

TIPS for TEACHERS (Inhalant Use)

School-based Prevention Programs

Recent studies show that the problem of inhalant use continues to rise and the need for more education in the classroom is increasingly apparent. With the help of informed educators and a quality program, educators can take this dangerous opponent to bat, and make significant changes in the rising rate of inhalant use. Isabel Burk, a drug prevention consultant, has developed guidelines for school professionals who talk to students about inhalants. In addition to ascertaining students' knowledge at each level and building on existing skills and information, she suggests the following strategies:

Ages 4 to 7:

- Teach about oxygen's importance to life and body functioning.
- Discuss the need for parental supervision and adequate room ventilation for cleaning products, solvents, glues and other products.
- Be a good role model; let students see you reading labels and following instructions.

Ages 7 to 10:

- Define and discuss the term "toxic"; students can practice reading labels and following instructions.
- Teach about oxygen's importance to life and functioning, with emphasis on body systems and brain functions.
- Discuss the need for parental supervision, following directions and adequate room ventilation.
- Be a good role model; let students see you reading labels and following instructions.
- Discuss and discourage "body pollution" and introducing poisons into the body.

Ages 10 to 14:

- Discuss negative effects of oxygen deprivation.
- Teach/reinforce peer resistance skills.
- Discuss environmental toxins and personal safety issues.

Ages 14 to 18:

- Describe and discuss implications of other gases replacing oxygen in the blood.
- Describe and discuss short/long-term effects of inhaling toxic products.
- Describe and discuss negative effects of volatile chemicals on fatty brain tissue.
- Where appropriate, offer access to counselor or other qualified professional.
- Respond to questions concerning specific products by describing negative effects and consequences.

In addition to the information listed above, there are some definite DOs and DON'Ts to school-based prevention programs.

DO

- Review school policy regarding drug use and referral service
- Provide training for all school staff as well as parents
- Start prevention efforts, by age 5, minimum
- Link inhalants to safety or environmental issues
- Ascertain current level of knowledge
- Teach and reinforce appropriate skills:
 - reading labels
 - safety precautions
 - following directions
 - decision-

making skills

- recognition of poisons/toxins
- refusal skills
- awareness of physical symptoms

DON'T

- Glamorize or promote usage
- Rely on scare tactics
- Tell too much, too soon
- Give details on "how to use" or trendy products being abused
- Limit prevention to secondary grade levels
- Link inhalants with drugs or a drug unit

SOURCE: Isabel Burk, M.S., CHES, The Health Network