premises
- Intoxication on Youth Service premises
- Drug related medical emergencies
- Incidents involving the police

It is important to remember the following when dealing with drug related incidents:

- Do not panic!
- Consider the health and safety of the worker, the young people, and others involved in the incident.
- Ensure staff are working within all relevant legal and professional guidelines.
- Always complete a *Drug Related Incident Form* to enable effective monitoring and review of policy and procedure.

