

**Safe. Sensible.
Social.**

**Young people, alcohol and
positive activities**



department for
children, schools and families

A guide on delivering positive activities
and dealing with young people who
have been drinking

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Glossary

Operation staysafe: partnerships between the police and Local Authorities sweeping anti-social behaviour hotspots and removing young people who are at significant risk off the streets at night and taking them to a place of safety.

Street based teams: partnership between police and youth workers keeping young people away from crime and anti-social behaviour.

Test purchase operations: partnership between police and trading standards officers to crack down on retailers that sell alcohol to under 18s.

Mobile youth facilities: vehicle-based youth provision which can be used to deliver positive activities in areas with no access to youth clubs or activities.

Common Assessment Framework (CAF): a standardised approach to assessing a child's additional needs and deciding how those needs should be met.

Police Community Support Officer's (PCSOs): Police community support officers (PCSOs) work on the frontline of local forces, providing a visible and reassuring presence on the streets and tackling anti-social behaviour by patrolling a beat and interacting with the public, while also offering assistance to police officers at crime scenes and major events.

Extended services and healthy schools: Part of the extended services programme covers how schools

work closely with other services to identify and support children and young people with emotional, behavioural, health learning or other difficulties as early as possible. Schools should work in partnership to develop sustainable provision, and where appropriate, signpost to existing services.

Extended services and positive activities: Schools have an important role in working with Local Authorities to plan, commission and deliver positive activities and make sure young people and their parents know what is available locally.

Introduction

“It’s just something you do. Everyone does it”

(young person, Birmingham, 14–16)

“When you’re at our age – sixteen, seventeen – you’re not old enough to drink legally in a pub but you want to drink so you have to drink on the streets”

(young person, Manchester 16–17)

“It’s so boring, you ain’t got nothing to do so you think, oh, let’s go and buy alcohol.”

(young person, London, 16–17)

Youth Taskforce Study of Perceptions in Youth Crime Action Plan (YCAP) Areas. DCSF – Publication Forthcoming

Over the last year the Youth Taskforce has been working with local authorities and partners across the country to increase access to high-quality youth provision at times when young people want and need it, especially on Friday and Saturday nights. Young people and their communities have told us that they want facilities open at times when they will use them, and that more activities would do most to keep them out of trouble.

The fact that more youth facilities are opening their doors and more activities are now available on Friday and Saturday nights is real testimony to the hard work and commitment of thousands of practitioners across all sectors. Running activities for young people, particularly on Friday

and Saturday night, comes with its own set of challenges especially relating to alcohol. Young people sometimes experiment with alcohol, so not only do youth workers need to think about providing a credible alternative to drinking during this period, but also how to engage with young people who might be under the influence of alcohol.

Whether young people who have been drinking should be allowed to take part in positive activities is a contentious issue. Feedback from frontline practitioners suggests that there is an equal split between those who think young people should be engaged in positive activities, even if they have been drinking, and those who think a strict policy of non-admittance has to apply to protect other young people.

Not all young people drink – in fact the numbers drinking regularly have fallen consistently over recent years. However, those who do drink are drinking more and putting themselves at greater risk.

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10,000 young people are admitted to hospital each year after drinking alcohol. And by age 16 one in five young people will have been caught up in violence after drinking. To include young people, who have been drinking in positive activities raises some challenges, but to simply leave young people outside and at risk of getting into trouble or vulnerable to becoming victims themselves is simply not an option. This is not an issue that only takes place at the weekend; youth workers will encounter young people who are under the influence of alcohol at other times as well; so it's not a question of *if* youth workers deal with young people who have been drinking but *how*.

Across the country every weekend, local authorities successfully work in partnership with the police and other agencies to stem the supply of alcohol to underage drinkers, to provide additional challenge and support for those young people who do drink, and to ensure that there are enough positive activities available for young people that provide an alternative to hanging around and getting drunk.

This guide aims to give you practical advice and tools to ensure you – and those you work with – are equipped to deal with this real issue.

Plan for alcohol

Working with young people under the influence of alcohol presents difficult challenges. However, many issues can be alleviated by planning in advance. Involving young people in the planning process from the start gives them a sense of ownership. As part of this, get them to shape and agree the rules that will be put in place around alcohol and why these need to be there.

A number of areas have successfully adopted this approach. Here are some guidelines to help:

1. In planning events or activities there should be a specific plan for dealing with alcohol - ranging from communicating the rules around alcohol to dealing with young people who are seriously at risk because of drinking too much.
2. You will need to develop and stick to a clear policy on alcohol in order to set consistent expectations for young people. This should cover:
 - alcohol is not allowed on the premises and that staff can refuse to allow young people to take part if they have been drinking.
 - Young people should not drink before taking part and turning up drunk is completely unacceptable.
 - Young people who repeatedly arrive after they have been drinking will be unlikely to be admitted to the premises.

