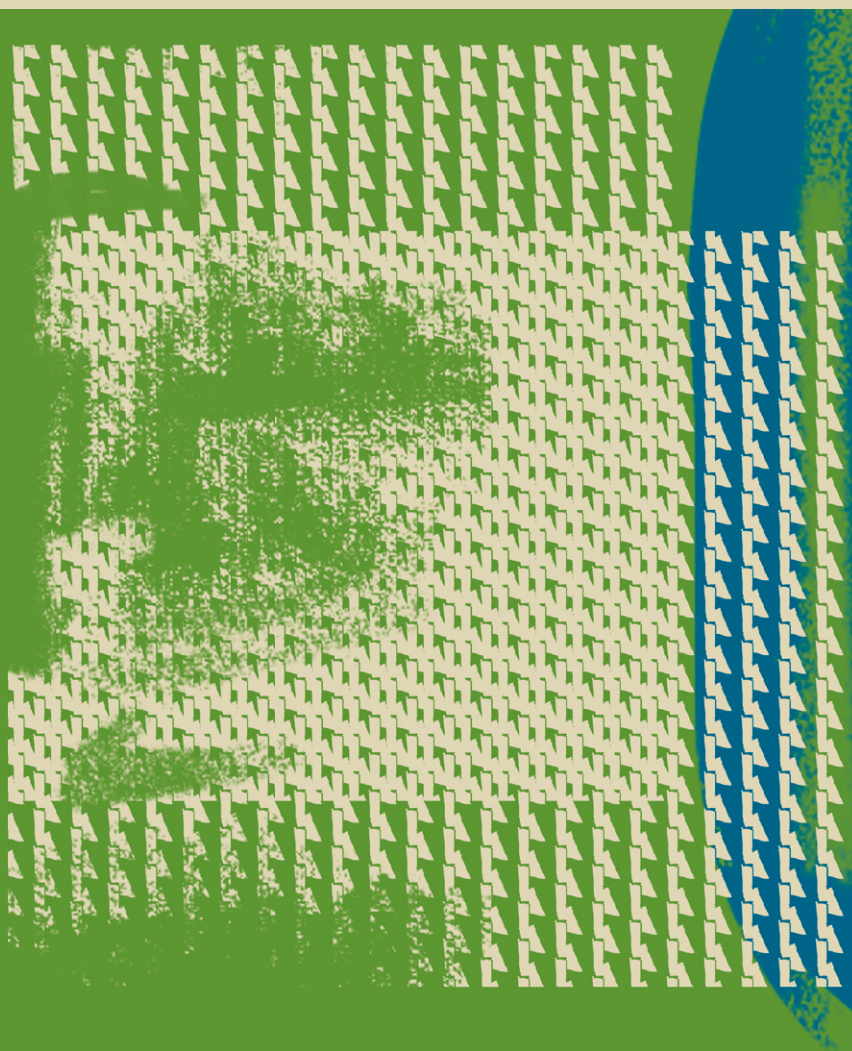


# MAKINGtheLINK

Promoting **HELPSEEKING** for Cannabis Use & Mental Health



This program has been developed by Orygen Youth Health for the National Cannabis Prevention and Information Centre (NCPIC).

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*Mates Help Mates* DVD, written by Bonnie Berridge, produced by Orygen Youth Health Design and Digital Media.

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## Background Information

### What is **MAKINGtheLINK**?

Orygen Youth Health, in collaboration with NCPIC, has developed a curriculum-based program for schools to promote helpseeking for cannabis use and mental health problems, called **MAKINGtheLINK**.

By seeking help early, young people are less likely to develop long term consequences as a result of mental health and substance use issues. However, research indicates young people are reluctant to seek professional help and tend to keep their problems to themselves or turn to their friends, parents or teachers for support – people who often don't know what to do.

### Why aren't young people seeking help?

It is not uncommon for young people to believe that they should be able to sort out their problems on their own, or be too embarrassed to talk to someone about their problems.

They are also worried about the confidentiality of information they give a professional. Existing school resources do not teach students how to overcome these barriers to helpseeking nor do they focus on improving helpseeking skills for substance use and mental health.

