



Pupils with Mental Health Difficulties

Addiction



Addiction



Classroom-based tips (focus on instructional methods)

1. **Refer the pupil that you have concerns about to the appropriate member of staff or the Student Support Team.** When pupils have issues that are beyond our professional areas of expertise we must refer them to those who have the experience and resources to help. This may be the most important step to help a pupil on their way to recovery. (Lang, E., 2011).
2. **Talk to your supervisor, as you would over any pupil medical issue.** Be sure to speak with your Student Support Team; they will give you specific advice and direction as you help the pupil re-enter the classroom. Working according to their advice and guidance is the best way to proceed so you can be certain that you're not overstepping boundaries, and that you're doing the best possible job on behalf of the pupil. (Gartens, B., 2015).
3. **Encourage the pupil and highlight the areas where s/he is achieving.** Building confidence helps pupils overcome the negative, self-deprecating thoughts many pupils in recovery have. (Lang, E., 2011).
4. **Reflect with pupils and help them to understand time management.** Addiction interrupts personal development and so those in recovery from addiction may have a tendency for impulsivity and poor boundaries. They may also take on too much at one time, resulting in becoming discouraged by failure and overwhelmed. A useful tool in visualising is a calendar or planner to mark down how much time is spent on various tasks. (Lang, E., 2011).
5. **Make allowances for pupils suffering addiction to attend appointments and be absent for long periods of time.** Pupils suffering from addiction often need to attend outside counseling sessions, or spend time at a residential treatment centre to give their recovery a strong and intense focus. Having the pupil get the necessary help outweighs all school-related matters. Extend deadlines, offer extra help and be giving of your time and patience. (Gatens, P., 2015).
6. **Plan for the possibility of a pupil recovering from an addiction having a relapse.** Some pupils do slip back into the throes of addiction, so it is important to communicate with your school's Student Support Team to monitor their progress. All schools have strict policies regarding pupil drug and alcohol use and you must communicate your concerns to your school's administration. (Gatens, P., 2015).
7. **Work with pupils who are attempting to recover from their disease, even though it is often difficult and frustrating.** You cannot guarantee pupils dealing with addiction will get clean and sober and stay that way, but you can ensure that the help you give in your class gives them the best possible chance. (Gatens, P., 2015).



School-based practical tips (focus on instructional methods)

Community

1. **Establish a Student Support Team to aid in ensuring that pupils with support needs are able to continue to access a full education, and to assist staff to manage those pupils effectively.** Student Support Teams are responsible for ensuring that systems, policies and procedures to help pupils with support needs are in place. Ensure that membership of the Student Support Team includes school management, school counsellor, special needs coordinators, year heads, home-school liaison personnel and teachers with specialist roles. Invite experts from external agencies and parents whenever necessary. (Educator Toolkit, NEDA, 2016 & Department of Education and Skills, Ireland Guidelines).
2. **Form open collaborative relationships with appropriate local treatment facilities and providers to support young people in their recovery.** Establish a system of referral provide space for treatment professionals to meet with young people where necessary (Wood, J., Drolet, J., Fetro, J., Synovitz, B., Wood, A., 2002).
3. **Ensure that school counsellors work closely with treatment counselors, and that treatment staff also provide progress reports to school staff.** Have the needs of the young person identified in conjunction with all stakeholders and appropriate provisions put in place. If the young person is receiving treatment in a residential setting and discharge is approaching, make a re-integration plan to allow for as smooth a transition as possible. (Wood, J., Drolet, J., Fetro, J., Synovitz, B., Wood, A., 2002).

Curricular Adaptations

1. **Ensure a robust social, physical and health education is delivered as part of the school curriculum.** As in other areas of personal and social education – such as sex and relationship education, health education, bereavement and child protection – prevention, wherever possible, is better than cure. As a school, ask: *What can we do to promote a healthy self-concept and equip young people with the confidence and skills necessary to handle problematic situations without experiencing overwhelming levels of anxiety?* (Wood, J., Drolet, J., Fetro, J., Synovitz, B., Wood, A., 2002).
2. **Prevention, and particularly drug-related prevention, only makes sense if provided as part of a comprehensive programme that addresses the health and well-being of young people within a school.** Train and support those teaching, or providing the specific learning, for the “prevention” curriculum. Provide support for development, monitoring, review and refinement to the school staff. (Ljubljana, 2012).