If your policy on alcohol is that any involvement is not tolerated this should be clearly communicated.

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3. When you decide to allow young people who have been drinking to take part in positive activities:
 - It's a matter of judgement, and the primary concern has to be the safety of all the young people you are working with.
 - Depending on the type of activity young people may be able to take part if they have had only a little to drink but this is the exception. They should understand that they will be asked to leave if their behaviour causes problems and they will need to sign up to the alcohol policy for future activities.
 - Be consistent with your approach to alcohol and be clear with young people as to why you are not allowing them in if that's the case.
 - You should ensure that you have the staff available to manage potential risks where young people have been drinking. This particularly includes having staff available for weekend opening.

4. If you decide to exclude young people who have been drinking your responsibility does not end here:
 - You will need to think carefully about how many staff you need, bearing in mind that some young people may need one-to-one support within or outside of venues if they have been drinking
 - Involve wider partner agencies including the police. Ensure that available staff have been trained in and are confident in handling young people who have been drinking more heavily.

- If you are fortunate enough to have a quiet 'chill out area', you may be able to offer the young person a supervised, safe place where they can sober up.
- You will also need to consider whether and when to make parents aware of their child's drinking behaviour.
- You will need to have access to appropriate arrangements (either through your own staffing complement or via partners) to accompany young people home if they are the worse for wear or to arrange for parents to come and collect them.
- Have arrangements in place if you become concerned about young people's alcohol misuse or the immediate risk that they face if they have been drinking heavily.

Other Tips

- Make use of flexible contracts that allow staff members to work on Friday and Saturday nights.
- Involve young people as volunteers, giving them a genuine role in shaping the activities, ensuring that they get the appropriate training.
- Provide activities that resonate with young people and are a credible alternative to drinking.
- Use detached workers, street based teams and mobile facilities to get out and engage with young people where they hang out and encourage participation in youth clubs.

Partnership working

Having the right partnerships and arrangements in place from the start can make tackling issues related to alcohol easier and more effective. Key groups to involve would be:

- youth workers;
- outreach teams/street based teams;
- police/community support officers;
- local schools;
- local voluntary organisations;
- substance misuse agencies.

Looking more broadly you may also decide to link to trading standards or licensing agencies, particularly if young people are repeatedly arriving at events with alcohol obtained illegally from nearby stores. Be aware of the polices' new tools and powers regarding confiscating alcohol from underage drinkers and how the police can signpost young people to activities in the area.

It is important that professionals are able to identify young people at risk of alcohol-related harm, in particular through use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). The CAF should be the main tool used where concerns are raised but local authorities may also have other screening or assessment arrangements in place for substance misuse. Ensuring that young people's needs are properly identified and assessed can help prevent problems from escalating.

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While very few young people are drinking heavily enough to need specialist alcohol treatment, linking to substance misuse, agencies or the local authority substance misuse lead may help in developing alcohol policies, approaches to working with vulnerable young people and identifying training opportunities for staff.

It is worth considering how to involve parents and carers and at what stage. Providing support can improve parents' ability to cope with their children's problems and reduce alcohol misuse among both parents and their children. Professionals should feel that they have the necessary skills to either do this or to draw on and/or involve the relevant expert(s).

The decision about how to engage with young people when they do turn up having been drinking is largely a question of risk assessment, as the next section highlights.

Risk assessment

A thorough and comprehensive risk assessment process will help ensure the smooth running of youth facilities. In relation to a young person who has been drinking, this needs to cover the potential risk to staff and other young people using the facility if they're admitted, and the risks to the young person and wider community if not. You also need to be clear what 'alternative offer' is in place to ensure the young person's safety and wellbeing.

Things to consider:

1. What is the level of intoxication – is the young person likely to be a risk to themselves or to others?
2. How has alcohol affected their mood – are they likely to become aggressive, cause arguments or fights?
3. Are there other issues to consider? Are there other issues affecting the young person that are known to staff?
4. Is the young person on their own or with a group of friends? Has the whole group been drinking or just the individual?
5. Are there any vulnerable young people already using the facilities?
6. Has the young person been warned previously that access to positive activities would be denied if they had been drinking?
7. Staff: do you have the capacity to supervise the situation? Are staff members suitably trained?

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The answers to all of these questions will help you build a picture of the implications of admitting a young person to the facility or activity. If you decide to do so, you will need to ensure that you assign a staff member to monitor the situation and to intervene quickly if any difficulties arise. If you decide not to admit the young person to the facility, you will need to have an alternative strategy – perhaps

by working with your local street based team, substance misuse service or safer neighborhood team, you can ensure that people are available outside the facility or somewhere nearby, who can be called upon to engage with the young person and ensure their safety.

