

Review of drug education websites for young people

Purpose

As part of the Drug Education and Prevention Information Service (DEPIS), DrugScope has undertaken a review of UK drug information websites that are specifically aimed at children and young people. Fifteen websites have currently been reviewed and are published on the DEPIS website. The aim is to provide a critical review, for professionals working with young people, of what sites are available to support their drug education work. Practitioners can find out which are the most relevant and appropriate sites to direct young people to or to use as part of drug education lessons. Websites are an important learning tool as the medium can offer something different from printed materials and take advantage of wider information available on the world wide web.

The reviews aim to provide critical comment rather than endorse or recommend the websites mentioned.

List of websites reviewed

Website name	Website address
BBC Education	www.bbc.co.uk/education/id/index.shtml
Cannabis Help	www.cannabishelp.com
Healthy Kids	www.healthykids.org.uk/
Jonny Long Life	www.jonnylonglife.com
Lifeytes	www.lifeytes.gov.uk
Mind Body Soul	www.mindbodysoul.gov.uk
Northern Ireland Drugs & Alcohol Campaign	www.nistudentsdrugs.info
Talk to Frank	www.talktofrank.com
Talk 4 Teens	www.talk4teens.co.uk
Teenage Health Freak	www.teenagehealthfreak.com
The Site	www.thesite.org
UDSide	www.udside.co.uk
Urban 75	www.urban75.com
Wotz Da Factz	www.wotzdafactz.co.uk
Youth Information	www.youthinformation.com

Overview of what the websites include

The websites reviewed cover a range of target age groups from primary age to young adults. They mostly include all substances, alcohol, tobacco, solvents as well as illegal drugs. Some are more general health websites whereas others are more specific to drugs. Some sites are appropriate to be used to support PSHE lessons in schools whereas others may be more appropriate for young people to access independently. Most of the sites contain a variety of activities and interactive features to engage young people in drug related issues. Some also include teacher's

notes and sections for parents. Other websites covering alcohol only will also be reviewed shortly.

A study of drug education websites and young people's views

DrugScope commissioned a study of drug education websites in 2000, which was funded by BT. The report *'Drug education on the web: A study of drug education websites in consultation with young people'*¹ reveals some important considerations and recommendations for websites aimed at young people. The study highlighted the importance of combining the learning experience with entertainment value, as young people commonly perceive websites to be a source of entertainment rather than primarily a learning resource. Use of vibrant co-ordinated colour, icons and clickable graphics, teen slang, magazine style layout and snappy titles were recommended as well as interesting and consistent design/layout. Uninterrupted text was seen as unappealing and short chunks of information with the option for further detail was recommended. Interactive features such as quizzes and games were very popular as they provided an instant way to test knowledge. The option to submit a personal story increased ownership and provided an opportunity to contribute. Caution was advised on using cartoon images for ages 15 upwards although comic strips were popular to illustrate elements of the content. Site name, URL address and a high quality home page were also important as these need to be appealing to young people to engage their interest, especially if they are viewing them independently. In keeping with good practice principles for drug education it was also considered important to provide unbiased, balanced information.

Assessment criteria

Assessment criteria on which the reviews are based were developed taking into account the findings indicated above as well as the existing criteria for reviewing other drug education resources on the DEPIS website. The criteria consider good practice principles in drug education, quality of information content, design and layout, accessibility, interactive features, ethical issues and appropriateness for the target audience. The assessment criteria can be viewed on the DEPIS website. These may also be used as important issues to consider for those developing drug information websites for young people.

Some key good practice principles for drug education that were considered are:

- Accurate, balanced, credible information
- Real life experiences, personal stories
- Discussion/debate (e.g the reasons why people use drugs)
- Challenge myths/stereotypes/attitudes
- Interactive games/quizzes
- Exploring the risks and consequences
- Safety and harm minimisation information – e.g emergency first-aid, safer clubbing

The use of websites to support drug education in schools

Pros

Websites are a useful resource to support formal and informal drug education. Most young people are familiar with using the internet and this can be an easy way for

¹ Drug education on the web: A study of drug education websites in consultation with young people, TNL Evaluation Services, 2000

them to access information for themselves. Websites have the advantage of being connected to a wider web of information enabling young people to access further sources of help. The Internet can also be used effectively as part of group activities and to help pupils with coursework/projects.

Cons

Teachers will need to consider the appropriateness of the content of the websites they intend to use. If bulletin boards and discussion fora are featured they need to be monitored to a degree that the teacher is comfortable with. Alternatively, if teachers do not wish pupils to view all areas of the website then they can download sections of the content onto the school intranet.

Teachers will also need to bear in mind that if the school has a net nanny system some sites may not be accessed, particularly if 'drugs' appears in the title. Depending on the IT system of the school it is possible to over-ride the net nanny for individual URL addresses. This may also be an issue if young people want to access the websites at home. They may need to ask parental permission to view sites, if they are forbidden access by the net nanny.

Inclusion

Teachers will also need to consider the individual needs of their pupils and whether the material is accessible for those with low literacy, learning difficulties, hearing difficulties, visual impairment or other special educational needs.

Ethical issues

Another important consideration is confidentiality. If there is a facility for young people to submit personal stories or ask a personal question it is important that privacy policy statements are included.

DEPIS website

The DEPIS website is managed by DrugScope and funded by the Department of Health. It provides information about drug education and prevention projects and resources for those working with children and young people and their parents/carers. It aims to provide those involved in drug education and prevention activities with access to reviews and evaluation to support them in developing good practice. Other reviews of a range of drug education resources are included on the site as well as evaluation reports of various school and community based drug education and prevention programmes.

You can view the reviews on the Department of Health website at this temporary URL address. We hope to have a new address soon.

<http://199.228.212.132/doh/depisusers.nsf/Main?readform>