

This autumn will see the launch of 'sensible drinking' materials for 11-14 year olds. They will recognise the importance of peer influence in this age group, as well as the need to involve parents. The following account is based on a report by John Lloyd, Senior Officer at TACADE.

Did you know that under-age drinking of alcohol starts surprisingly young? By the age of 13, 82% of boys and 77% of girls in England and Wales have had their first 'proper drink'.

Most young people have high levels of knowledge about the health risks associated with alcohol, but seriously overestimate the amount of alcohol that can be drunk safely.

Peers are more often than not cited as a major influence by young people in their decision to smoke or drink.

Alcohol is a socially acceptable and accepted drug. The *Peer Led Alcohol Project* is therefore not about promoting non-use, but more about encouraging sensible and responsible attitudes and behaviour towards the use of alcohol.

### *Peer teaching*

This Health Education Authority/TACADE project recognises the positive effects on behaviour that peers can have through peer teaching approaches in the classroom. Building upon the very successful *Smoking and Me* materials and the Family Smoking Education Project, the *Peer Led Alcohol Project* will further develop the concepts underpinning such approaches through raising pupils' awareness in the 11 to 14 years age range about alcohol as a drug and its effect on the body; alcohol and behaviour; the influence on social groups and friendships; drinking and driving; myths about alcohol; advertising, the media, peers and culture; the cost of alcohol and taxation.

# *The Peer Led Alcohol Project —*

## An approach to alcohol education for young people

The format of the project is likely to be:

- Pupil material, probably a 'flyer' giving information, raising awareness generally and alerting young people to the need to consider the issue of alcohol in more depth.
- Pupil material in the shape of five or six lessons using a peer-led approach in the classroom.
- A teachers' training manual which will enable teachers unfamiliar with peer-led teaching to use the pupil materials effectively and enable them to involve parents in alcohol education in school. It would especially address such issues as the need to raise parents' own awareness of their own behaviour in relation to alcohol, the influences on children and how young people's drinking behaviour might be addressed if there are causes for concern on an individual or community basis.
- Parent material using a 'flyer' to raise awareness of the importance of alcohol education in school and the contribution that parents can make through their support and involvement.

The pupil and parent 'flyers' are intended for all those children entering secondary schools, and their par-

ents, in September 1991. It is intended that the materials will be launched on Drinkwise Day in June 1991.

### *Successful education*

There is much evidence to suggest that successful education is that which involves and gives the learner some responsibility for their own learning and is enhanced by parental involvement, not as passive receivers but as contributors and partners in the learning process. Through the approach described, the *Peer Led Alcohol Project* seeks to develop alcohol education which is relevant and appropriate to the needs of young people in the 1990s.

### *Ideas welcomed!*

I am very aware of a number of exciting projects which are making use of peer-led approaches in other areas of health education and of innovative work being undertaken by teacher colleagues and others in schools on the subject of alcohol. I would be delighted to hear from anyone who can offer examples of good practice or would like to put forward suggestions or ideas based on their practical experience.

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