

Guidelines for Selecting Inhalant Abuse Prevention Materials

Inhalants are unique among abused substances – they have almost universal availability, they are legal products when used for their intended purposes, and many adults are unaware of their danger. More than 1,400 everyday products (including computer air duster, gasoline, butane lighters and refills, paint thinner, solvent-based glues, solvent-based markers, correction fluid, and anything in an aerosol can) have the potential to be abused with addictive and deadly consequences.

New ideas and expert consensus have emerged about best practices for inhalant abuse prevention in recent years. We observe that elementary and middle school youth (the average age of first time use is 11.2 years) are very curious about getting “high” and that their curiosity often triggers experimentation. Yet adults and children are often unaware of the dangers of inhalants, which include poisoning, accidents, sudden death, fires, and permanent damage to the brain, kidneys, liver, and lungs. Here is the challenge of inhalants.

National experts recommend reframing the messages to young people about inhalants. We need to look at materials with a critical eye. Inhalants, more than any other drug, are readily available to children, and can be deadly on first use. (39% of the inhalant deaths in the United Kingdom were to first time experimenters.)

Criteria for Screening Videos and Print Materials for Children

Inhalant prevention messages (whether in the form of videos, brochures, flip charts, classroom lessons, or websites) for children (elementary and middle school aged) should not teach children how to abuse inhalants or even entice their curiosity. **Current guidelines would discourage the use of materials that:**

- talk about the “high” or “head rush”
- identify specific products as inhalable for a high
- show how products are misused

Today’s prevailing expert consensus about best practices recommends disconnecting inhalant abuse prevention from substance abuse prevention. Instead education about inhalants should stress their poisonous, toxic, polluting, combustible/explosive nature and should emphasize product safety. When targeting young children who have had little or no exposure to the nature of inhalants, there is no reason to make the association for them that inhalants are like drugs that create euphoria, thereby giving them an easily accessible way to get high.

Preferred messages reframe the issue of inhalants into a public safety approach. **Choose videos and materials that:**

- equate inhalants with poisons, pollutants, and fire hazards
- stress using products as they were intended to be used
- are careful not to group inhalants in with other drugs
- are careful not to exaggerate negative effects on the body

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