

Solvent Abuse: Staying Safe – Sessions for Schools

Re-Solv is the national UK charity that has been working to prevent the misuse of solvents, gases and other 'legal highs' for over 30 years. Solvent abuse involves the misuse of everyday household products, primarily cigarette lighter refills and aerosols - often hairspray and deodorants. As such, they are the only 'drugs' allowed in schools. The use of nitrous oxide ('laughing gas') has also become increasingly popular among young people in recent years.

Some forms of solvent abuse can kill instantly and yet it continues to be the most common form of drug use among 11-13 year-olds and second only to cannabis by the age of 15.

Fun, Interactive Sessions

Our fun, interactive sessions focus on the importance of making good decisions and dealing with peer pressure in the context of drugs, specifically solvent abuse. We aim to:

- raise awareness of the risks and dangers of household products so they are used safely,
- build resilience by addressing issues of risk-taking behavior and peer pressure,
- enable young people to make informed choices.

We can tailor sessions to suit your timetable and the needs of your students but they are usually an hour in length and likely to include the following key elements:-

Opening Discussion

To gauge students' pre-existing knowledge, we'll ask about various household products and what they think might be dangerous. (This discussion may cover items such as medicines and hair straighteners as well as household sprays and deodorants.)

Then we'll ask if students know what 'solvent abuse' is and ask them to draw up a list of products they think may be relevant. (We will never suggest additional products or tell pupils how to misuse solvents.) We will talk about using these products safely, and the risks of not using household products for their intended purpose, including the risk of death.

Activity Illustrating Risk: Egg Roulette

This game, which involves breaking eggs (some hardboiled ... some not!) enables us to discuss why people might choose to engage in risk-taking behaviours, including solvent abuse. We give students factual information so they understand the risks involved. We also talk about the other risks of misusing aerosols such as flammability.

Students volunteer to participate in this game – no one has to play. It is not suitable for those who have an allergy to eggs. We will always ensure that students' clothes are covered.

Activity Illustrating Peer Pressure: Dog Food Challenge

Volunteers are asked to try a variety of foods including mustard and marmite, finishing with what looks like a can of dog food. (The 'dog food' is actually chocolate muffin and jelly – *but please do not tell students before/during the session.*) Afterwards, we'll talk more about peer pressure and the importance of making your own decisions about what you choose to put in your body. We also talk about living with the consequences of your own actions.

Conclusion

Final round-up, any questions and signposting information so that students know where to find help, should they need it.