The great debate

Suggested duration: 40-60 minutes

This activity provides students with the opportunity to discuss ideas and opinions on current issues related to drugs and alcohol in a supportive learning environment.

Crossroads outcomes

1.1 Propose and evaluate situations and solutions which may affect the health, safety and wellbeing of self and others.

1.2 Critically analyse situations, attitudes and behaviours that influence health, safety and wellbeing in different contexts.

3.1 Respect the right of others to hold their own personal set of values and beliefs.

3.2 Analyse the relationship between health behaviours and personal beliefs, attitudes and values.

4.3 Show respect for the ideas, feelings and contributions of others in various contexts.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

- Reflect on personal values in relation to drug use.
- Develop and express opinions and ideas about current issues related to drugs and alcohol.
- Identify the potential for drug related harm in the community.
- Develop responsible attitudes towards alcohol and drug use.
- Challenge socially acceptable behaviours.
Crossroads content

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Teaching notes

It is important that teachers choose issues for debate that are relevant to their students and school community, or are current issues in the wider community and/or the media. Involving students in the process of planning for Crossroads will ensure that activities and issues remain relevant to building connections for students.

Through this activity students will develop and express opinions about issues related to drug and alcohol use. It is not important for students to use correct debate procedures and protocols. Audience involvement is important, and teachers should allow five minutes at the end of each debate to debrief and discuss the points and issues raised by the speakers. Teachers should use this time to identify when inaccurate or misleading opinions or beliefs around drug use are presented, and allow students the opportunity to respond.

However, it is important to establish a safe and supportive classroom environment, where students are encouraged to listen to and respect the values, beliefs and opinions of others.

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

- Making students aware at the beginning of Crossroads sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
- Being aware that some parts of Crossroads can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
• Enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

Be sensitive to cultural protocols that may be relevant to certain members of intended audiences when previewing materials. The department’s Audiovisual materials in schools - procedures for use provides advice for schools with regard to the use of audio-visual material including films, videos, DVDs and computer games classified by the Classification Board and Classification Review Board.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the Crossroads website.

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

The resource review flowchart (PDF 276KB) helps you decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Crossroads may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Crossroads program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Crossroads program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the Crossroads website.
Learning experiences

Activity one – Option A: Face to face learning

1. Students work in groups of 3-4. There should be an even number of groups so that groups can be paired with an opposing group.

2. Each pair of groups is allocated a topic. Topics that reflect current issues related to drugs and alcohol should be selected. Suggested topics may include:
   - It is okay to blame alcohol as an excuse for inappropriate behaviour or illegal actions.
   - You are not at risk of drink spiking when you are at a celebration with people you know.
   - Fitting in with friends is more important than being yourself.
   - Illegal drugs are more dangerous than alcohol.
   - Parents who buy alcohol for their teenage children are being responsible by limiting what they drink.
   - Alcohol is the biggest contributor to violent situations.

3. Decide which group will argue the affirmative and which group will argue the negative side – they cannot argue both sides of the topic.

4. Students prepare an argument as part of their group that relates to their allocated topic and point of view.
   - Each member of the group prepares and presents different points and ideas.
   - Each member of the group should be allocated a maximum of 2 minutes to present their argument.
   - Encourage students to use reliable sources of health information in order to prepare their argument. Arguments should be supported by evidence.

5. Allow approximately 20 minutes to prepare for the debate, depending on the length of the lesson and the number of debates to be completed.

6. Conduct each debate using a timekeeper to keep speakers on track and limited to 2 minutes. This will allow all debates to be completed.

7. As a group, discuss the main issues raised through each debate. Members of the audience may have questions for the speakers or for the teacher. Questions for discussion may include:
   - Did both sides of the debate reflect responsible behaviour in relation to drug use?
   - How can we ensure that our own actions reflect responsible behaviour in relation to drug use?
   - How would you respond if your attitudes or values in relation to drug use differed from someone else’s?
   - Why do different members of society have different values and beliefs in relation to drug use?
   - What factors may have influenced our personal beliefs and attitudes?
Option B: Online learning

1. Students select or are allocated a topic. Topics that reflect current issues related to drugs and alcohol should be selected. Suggested topics may include:
   - It is okay to blame alcohol as an excuse for inappropriate behaviour or illegal actions.
   - You are not at risk of drink spiking when you are at a celebration with people you know.
   - Fitting in with friends is more important than being yourself.
   - Illegal drugs are more dangerous than alcohol.
   - Parents who buy alcohol for their teenage children are being responsible by limiting what they drink.
   - Alcohol is the biggest contributor to violent situations.

