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Substance Misuse Policy



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1.1 County Limerick Vec Commitment

County Limerick VEC and its schools and centres promote an ethos based on respect, co-operation and participation where the partners are fully committed to creating an environment within the organisation that is safe and healthy, and where young people will develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes to make informed choices in a drug oriented society. This philosophy underpins and informs all the work we do and is central to this policy document.

1.2 Definition of Substance/Drugs and Substance Misuse

Substance/Drugs can be defined as all mood altering substances, both legal and illegal that cause changes in the way a person thinks, feels and acts. Substance misuse is the use of any drug, which can potentially lead to injury of the individual and/or society. For the purpose of this centre's policy this includes tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drugs such as, cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, cannabis, solvents, barbiturates, tranquillisers etc.

(Illicit drugs mean all illegal drugs together with solvents, magic mushrooms and tranquillisers, this list is not exhaustive).

1.3 Scope Of The Policy

This policy applies to all school/centre personnel and students of the school/centre and any other users of the school/centre premises including parents, visitors and those attending evening classes. The school/centre does not accept the possession, use or supply of drugs. The policy is in force at all times on the school/centre premises, during school/centre time and during school/centre related activities, including school/centre tours. The only exception is for legitimate medicinal use and the correct and supervised use of cleaning agents and curriculum-related materials/ingredients. On either occasion the relevant school/centre authority has to be informed.

1.4 Aims And Objectives Of The Policy On Substance Misuse

- To affirm publicly the commitment of the school/centre to promote, prevent and endeavour to eliminate any form of substance misuse in all schools/centres.
- To set out clearly the definition of what constitutes substance misuse, signs and indicators of concern and appropriate responding guidelines, which are fundamental to the implementation of the policy.
- To provide a framework which will ensure that the policy and procedures will be applied fairly, and without delay to ensure consistent and equitable standards of care in all centres.
- To promote the inclusion and participation of all partners, which includes student, teacher, parent and other agencies in the community in the ownership, specific needs analysis, development and implementation of the policy and procedure.
- To develop a policy and procedure that promotes long-term sustained education on substance misuse underpinned by enhancing the social and psychological development of all young people within the context of the local culture.
- To ensure that the approach is grounded in factual or informational education which aims to give unbiased, accurate information on substance misuse and facilitated in a manner, which is conducive to open education, discussion and exploration of attitudes and experience.

1.5 Principles

- County Limerick VEC and each school/centre are committed to an environment free from drug misuse.
- The school/centre promotes the right of all students and school/centre personnel to be treated with integrity and dignity.
- County Limerick VEC and each school/centre actively promote the raising of awareness of all partners on what constitutes drug misuse and the means by which it is dealt with appropriately.
- The school/centre is committed to an environment where open communications are enhanced at all levels, where students and staff are empowered to talk about any concerns they have.
- The school/centre promotes interagency partnership with the Health Board professionals in raising awareness on substance misuse.
- Student and staff development programmes promoting self-esteem, self-empowerment and self-worth are an integral part of the school/centres provision of a comprehensive drug education programme which will be incorporated into the SPHE programme currently being run in the school/centre.

1.6 Signs And Indicators Of Substance Misuse

The identification and recognition of substance misuse is not an easy task as some of the signs may also have

explanations linked to normal adolescent development. While it is essential that harmful and potentially fatal behaviours be identified as early as possible, it is equally vital that parents and other authority figures should not label a young person as a drug misuser. A combination or pattern of the factors often associated with drug misuse are set out in Appendix 2.

1.7 Substance Misuse: Key Considerations

The policy is focused on four key areas:

- Alcohol, tobacco and drug education programmes.
- Managing drug related incidents.
- Training and staff development.
- Monitoring, review and evaluation.

1.7.1 Education on substance use/misuse essentially aims:

- To increase the self-esteem and confidence of young people.
- To equip young people with personal and social skills.
- To enable young people to make informed, responsible and healthy choices.
- To provide honest and age appropriate information on drugs.
- To minimise the harm caused by drug use by offering supportive interventions.

These aims will be met by the following actions:

- All teachers involved in SPHE will receive ongoing in-service training pertaining to education on substance misuse.
- A policy coordinator will be assigned within the school/centre.
- All teachers will be offered information and awareness training on substance misuse.

Parents are to be made aware and informed of what is happening in the school/centre regarding education on substance misuse on a regular basis.

1.7.2 Managing substance misuse related incidents:

The school/centre should respond to incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and substance misuse in a planned and considered way. In certain situations legal advice should be sought. Due care will be important in deciding on the balance between a pastoral response and a disciplinary response. An appropriate pastoral response to an incident involving substance misuse may involve referral to a support agency. Disciplinary procedures will be called in if school/centre rules are broken and expulsion will be considered as a last option when other options have not worked. Where a member of staff requires support schools/centres may consider facilitating links with an Employee Assistance Scheme.

