

## Drug Education in Schools - Are We Doing Enough?

By Jessica McGrath  
Hartstown Community School  
Youth Category: Age 15 – 17

Drug Education - What's that? No, I don't think there is not nearly enough drug education in schools throughout Ireland. Not even close. If we **were** doing enough then studies would not show that drug use among young adults was shown to have **increased** in the years 2002 - 2006 according to the results of a survey done by the *National Advisory Committee on Drugs* (NACD) and the *Drug and Alcohol Information and Research Unit* (DAIRU) from 10% to 12.1%. This fact alone shows that our country is not doing enough to prevent young people from experimenting and trying drugs, but there is more evidence still as the most recent survey in Ireland, done by the *Health Behaviour in School-aged Children* (NBSC) shows that overall, 24% of 15-and-a-half year olds reported using cannabis during their lifetime in 2006, compared with 20% in 2002. Another less obvious indication that we need to do more to raise awareness about drugs is the fact that the most recent national survey done on this topic is from six years ago!

As a leaving cert student, I have found that there is very little school time dedicated to learning about the dangers of drugs, addiction and substance abuse. In my six years of second level education, I spent three S.P.H.E (Social, Personal and Health Education) classes over three weeks, in second year, learning about drugs. This is not nearly enough and there should be a lot more than three thirty-five minute classes used to teach about the havoc and devastation that drugs can cause if abused.

Over the past couple of weeks, I have taken it upon myself to see what else schools in general offered in relation to drug education. To my horror, I found that there were very few posters promoting drug awareness as well and only two pages in the school homework journals. One page has a list of numbers a student could contact for more information or advice on dealing with addiction under the heading: Useful numbers. These numbers were mixed in with numbers for other problems teenagers might need help with such as bereavement and pregnancy counselling helplines. The other page, well paragraph is more appropriate, was titled: "*Smoking and Substance Abuse*", saying that "*Possession, use or supply of drugs, alcohol or any illegal substances is completely prohibited.*", along with an outline of punishment for breaking the rules. I was disappointed to note that there was usually a more detailed paragraph about punctuality later on in the journals. It seems being on time is much more important than avoiding these addictive and dangerous substances.

I think that peer pressure has gone completely under the radar. In some schools, my old school included, taking drugs, smoking and drinking were made out to be the "cool"

thing to do. If you wanted to be popular, you had to at least try something or else you were considered a goody-two-shoes and cast out from the group. It is a very easy and dangerous social circle to get into. I think that the perception that taking drugs and being rebellious makes someone cool and popular should be taken care of with immediate action. If we can highlight the bad effects of drugs and change the mindset, then freeing the next generation from the grasps of drugs will be easier. If the majority of teenagers think that taking drugs is uncool and idiotic then we could make peer pressure work in our favour and in a positive fashion to keep children free from drugs.

Until now, I never really noticed just how bad the awareness about drugs is. But now that I have researched and looked into it deeper, I notice how much we could be doing to promote Drug Awareness, but aren't. The young people of our country deserve to be better educated about the dangers of drugs, but, unfortunately before this can happen, the teachers will have to be educated in drug awareness.

According to the *Department of Education and Skills*, a new policy has been drawn up which addresses the needs of schools in relation to drugs. ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie) >Education Personnel >School Policies & Plans >Substance Use). According to this policy, teachers will be offered Drug Awareness training, S.P.H.E. training and any other relevant in-service training which will help teachers educate pupils about drug and substance abuse in their S.P.H.E. classes.

My friends and I have decided to raise the issue in an email and petition the *Department of Education and Skills* to urge them to proceed with their intended plans for Drug Awareness Education as quickly as possible.