

Supporting parents to address adolescent alcohol use – a formative study into the role of schools

Robyn Johnston¹, Therese Shaw², Alana Papageorgiou²

¹School of Exercise and Health Sciences, ECU; ²Telethon Kids Institute, WA.

Contact: robyn.johnston@ecu.edu.au

INTRODUCTION

Reducing and delaying alcohol intake by young people has been identified as a public health priority in Australia¹. Parents are a key influence on children's drinking behaviours². Schools may provide an appropriate setting for the delivery of interventions to support parents to address adolescent alcohol use.³ However, interventions must be acceptable to schools and feasible to implement within the school context, as well as being appropriate and useful to parents.

AIM

To explore with schools, parents and community stakeholders, the feasibility and acceptability of delivering, through schools, an intervention for parents to support them to reduce and delay their child's use of alcohol.

METHODS

- Interviews with 11 community stakeholders in the area of alcohol/parents/education.
- Interviews with 13 staff members at seven, purposively sampled, mixed SES secondary schools in Perth (four Government schools, two Catholic schools and one Independent school).
- Focus groups and interviews with 28 parents of 12-16 year olds in Perth, recruited through sporting clubs and snowball sampling.

RESULTS

Schools: Schools were very aware of maintaining the balance between providing support for parents while placing the onus back on parents to take responsibility for their child's socialising and alcohol use. Schools saw the value of providing information to parents around alcohol issues, but were often hindered from doing so by lack of resources (time, staff, funds). Schools felt they had the capacity to link parents to external sources of information but many were limited in their ability to run programs themselves.

Schools' Role "It's the parents' role to parent...the school's role to help parents find information".

"Its about taking every opportunity, as an educator, to put those subtle messages out".

Schools' Capacity "Our strongest capacity is as a vehicle to translate information"... "Schools are a great facilitator, but not necessarily best for running programs".

"Link to feeder primary schools so what happens there continues on as child develops".

"Parents are not schools' primary agenda.. Useful to involve the P&C and strengthen links to external agencies ... Parents often don't know what is out there"



Parents : Parents interviewed agreed it was not the schools' responsibility to support parents with information on parenting adolescents on alcohol issues, but many agreed it would be useful to receive relevant information from the school. Parents were regularly accessing the school website and receiving school emails, so these may be useful channels for brief information, or links to reliable, trustworthy external sources of information.



"I agree that it's not the school's responsibility. (But) they can help by pointing us in the right direction...because obviously they have the experience of knowing what's coming whereas a lot of parents don't".

Stakeholders: Indicated that parents and schools have expressed a need for information on parenting children on alcohol issues. Key points included:



- Schools are one channel for information for parents, which supports mass media and other community-based actions.
- Deliver parent programs as part of a whole-school approach beginning in Primary school, prior to issues with alcohol use arising and while parent networks are still strong. Parent information should vary for age of child.
- Provision of on-line support by agencies to broaden reach a possibility.

CONCLUSION

Schools may be a useful channel for linking parents to alcohol-related parenting support. Many schools felt that having a role in the provision of information and support to parents was of value to their students. However, most schools would require external support to disseminate information more broadly to parents on a whole-school basis.



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