Where young people are vulnerable because of the amount of alcohol they are drinking it may be necessary for the police to return them home or to a place of safety as per operation staysafe arrangements.

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Whatever the outcome, consistency of boundaries is vital—everyone should be clear about what behaviour is acceptable and staff members need to have a consistent approach to everyone. What you say on Monday has to be consistent with what you say on Friday or Saturday.

Top tip: *make sure all staff know emergency procedures.*

Top tip: *At the point a young person arrives the staffs' hands are tied by the resource and the options available to them. Planning, and particularly engaging wider agencies, is critical for being able to deal with this issue effectively.*

Review

The opportunity to review and assess how it's working is vital. As part of the review process, ensure staff members can discuss any concerns they have about ways of working, and ensure that they buy in to the policies and expectations they are setting. It is also important to give staff the opportunities to raise concerns about particular young people. Staff should know how to signpost young people to other services like drug and alcohol support services, how to use the Common Assessment Framework to assess the young persons' needs, and how to involve family or schools if the behaviour is a concern.

Top tip: *We are informed by some young people that they would normally commence drinking after school and continue until late, often in the park and on the streets. Having centres open earlier will give young people an alternative to drinking.*

Case study: plan, review and delivery

Friday Night Positive Activities Programme, Newcastle

Newcastle Youth Service, working with a range of partners, has developed a Friday night programme offering high quality activities in youth centres across the city. When the 'Safe Newcastle' programme first started the Friday night sessions were specifically aimed at diverting young people away from becoming involved in anti social activities and congregating on street corners. Nearly 500 young people attended the first 14 sessions, including some clearly under the influence of alcohol whose behaviour has been challenging for staff and some other young people.

The service has addressed this through developing risk assessment procedures and detailed operational guidelines, and by providing staff training. Senior management team members ran sessions with staff, to support any difficult situations and to show that they are not asking staff to do anything they are not prepared to do themselves. Security staff have been used for some venues.

A city-wide youth steering group has been set up which is developing a behaviour code for all youth service provision. This is based on feedback from young people that: young people want clear rules that are the same across all provision; bad behaviour needs to be challenged; and everyone has the right to feel safe in a session. The code focuses on young people's behaviour, rather than alcohol intake. It uses a red and yellow card system to encourage young people to take responsibility for their behaviour. There is also a gold card to reward improvements in attitudes and behaviour. Young people are asked to sign up to this code and staff members from all the agencies involved are expected to apply it consistently.

Police data shows a significant reduction in ASB and that young people have reduced or stopped their drinking on Friday nights through engaging with the programme.

Case study: working in partnership

Friday Night Project, Hertfordshire

Parkguard's Friday Night Project in Broxbourne, Hertfordshire, has helped transform an anti social behaviour hotspot. Up to 150 young people used to congregate in a park and there were high levels of underage drinking and nuisance behaviour. So officers from Parkguard, which supplies patrol services for the council, brought down sports equipment and other resources to give the young people something to do. These activities proved popular and the Friday Night project took off.

"Since its launch two years ago, incidents of anti social behaviour and criminal damage have virtually stopped", says Parkguard's Operations Director Lee Hutchings. "The aim is to give 13–18 year olds something fun to do on a Friday night and keep them out of trouble. They now use the park pavilion as a base but it is still very flexible and staff will take activities out and about if necessary".

The pavilion has sofas, a pool table, computer games, televisions, DJ equipment and a tuck shop. The project starts at 6pm and finishes at 1am. Working late is not an issue for the staff involved as they are used to late shifts.

Patrol officers can use official powers such as confiscating alcohol.

Up to 120 young people can attend but on average about 80 young people turn up.

Top tip: *work with other youth facilities to plan staggered closing times like in Tower Hamlets.*

Street based teams

Street based teams are successfully run all over the country. They provide initial engagement with young people on the street; they prioritise young people who have rejected previous offers of support and aim to divert them into positive activities, training, work and referral to support services.

Case study: street based teams

Bury

Detached youth work is key to Bury Youth Support Service's Friday and Saturday night provision. Following research into alcohol use on Friday and Saturday nights, the service opened some youth centres on these nights to provide an alternative to drinking, but young people did not use them.

Using street based teams the service decided to build relationships with young people and develop a credible weekend provision based on groups' identified needs and wants. One team worked closely with a group of around 20 young people on an outlying estate to plan an activity programme for the nearby centre. The centre now attracts 40 to 60 young people on Friday evenings; young people who would have normally been drinking in the local park now take part in a range of activities including cooking, music, DJing, dance and sports, from around 7pm to 9.30pm.

Top tip: *Street based teams are in a prime position to gather local intelligence on who is supplying alcohol to young people. This information can be passed onto trading standards.*

Case study: disseminating information

M-Zone, Barnsley

Barnsley's street based teams work closely with the police to engage young people who may be on the verge of getting into trouble. The teams engage young people in games and modern pop art which aims to reduce the temptation to drink alcohol.