Incidents involving alcohol, tobacco and drug use might include:

- Use or suspected use of alcohol, drugs, tobacco on the school premises or on a school related activity.
- Intoxication/unusual behaviour.
- Disclosure about use.
- Finding these substances or associated paraphernalia.
- Possession and/or supply on the school/centre premises or during a school related activity.

Assessing an Incident

In all cases where there is no immediate danger to young person/s it is important to take time to assess the situation before responding and to complete a drug incident report form.

The possession, use or supply of alcohol and illicit drugs as defined is viewed as unacceptable by all in the school/centre community.

Staff and/or students may not be present in the centre under the influence of alcohol and/or illicit drugs.

It is important in all suspected or confirmed drug incidents that a limited number of people are involved. All reports and incidents of substance misuse will be dealt with firmly, sensitively, consistently and confidentiality will apply on a 'need to know' basis.

Parents:

In most cases the school/centre will want to involve parents unless the student is over the age of 18 years. This needs to be handled sensitively and support offered to the parent/guardian by the Guidance Counsellor in the

first instance.

Liaison with Gardai

The principal or designated person will liaise with Gardai in the event of a confirmed drug incident.

Powers of search

In the interest of the general student body the school/centre retains the right to search any part of school/centre property if there is any reasonable cause to believe a substance in breach of this policy is present.

- Search of a student's locker.
- Search of a student's school bag.
- An instruction to a student to empty his/her schoolbag or pockets or locker.

The following conditions will apply:

- Any such search will be authorised by the principal/manager/deputy.
- Consent and/or the presence of the parent/guardian should be sought where possible.
- Any search will be undertaken in the presence of two members of staff.

Disposal of Illegal Substances

If an illegal drug is found it must be stored securely by staff while awaiting the Gardai who will dispose of same. The substance should be handled as little as possible and no attempt should be made to taste or analyse the substance.

Two staff members should be present during any procedures involving handling illegal substances.

Counselling/Pastoral Care

The pastoral care system is the first response to an incident. For some young people their involvement with drugs may be masking some underlying difficulties and for others it may be a phase of experimentation.

- Pastoral care will be offered in response to all incidents.
- If the person has a serious drug problem then referral to an external agency will be recommended.
- Parents and staff involved in an incident will be offered support.

Disciplinary Procedures

Drug incidents are complex and in a situation where the school rules are broken the sanctions will be implemented depending on the nature and severity of the incident. (Please refer to the Code of Behaviour)

Recording of Incidents

All incidents involving alcohol and illicit drugs and any action taken including the consequences or repeat misbehaviour will be recorded in a confidential file. The record will be shared with the student concerned.

Confidentiality

School/centre staff cannot offer total confidentiality to a young person who discloses substance misuse. Information must remain private and only discussed on a 'need to know' basis. The young person must be informed about what is happening and why. It is important that confidentiality and its limits are brought to the attention of all students in advance of an incident arising.

Media

The principal/manager or a nominated spokesperson will handle all media queries. The school/centre will not comment on individual cases but will refer to the school policy and procedures on the management of drug related incidents.

1.8 Guidelines For Managing Substance Misuse Related Incidents

All reports and incidents of substance misuse will be dealt with sensitively, discreetly, consistently and confidentiality will apply on a 'need to know' basis.

Emergency Response:

- Drug taking can have dangerous consequences, it is therefore important to know what action to take in the event of an emergency.
- Teachers should be prepared to deal with an emergency by calling the trained first aider where available in the school/centre, calling emergency services, notifying the co-ordinator/director/manager and attempting to make contact with parents/guardians.

- It is essential that contact with local medical services has been established in advance and agreement in place on how to access the service in an emergency and what the school can expect in terms of support.
- If it is been identified that any immediate health threatening reaction has occurred as a result of substance misuse please refer to the steps set out in Appendix 1 for guidance.
- Liaison with external support services in this area is essential both as a source of ongoing support and for the provision of training.

General Procedure: Alleged Substance Misuse:

- It is essential that all centre personnel know the signs and indicators of substance misuse.
- Remain clam and keep a note of incident/s, noting date, time, place, any witness present, and the context and nature of the alleged incident.
- Inform school/centre designated person who has the responsibility to investigate allegation and who will then:
- Inform school/centre principal/manager of the incident and action taken to date.
- Document where possible all relevant details and evidence relating to the incident.
- Inform parents when the following apply:

Any reasonable suspicion of drug use.