Discipline

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2. Ensure that membership of the Student Support Team includes school management, school counsellor, special needs coordinators, year heads, home-school liaison personnel and teachers with specialist roles. Invite experts from external agencies and parents whenever necessary. (Educator Toolkit, NEDA, 2016 & Department of Education and Skills, Ireland Guidelines).

Parents / Parents' Associations

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Safety

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3. **Develop a Mental Health Policy within the school to promote mental health and well-being.** This policy should inform all relevant decisions on procedures and systems relating to pupil wellbeing. Ensure that the needs of pupils suffering from addiction are reflected in these policies and procedures.
4. **Establish a Safe Person and Safe Place in the school for times when the pupil feels overwhelmed.** Ideally this person should be a school counselor or another suitably qualified person. Choose a location that is adequately private to be away from the unnecessary attention of other staff and pupils.
5. Develop Policies and Procedures for the use of this space and inform all relevant stakeholders.

6. **Ensure that school counsellors work closely with treatment counselors, and that treatment staff also provide progress reports to school staff.** Have the needs of the young person identified in conjunction with all stakeholders and appropriate provisions put in place. If the young person is receiving treatment in a residential setting and discharge is approaching, make a re-integration plan to allow for as smooth a transition as possible. (Wood, J., Drolet, J., Fetro, J., Synovitz, B., Wood, A., 2002).

School Breaks

Provide supervision at all times for pupils who are recovering from addiction.

Scheduling Events

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Pupil Support

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9. **Prevention, and particularly drug-related prevention, only makes sense if provided as part of a comprehensive programme that addresses the health and well-being of young people within a school.** Train and support those teaching, or providing the specific learning, for the “prevention” curriculum. Provide support for development, monitoring, review and refinement to the school staff. (Ljubljana, 2012).
10. **Provide supervision at all times for pupils who are recovering from addiction.**

Teacher Professional Development

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Timetabling

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Supportive Literature

Addiction is defined by a compulsion to use a substance, or continue with certain behaviour that makes you feel good or avoid bad feelings. There are two types of addiction: physical and psychological.

The pattern doesn't have to be severe to be considered an addiction; there are mild addictions as well.

Physical addiction

This occurs after a substance is used so much it actually alters the body's chemistry. The body develops a hunger for a particular drug that needs to be constantly fed. If the hunger is not fed, the body goes into withdrawal, leading to a range of unpleasant symptoms until the hunger is fed again.

Psychological addiction

This occurs when the brain gets addicted to a particular substance or behaviour that 'rewards' it, i.e. creating a sense of 'feeling good'. The mind is powerful and therefore an addicted brain can produce physical manifestations of withdrawal, including cravings, irritability, insomnia and depression.

When it comes to alcohol, nicotine and illegal drugs, it is possible to develop a physical addiction, a psychological addiction, or a mixture of both.

What are the signs?

Even though different people can develop any kind of addiction, the warning signs are quite similar and include:

- An unhealthy focus on pursuing the substance/behaviour
- Excluding other activities that are not related to using the substance
- Going out mainly with the aim of using the substance
- Needing more of the substance/behaviour to get the same feelings of elation
- Neglecting other areas of life, including relationships, health, or work.

(Reachout.com)

Websites and EU reports

ReachOut.com is an online youth mental health service.

www.reachout.com/inform-yourself/alcohol-drugs-and-addiction/other-addictions/what-is-addiction/

References

Lang, E., (2011) *Advising Students in Recovery from Addiction*, *Academic Advising Today*, 34(4)

Gatens, B., (2015) *Helping Students Cope with Addiction: Tips for Teachers*, *From the Principal's Office* (<http://education.cu-portland.edu/category/blog/principals-office/>)

Wood, J., Drolet, J., Fetro, J., Synovitz, B., Wood, A., (2002) Residential Adolescent Substance Abuse Treatment: Recommendations for Collaboration Between School Health and Substance Abuse Treatment Personnel, Journal of School Health, 72(9), 363-367

Sussman, S., (2011) Preventing and Treating Substance Abuse Among Adolescents, The Prevention Researcher, 18(2), 3-7

Guidelines and Recommendations for School-Based Prevention, Ljubljana (2012)