A range of activities are also put on through Barnsley's M-Zone. This partnership between Barnsley Youth Service and Barnsley Premier

Leisure Centre which has enabled purpose built youth facilities to be incorporated within the leisure centre itself. This offers young people activities and facilities such as a Youth Gym – supported by trained coaches provided by the leisure centre; interactive dance studio; an internet café and chill out space as well as nail art and street dance classes. If young people seem to be drinking, the team would engage in brief dialogue with the young people asking them where they have got their drink from and about what they were doing and invite them to join in next time. More often than not these young people would come back to the session sober the next time. If young people have consumed a minimal level of alcohol, such as one beer the team may engage them in activities but ensure the young people adhere to health and safety guidelines at all time.

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Mobile units

Mobile youth facilities are deployed at times and areas where young people want and need them. Using local intelligence from police, mobile youth facilities can reach areas where young people are congregating like local parks, housing estates and town centres and provide an alternative to drinking.

Case study: mobile facilities

Space Bus, Burnley

In Burnley the SPACE Youth Bus responded to a survey of 1000 young people carried out across Burnley where young people said they wanted a facility that operated at times when they wanted and needed it most: weekends and late evenings. The bus sponsored by ASDA goes directly into their neighbourhood, and engages young people in activities who may otherwise start drinking and causing trouble.

The SPACE bus engages young people in positive activities in areas with little or no youth provision. Information about hotspots and underage alcohol use is gained from partnerships with the Police and Calico Housing Association.

When engaging with the young people under the influence of alcohol, young people are allowed onto the bus to use the facilities if there is low level alcohol use and the young person is not a risk, this establishes trust and many young people return the following week sober. If young people are intoxicated and are a risk to themselves the bus becomes a place of safety till the police can return the young people home.

As well as positive activities the bus provides young people with information, advice and guidance on issues relating to alcohol and drugs.

The numbers of young people using the SPACE bus facility averages 45–50 each night with up to 100 at weekends.

Case study: third sector partnership

Social Inclusion Programme, Charlton Athletic

Kent police and youth workers formed a partnership with Charlton Athletic to help re engage vulnerable young people in the area. The project sought to address a number of problems such as high school exclusion rates, low school attendance rates, antisocial behaviour and underage drinking. The problems were created by underlying issues of boredom. This often led to young people congregating in groups in estates and parks and causing high levels of ASB, drinking related violence and criminal damage. These problems were often exaggerated on Friday and Saturday nights.

A multi-agency steering group was set up and football-training sessions were identified as a solution. These events were arranged in playing fields and open places away from the usual hotspots. This project grew to involve a wide variety of activities and programmes designed to engage young people, including fishing, boxing, basketball and dance. Youth workers also ran some educational sessions around alcohol awareness that was delivered to over 20,000 young people.

And finally

This document has explored the issues relating to delivery of positive activities to young people who may be under the influence of alcohol. The following case study explores how positive activities can also be used in the delivery of alcohol treatment services.

Case study: treatment

Know the Score, Rotherham.

Know The Score is a NHS young people's service specialising in treatment of alcohol and drugs misuse in Rotherham. The project engages and educates the community and young people on drug and alcohol misuse close to their home, school or youth club. When alcohol use is an issue, young people are referred to the service by the police, A&E and youth clubs.

As part of the assessment and treatment process young people are encouraged to explore positive/leisure activities as an alternative to drinking. With the support of the substance misuse worker they take part in activities such as gym membership, boxing clubs, and horse riding. These activities are undertaken on the proviso that they are sober, if a young person arrives for a session under the influence of a substance the decision would be left with the organisation leading the session as to whether or not a client participated. This project has numerous examples of how using this technique can move people through treatment and into positive outcomes.

Checklist

Are you talking to the right people?

What is your policy relating to alcohol?

- Are staff consistent with this approach throughout the week?
- Are the young people aware of the boundaries?

Have you weighed up the risks?

- do the risk assessments for your activities cover alcohol?
- how will you deal with young people who are vulnerable or at risk because of the amount of alcohol they have drunk?

Do you know how to refer the young person to specialist support?

- Can anyone in your team administer the CAF?

Do you review procedures regularly?

Useful links

- Positive activities for young people: Expanding Friday and Saturday Night Provision.
- Safe. Sensible. Social. Tackling youth alcohol fuelled antisocial behaviour.
- Safe. Sensible. Social. Alcohol Test purchasing – Innovative Practice.
- www.direct.gov.uk/whyletdrinkdecide
- www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/ytf
- <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducingcrime/alcohol-related-crime/>
- <http://www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/health/substancemisuse/>
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