Person/s alleged to have misused drugs does not understand the gravity of the situation.

Person/s alleged to have misused drugs needs support from parents and/or professional support.

- Refer to the school counsellor/pastoral care team.
- Liaise with Health Board for advice and assistance as soon as possible.
- If the allegation suggests an initial incident or that it is experimental in nature it is important to remain supportive, reasonable and not to punish the person.
- However in the event of continued misuse/a serious incident, the sanctions set out in the Code of Behaviour will be invoked. The sanctions invoked will make the distinction between minor and more serious offences. Referral to external agencies may also be appropriate in the event of specialised advice being required.
- Persons who breach the smoking policy may be subject to a graded system of fines and parents/guardians will be informed.
- (Please refer to Appendix 2 which sets out the specific school sanction regarding smoking.)
- Staff breaches of the policy will be dealt with as per the Code of Professional Conduct and Conditions of Employment.
- Additional workshops may be appropriate within the school/centre to raise awareness on the policy guidelines on substance misuse.
- Staff dealing with illicit drug incidents will be offered support through internal support systems and contact with relevant external agencies requested.

General Procedure: Alleged trafficking of drugs within the centre:

Trafficking refers to the supply of and giving of drugs to another, no money need change hands.

- It is essential that all centre personnel know the signs of drug misuse.
- Remain calm and keep a note of alleged incident/s, noting date, time, place, any witness present, and the context and nature of the alleged incident.
- Inform school/centre designated person who has the responsibility to investigate the allegation and who will then
- Inform school/centre principal/manager of the incident and action taken to date.
- Document where possible all relevant and evidence relating to the incident.
- Inform parents immediately.
- The normal disciplinary procedure will apply including immediate suspension pending further investigation.
- A recommendation of expulsion may follow on confirmation of the trafficking allegation.
- In incidents involving the supply of illegal drugs, it is the policy of the school/centre to inform the Gardai or the Garda Liaison Officer in the case of a student under the age of 18 years. Garda advice may also be sought about other incidents on a case by case basis. The decision to contact the Gardai will rest with the principal/manager and other relevant staff.

1.9 Visiting Speakers

A number of organisations and individuals offer or are asked to speak about drugs to students and parents. It is advised that the approach taken by the speaker and their purpose in speaking be carefully considered. Speakers have the greater chance of being effective when they are invited to make a presentation as part of an ongoing planned programme on health issues within the school.

- The speaker will be advised in advance of the policy on substance misuse and the overall policy framework in operation within the school/centre.
- The speaker will meet where possible and submit the content of the proposed presentation to the coordinator in advance of the visit.
- The coordinator will consult with relevant stakeholders eg principal, BOM, SPHE staff etc to review the proposed presentation.
- Normally the teacher/coordinator will remain for the duration of the presentation.
- A subsequent evaluation will take place with students and staff to determine the outcome of the presentation on those present.
- The teacher should be clear on what matters require follow up and have a plan in place to facilitate this process with students.

1.10 Implementation Of The Policy

The following sets out the context within which the policy and procedures are developed, implemented and reviewed.

1.10.1 Contextual Criteria

School/Centre management will endeavour to create a proactive healthy lifestyle climate within the school/centre that will:

- Promote the SPHE programme, in particular material on substance abuse education and material on student self-esteem in a cross curricular way highlighting the following aspects:
 - Identifying and expressing feelings and emotions.
 - Being sensitive to and respecting the rights, needs and wishes of others.
 - Developing skills of sharing, negotiation, co-operation, listening and dealing with conflict within the context of peer relationships.
 - Enhancing self-esteem and self-confidence.
 - Identifying a range of tried and trusted adults/colleagues with whom to share concerns.
 - Providing time and space for students to identify their own needs and to explore a range of social issues that may have an impact on their lives now and in the future.
- Promote an atmosphere of openness, honesty and respect in which students, teachers and parents are encouraged to talk openly about their concerns.
- Promote staff training on substance misuse and First Aid as an integral part of the annual in-service calendar.
- Clearly state that the centre will not administer any medicines to students.

Staff Training and Development

- Training will be made available to staff involved in the delivery of the SPHE programme.
- All staff will be offered drug information and awareness training.
- First aid training will be made available to all staff.
- The school will provide opportunities for members of the Board of Management and parents to attend information evenings and workshops on issues relating to substance misuse.

Developing the Policy and Procedures on Substance Misuse:

- Establish a core committee with representatives of students, centre personnel, parents and external agencies to oversee policy development and implementation.
- Review the current situation in the school/centre regarding substance use policy issues.
- Prepare school/centre draft policy document.
- Consult via focus group, publicise, revise/amend and finalise draft policy.
- Ratify, circulate and implement the agreed policy.
- Monitor review and evaluate the policy.

