



## CREATING A SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT STUDENTS

Substance use disorder is a very serious disease; students may have varying levels of experience with this topic. Some students may be struggling with substance use, while others may have family and friends that have issues with drugs or alcohol. Please also be aware that Chris Herren's presentation may bring up a myriad of other issues with which students are struggling. These can be anything from past traumatic experiences, current abuse, and often self-injury and/or suicidal thoughts. It is important that your school system develop a plan on how these delicate issues will be managed. School systems often find it helpful to have a school counselor or licensed professional available following the discussion.

Therefore, before you decide to present Chris Herren's story, you need to ensure that your school and staff have the necessary resources available to support this initiative. The toolkit has outlined support services that must be in place to make sure students are safe and that school staff can properly handle any issue that may arise when a school decides to secure Chris Herren as a speaker.



## KEY PERSONNEL

As you work on developing a plan for your school to bring in Chris Herren as a speaker, you should create a list of the people who will play a role in supporting students if issues arise. Staff with differing areas of expertise will be required to support students and handle any disclosures or crisis. The following people may be helpful in planning and providing support to students:

- Superintendent
- Principal
- Assistant principal
- Curriculum director
- Health educator
- School nurse
- School health coordinator
- Guidance counselor/school counselor
- School social worker
- Members of a crisis response team
- School psychologist
- Child study team member(s)
- School security officer/school resource officer
- Teachers
- School-based health center and/or mental health center staff





## IDENTIFICATION AND INTERVENTION

Even though a student may not have or use alcohol or drugs at school, he or she may still have serious problems involving substance use which requires the responsiveness and support of school personnel. Teachers, counselors and administrators are school professionals already equipped to work with youth; they are also knowledgeable of the legal, sociological, psychological and medical effects of substance use or addiction. It should be a goal of your school system, through in-service programs and workshops, to continually raise staff awareness, understanding and effectiveness regarding substance use in order to ensure that students with substance use issues are receiving the services they need. The school staff must be alert to those symptoms in students which may indicate problems with substance use so that they may initiate assistance to students in need of early intervention or disclosure.

These signs or symptoms of substance use disorder may include one or more of the following: abrupt change in mood or attitude; sudden decline in attendance or performance in school; sudden resistance to discipline; impaired relationships with family or friends; drowsiness or inattention to discussion or surroundings; weight loss; inattention to dress; unusual flare-ups of temper; stealing; heightened secrecy about actions or possessions; and association with new friends, especially with individuals known to be substance users.

# PREPARING FOR THE PRESENTATION



## **SUGGESTED POLICY FOR COUNSELING/REFERRAL**

If it is clear that a student is either using alcohol or other drugs, or there are strong indications that such is the case, or there is a disclosure from a student about substance use, the administrative head or school counselor should discuss the situation with the student, parents or guardians of the student, and explore the possibility of directing them to a counseling or referral site capable of responding to the student's needs. The school's student support coordinator, guidance counselor and nurse should be consulted when dealing with such cases.

Students may be referred to the key personnel by teachers or by any other school staff member. Students may self-refer because of a problem with substance use. The team should be prepared to assist the student by providing him/her with a source of early intervention in the form of individual or group counseling by a provider agency, which serves the school or is available in the community.





## SUGGESTED POLICY GUIDELINES

The following policy guidelines have been shown to be effective practices to address the issue of substance use disclosure and intervention and should be in place in a school.

1. All staff should be aware of substance use signs and symptoms outlined herein.
2. All staff have an obligation to be knowledgeable about and to cooperate fully in the implementation of your school substance use policy and guidelines.
3. Building administrators shall provide leadership in addressing the issue of substance use and intervention and shall establish and maintain the following support mechanisms required to address the issue within the wider school community:
  - a. Be sure that staff is knowledgeable about the purpose of the school support team, its membership and the process for making referrals to the team.
  - b. Ensure the provision of in-service for staff in each school year concerning the issue of substance use disclosure, intervention and prevention.
  - c. Establish and maintain linkage with appropriate community-based support agencies that will assist the school in addressing this issue.
  - d. Provide information and services to students to reinforce a substance free life.



## SAMPLE POLICY FOR REPORTING OF INCIDENTS RELATED TO DRUG/ALCOHOL USE

- All school department personnel are under obligation to report to the principal, headmaster, or other designated administrator any and all incidents or suspected incidents involving the use, possession, or distribution of any drug, alcoholic beverage or weapons by any student, while he/she is under the authority of the school system.
- All school department personnel are to understand that in the event they are subpoenaed to testify in a court of law or other proceeding, they may be obligated to disclose any information pertaining to drug, alcohol and weapons incidents, even if the information was given confidentially.
- All school personnel should comprehend that they are prohibited from "making deals" with students whereby they agree not to notify school administration or law enforcement agencies of known or suspected illegal activities involving drug, alcohol or weapon incidents.
- Each and every incident or suspected incident should be reported immediately to the appropriate principal, headmaster or designated administrator, in accordance with your school department's policy and procedures.
- Any student who is suspected of, or who has admitted to being under the influence of drugs or alcohol must be immediately escorted to the office of the principal, headmaster, or designated administrator.
- To be under the influence of drugs or alcohol should be considered a violation of your school department rules. Students deemed to be in violation of your school rules after an investigation by the principal, headmaster or designated administrator should be appropriately disciplined, but law enforcement and EMS assistance may be requested in cases where it is apparent that the student is engaging in disorderly or dangerous behavior.
- Students found to be in possession of drugs, alcohol or weapons or to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol should be considered in violation of state law. In such cases the principal, headmaster or designated administrator is obligated to summon the police, which will assume responsibility for criminal prosecution in the event that such prosecution is warranted.
- In all such cases where students are found or suspected to be involved in any incident involving substance abuse your school police officer or local law enforcement should take custody of any and all evidence including drugs and alcohol.



# PREPARING FOR THE PRESENTATION



## SCHOOL CHECK LIST

- ✓ School has a clear alcohol and drug policy for students.
- ✓ School has established resources, policies and protocols for handling student substance use disclosures.
- ✓ School has provided training and education to all teacher, staff and administration about student substance use and corresponding policies and protocols.
- ✓ School has identified local counseling and alcohol and substance use programs for student and parent/guardian referrals.
- ✓ School has an established crisis intervention team that is equipped to handle student disclosures and substance use issues.
- ✓ Review Tech Rider and make sure all technical requirements for the presentation are met.
- ✓ If holding the presentation in a gymnasium, please set up the seating to face one end of the gym with chairs on the floor. This will prevent Chris from turning his back on the students.
- ✓ Any press inquiries should be directed to Jenny Swider, Communications Director, by calling 401-243-8555 or emailing her at [jenny@herrentalks.com](mailto:jenny@herrentalks.com). Please also notify her or Chris directly if any press will be sitting in on the presentation.