Young people need to believe that the benefits of seeking help outweigh the fears they have about seeking help from a professional.

“Australian principals believe one in five students need mental health support and rated alcohol and drug abuse as having the biggest impact on the psychological wellbeing of young people” (Intercamhs survey, 2008)

- **MAKINGtheLINK teaches young people to help each other to seek professional help.**
- **It promotes the idea that 'Mates Help Mates'.**
- **It reduces the barriers to seeking help from professionals.**
- **It also educates teachers about how to assist their students to access professional help for cannabis use and mental health problems.**

## How was MAKINGtheLINK developed?

The development of **MAKINGtheLINK** was informed by the scientific literature on barriers to helpseeking among young people and the real life experiences of teachers, school psychologists, mental health and substance use specialists working with young people with these issues.

The Project Team, which comprised former teachers, a school psychologist, an addiction psychiatrist specialising in youth, and a clinical psychologist specialising in co-occurring mental health and drug use problems, met regularly to monitor progress and ensure best practice of program development for schools. The National Reference Group, made up of education, helpseeking, substance use and mental health experts from across Australia, was consulted throughout the development of **MAKINGtheLINK**. Their role was to share information and provide advice on the development and dissemination of the program and recommend structures and strategies to maximise uptake in schools.

**MAKINGtheLINK** was specifically developed for teachers to facilitate the Student Helpseeking Program as part of the curriculum. The authors of **MAKINGtheLINK** subscribe to the view that teachers are the best resource in the classroom. Hence, the Teacher Manual and classroom

activities were developed in consultation with teachers, education experts and young people. Multiple teaching strategies are utilised in the program to meet the needs of different learning styles and abilities of students. The activities are interactive, engaging and provide many opportunities for discussion.

The classroom materials and DVD script were developed and focus tested with young people. The classroom materials were amended to ensure students found the activities meaningful and relevant and understood the key messages related to helpseeking.

The *Mates Help Mates* DVD was especially well received by students and in fact, surveys revealed it was one of the most useful activities in the program.

“It [the DVD] showed how you should approach a friend and what you can say to help. And they were our age so it was like watching someone in our school”. – Year 10 student

The Implementation Guide describes the development of **MAKINGtheLINK: Promoting HELPSEEKING for Cannabis Use and Mental Health** and outlines a general set of principles to consider when implementing the program in your classroom or across the whole school. Some schools may choose to trial the activities with individual classes to better prepare them for a whole-school approach.



The authors of **MAKINGtheLINK** subscribe to the view that teachers are the best resource in the classroom.



# MAKINGtheLINK Program Components

1

## Implementation Guide –

describes the development of the program and outlines a general set of principles to consider when implementing **MAKINGtheLINK** in your classroom or across the whole school

2

## Staff Professional Development Information Session –

explores helpseeking in young people, promotes helpseeking in schools and explains the Student Helpseeking Program

3

## Parent Information Session –

explores helpseeking in young people and explains the Student Helpseeking Program

4

## Student Helpseeking Program for senior secondary students which has four resources:

A

**Teacher Manual** – provides the teacher with relevant background information and instructions to facilitate the activities

B

**Classroom activities** – six activities in total

C

**Mates Help Mates DVD:**  
An interactive resource modelling how to facilitate helpseeking in peers

D

**Information flier and program poster**



### ***The classroom activities cover:***

Recognising when a friend needs help; what types of helpers are available; professional confidentiality; myths and facts about cannabis; barriers to raising concerns with a friend; barriers to professional helpseeking; assisting a friend to access professional help and accessing reliable helpseeking websites.

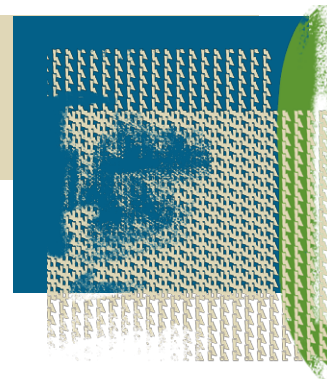
Each activity has background information, aims, instructions, and extension and alternative options.