- Inclusion in school/centre induction week programme on policy awareness.
- Informal collective vigilance by school/centre personnel, students and parents.
- A designated person within the school/centre will be nominated to coordinate and implement the policy guidelines.
- An independent third party will be available where appropriate i.e. Health Board professional.

1.11 Monitor And Evaluation Of The Policy

- The coordinator will monitor the policy once a term to ensure that it is of practical benefit to the school/centre. The results of the monitoring will be made available to the principal/manager.
- The policy will be reviewed annually or in the light of changing information by the policy working group in consultation with the school/centre community.
- Evaluation and review of the policy is an essential pre-requisite in realising key quality standards in service delivery. An annual evaluation will assess the extent to which the needs of an individual, school/centre and agency level are being met. The evaluation process will entail the following:
 - Clarify, review and where necessary update the aims and objectives.
 - Identify the level of progress towards the achievement of the objectives.
 - Assess the effectiveness of methods and approaches used in implementation.
 - Encourage participation, partnership and empowerment of all parties that will include needs analysis, participation at focus group, questionnaires and evaluation etc.
 - In the light of the evaluation to update an implementation process accordingly.

1.12 Appendix 1: Signs and Indicators of Substance Misuse

1. Common features indicative of drug-taking among adolescents:

- Unusual loss of interest in centre/school
- Poor centre/school results
- Increased truancy
- Habitual lateness for centre/school
- Rowdy or unusually giddy behaviour in class after breaks
- Groups congregating in out of the way places
- Unexplained loss of consciousness in class
- A secrecy about activities and whereabouts
- New and different friends
- Keeping unusually late hours
- Losing interest in old friends, sports or hobbies
- Excessive tiredness or loss of appetite
- Mood swings that cannot be explained
- Appearing drunk or stoned
- Selling prized possessions
- Stealing
- Job loss
- Clashes with the Gardai
- Information learned from other members of the group/class

2. General Signs and Indicators of Substance Misuse

Substance misuse can involve a wide range of different drugs and each drug used will have specific consequences. Among the initial signs which are often noted are:

- Drunkenness
- Hallucinations
- Erratic or violent behaviour
- Fixed stare blurred or double vision
- Restlessness tiredness and lack of energy
- Unusual smells including solvents
- Persistent cough runny nose and eyes
- Unusual spots, rashes, red marks or unexplained burns on the face area or on arms
- Nausea, loss of appetite and weight

3. Reasons Why Young People Start Taking Drugs

Substance misuse is found in all social classes and in all ages with the majority of people starting to take drugs in their teenage years.

There are many reasons including the following:

- Peer influence
- Drugs are more available
- Desire to experiment, for pleasure and excitement
- Relieve boredom
- A need to escape from other stresses and traumas in life
- Media influence
- Lack of occupation

1.13 Appendix 2: Emergency Response Guidelines

Do not panic and approach the student in a firm, caring way avoiding confrontation.

1. If a Person is Tense or Panicky:

This tends to happen with drugs like LSK, amphetamines, magic mushrooms and ecstasy.

- Calm her/him down and reassure the person.
- Talk openly and explain that panicky feelings will go.
- Keep them away from loud noises and bright lights.
- Encourage them to take slow deep breaths and exhale slowly.
- Contact medical help immediately.

2. If the Person Overheats or Dehydrates

This tends to happen with drugs like ecstasy or amphetamines have been used. Warning signs include:

- Cramps in the legs, arms and back
- Failure to sweat
- Headaches, dizziness and vomiting
- Suddenly feeling tired
- Fainting
- Action:
- Move the person to a cool area
- Splash them with cold water to cool them down.
- Remove excess clothing and fan person to cool him/her down.
- Call an ambulance immediately.

3. If the Person Faints or Loses Consciousness

This happens mainly with drugs like alcohol, heroin, tranquillisers and solvents.

- Put the person in a recovery position.
- Loosen any tight clothing that might restrict breathing.
- Keep person warm but not too warm.
- Check their breathing and be prepared to do mouth to mouth resuscitation.
- Call an ambulance as soon as possible.

4. If the Person is Drowsy and Conscious:

- This usually happens with drugs like alcohol, tranquillisers, heroin, and solvents.
- Put the person in the recovery position and keep talking to them.
- Try to stop them losing consciousness and do not put them to bed.
- If they want a drink give sips of lukewarm water only.
- Call medical help as soon as possible.

It is recommended that training on basic First Aid and the ABC of resuscitation is made available to all relevant centre/school personnel

(Adapted from Cohen Julien, D-Mag. HEA & ISSD, 1995)