

THE PRESENTATION

As discussed in the last section, schools need to have an infrastructure in place before securing Chris Herren as a speaker. Once a school begins to implement substance use education, students may disclose issues related to drugs and alcohol. How an institution responds to these disclosures is critical to ensuring the success of the program in your school.

HANDLING DISCLOSURES AND ASSISTANCE TO STUDENTS

Disclosure means telling another person about an incident or history of substance use or other issue by a student. This may be a recent incident or it may have occurred in the past or be ongoing. Disclosure is about support-seeking. Disclosing should be seen as distinct from making a report or allegation (even if sometimes they are one or from the same event). Reporting to police and making allegations are formal mechanisms to bring an incident to the attention of law enforcement and other agencies.

As stated, young people's disclosures of substance use are sometimes an ongoing process, rather than a clearly marked event. The sad reality of substance use is that nearly three quarters of students (72%) have consumed alcohol (more than just a few sips) by the end of high school and more than a third (37%) have done so by eighth grade. Students are struggling with substance use and it is important to find them the appropriate resources.

Recipients of disclosures, including peers, parents, siblings, coaches and teachers have a crucial role in supporting students who reveal substance use issues. A young person who discloses using drugs or alcohol, may be seeking information to help them choose the most appropriate way of handling their substance use issue. Students may disclose to learn more about addiction and to determine what to do next or what choices are available. The reactions of others can strongly influence a person's decision-making process around these matters, therefore below are suggested best practices for handling disclosure.





SUGGESTED DISCLOSURE BEST PRACTICES:

- When a student acknowledges that they have a substance use issue or it is evident to schools' staff, the administrative head of the school or designated substance use counselor should discuss the situation with the student, parents or guardians of the student, and explore the possibility of directing them to counseling or to local community resources capable of responding to the student's needs.
- The school's student support coordinator, counselor and nurse should be consulted when dealing with such cases.
- Students may be referred to a crisis management team 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.
- Follow-up is a crucial phase of a student's recovery after the initial disclosure and/or return from treatment for substance use. School staff should devise an after-care program in collaboration with the facility, which has provided treatment services. The plan should include a review of the student's school program with parents/guardians, guidance counselor and case manager, placements in an appropriate class schedule and follow-up meetings.





SUGGESTED DISCLOSURE BEST PRACTICES (CONT)

As mentioned earlier, Students will many times disclose issues outside of substance use. The reactions of others is also very important when handling matters related to past traumatic experiences, current abuse, self-injury and/or suicidal thoughts. We refer to these as high-risk disclosures, and depending on the level of risk associated with the disclosure, it may be necessary to have the student evaluated by a professional.

Here are a few key steps to follow:

- When a student discloses an issue related to past traumatic experiences, current use, self-injury and/or suicidal thoughts a licensed professional should be called in to discuss the situation with the student. Parents or guardians of the student should also be contacted. A risk assessment should be conducted to determine the appropriate course of action, and/or level of treatment.
- Aftercare should be handled in the same manner as a substance use disclosure, with staff devising an aftercare program in collaboration with outside treating agencies. The plan should include a review of the student's school program with parents/guardians, guidance counselor, and case manager with placements in an appropriate class schedule and follow-up meetings.