2. Students prepare an argument for the affirmative or negative side that relates to their topic.
   - Students prepare a 2 minute argument using reliable sources of health information. Arguments should be supported by evidence.

3. Students record their argument using a preferred video or audio application and submit to a group blog or online space.

4. Use the online space to generate discussion of key issues and encourage students to critique and comment on the arguments of other students. Pose questions for discussion on the selected debate topics such as:
   - Did both sides of the debate reflect responsible behaviour in relation to drug use?
   - How can we ensure that our own actions reflect responsible behaviour in relation to drug use?
   - How would you respond if your attitudes or values in relation to drug use differed to someone else's?
   - Why do different members of society have different values and beliefs in relation to drug use?
   - What factors may have influenced our personal beliefs and attitudes?
Teacher information sheet

The information below can be used to assist in debriefing students on some of the debate topics.

It is okay to blame alcohol as an excuse for inappropriate behaviour or illegal actions

Alcohol is not an excuse for illegal behaviour. In fact, some crimes actually attract a larger penalty if the perpetrator was under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. In 2014, the NSW parliament passed stricter laws to address the issue of alcohol related violence, including minimum mandatory sentences for people who commit a range of violent offences when intoxicated. These laws also apply to people under the influence of other drugs.

More information about these alcohol fuelled violence laws.

You are not at risk of drink spiking when you are at a celebration with people you know

The effects of drink spiking can be extremely dangerous and unpredictable. Drink spiking is illegal, and offenders face serious penalties even if no other crime is committed against the victim. It cannot be assumed that drink spiking is not a risk in a situation where people are familiar to young people.

Access more information about drink spiking.

Illegal drugs are more dangerous than alcohol

Drugs have different effects on the user depending on the type of drug, how it is taken, the amount taken, characteristics of the user, and the environment in which the drug is consumed. As a result, it is not possible to say that one drug is safer or more dangerous than another drug. All drugs have the potential for harm, including those drugs that are legal to use, such as alcohol.

Alcohol and illegal drugs have a wide range of serious short and long-term effects. Alcohol is the second highest cause of drug related death in Australia. Long-term effects of alcohol include depression, poor memory, brain damage, liver disease, cancer, high blood pressure and heart disease, and dependence. It is also linked with a number of serious issues in the community, such as violence, transport related injuries, vandalism and anti-social behaviour.

A larger proportion of the population uses alcohol than illegal drugs. The majority of people use alcohol responsibly. According to the Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking
Alcohol, drinking **no more than two standard drinks on any day** reduces the risk of harm from alcohol-related disease or injury over a lifetime for healthy adult men and women. There is no safe level of use for illegal drugs.

Access more information about the [effects of different drugs](#).

**Parents who buy alcohol for their teenage children are being responsible by limiting what they drink**

The latest information and research indicates that the safest option for young people is to delay drinking for as long as possible. Parents who buy alcohol for their teenage children are encouraging them to commence drinking alcohol before it is recommended.

The Australian Guidelines to Reduce Health Risks from Drinking Alcohol\(^2\) recommend that young people do not drink alcohol before turning 18.

Early drinking is related to increased alcohol consumption in adolescence and young adulthood, as well as problem drinking later in life. These drinking patterns are also related to the possibility of damage to the developing brain and development of alcohol-related harms in adulthood. The risks of accidents, injuries, violence and self-harm are high among drinkers aged under 18. Young people who drink are more prone to risky and anti-social behaviour than older drinkers.

Access more information about [parents and teenage alcohol use](#).

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\(^1\) National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009  
\(^2\) National Health and Medical Research Council, 2009