

ALCOHOL and SCHOOLS: Policy Options

Alcohol is becoming an important issue for school and educational communities, and the Ministry of Education has suggested that schools may wish to have an alcohol policy.

Children's future drinking behaviour can be influenced by seeing adults drink alcohol in the school setting. From a very young age, children are able to identify how adults behave when they drink. This may influence what they consider to be normal behaviour in their community. It is known that if children anticipate there are positive effects associated with drinking alcohol, they will start drinking both at an earlier age and more intensively, which increases their risk of later alcohol abuse and dependence.

An alcohol policy for your school ensures that everyone in the school community is clear about the place of alcohol on the school premises or at school events.

It is important that your policy complies with the legislation and reflects the intentions of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012. The object of this legislation is to improve New Zealand's drinking culture and reduce the harm caused by excessive drinking, through:

- The safe and responsible sale, supply and consumption of alcohol; and
- Minimisation of the harm caused by the excessive or inappropriate consumption of alcohol.

Any policy allowing alcohol to be sold or supplied at a school event or on school premises, requires a special alcohol licence from the local council. As part of the application process the District Health Board's Medical Officer of Health will ask to see the school's alcohol policy and may oppose the application if the event could inappropriately increase children's exposure and /or access to alcohol. The following questions might therefore be of help when considering your policy:

- How can we support the intention of the Sale and Supply of Alcohol Act 2012?
- How does our school contribute to reducing alcohol harm in our community?
- What benefit does having alcohol available on school premises or at school events have for our school community or for the children in our community?
- What example do we want to set for our children and community?

The following are possible policy options you might wish to consider:

- Alcohol consumption is not permitted at any school function or event;
- Alcohol consumption is not permitted at any school function or event where children are present. Examples of cases where alcohol could be permitted include - fundraising events where children are not present, adult only school council meetings, and in the staff room after work;
- Alcohol consumption is not permitted at school associated, child-focused events;
- The supply of alcohol at school for later use is not permitted (for example as a fundraising activity - as children may be present or participate in such activities);
- Alcohol consumption is permitted at school functions or events;
- The supply of alcohol at school for later use is permitted— thus permitting school fundraising involving alcohol where it will be consumed at a later time.

Recommendations

In order to decrease the normalisation of alcohol consumption in school settings, Public Health South recommends schools develop policies that prohibit the use of alcohol at events where children are present, and prohibit the use of alcohol products in fundraising initiatives that involve children.