# Implementation Guide

for Secondary Schools



Although **MAKINGtheLINK** is about cannabis, the activities are applicable to all drugs including alcohol as the helpseeking messages are transferrable.

## Becoming a **HELPSEEKING** classroom

For teachers intending to implement **MAKINGtheLINK** with their students, this document complements the Teacher Manual as it highlights issues to consider when implementing a program about helpseeking for substance use and mental health problems.

Look out for the Classroom Teacher boxes which are written specifically for you...

## Becoming a **HELPSEEKING** school

For school leaders or champions this document will assist you to promote cultural change in your school in the area of helpseeking for substance use and mental health.

Whole-school approaches take time and require planning and preparation to be successful.

Look out for the Whole-School Approach boxes which are written specifically for you...

“The students were engaged and interested. They enjoyed talking about the scenarios presented to them and learnt a lot from each other. The lessons were structured very well, students had opportunities to talk to each other, work in groups, move around... all very enjoyable.” – Year 10 teacher



# Implementing MAKINGtheLINK

This section includes seven steps or recommendations for implementing **MAKINGtheLINK**, either in your **classroom** or across the **whole-school**.

Each step includes information for teachers to consider before using the activities in their classrooms as well as information for those schools who wish to use a whole-school approach. The steps are presented in a logical order, however, every school is different and will need to address the steps they see as most relevant to their current situation. Some schools may only be able to work on one step each term.

## The steps include:

Step 1.	Assessing readiness to promote helpseeking
Step 2.	Making the link with local and culturally appropriate agencies
Step 3.	Driving the program
Step 4.	Planning 'best fit' with your current programs
Step 5.	Deciding who leads and who receives
Step 6.	Informing and involving staff and parents
Step 7.	Evaluating the program



### Classroom teachers: Becoming a **HELPSEEKING** classroom

The six classroom activities can be used by any teacher who is interested in promoting helpseeking with their students and upskilling them to support their friends to access professional help.

The Teacher Manual includes all the resources teachers will need to run the activities in the classroom so minimal preparation is required.

However, it is essential that teachers read the Teacher Manual and Implementation Guide before implementation.

### Whole-School Approach: Becoming a **HELPSEEKING** school

Although the activities can be used by individual teachers with their classes, we know that a whole-school approach is best practice to promote sustainable change.

To build the capacity of schools to promote helpseeking, **MAKINGtheLINK** is best placed in the curriculum in health, wellbeing or pastoral care.

Schools who implement the program effectively and succeed in involving staff, parents and community agencies will lead the way to creating a helpseeking community which will benefit all of its members.

## Step 1:

### Assessing readiness to promote helpseeking

Several factors combine to foster a school or classroom climate in which health and wellbeing curricula can succeed and bring about improvement in student wellbeing. In other words, students and staff have to be 'ready'; prepared for action or progress.

#### Classroom readiness – Questions to consider:



- Are you and your students ready to discuss helpseeking for cannabis use and mental health?
- Are your students ready to learn about becoming facilitators of helpseeking for each other?
- Is your student services team able to cope with potentially increased levels of helpseeking?
- Do they have good connections with local and culturally appropriate youth support agencies that they can refer students to?

#### Whole-School readiness – Questions to consider:



- Is your school ready to promote helpseeking?
- Are health and wellbeing priority areas on your school improvement plan?
- Are your teachers and students ready to learn about becoming facilitators of helpseeking?
- Is your student services team able to cope with potentially increased levels of helpseeking?
- Do they have good connections with local and culturally appropriate youth support agencies that they can refer students to?

“Most teenagers struggle trying to work out whether or not to get help, especially for their friends so this was a good tool to show kids how to bring it up with friends.” – Year 10 student

#### Whole-School readiness checklist:



***To improve helpseeking for substance use and mental health issues across the whole-school it is recommended that you have:***

- Clear documentation of helpseeking policies and referral pathways within the school for substance use and mental health problems
- Clear documentation of helpseeking policies and referral pathways external to the school
- Experience in the delivery of social and emotional health or drug education curricula
- Staff knowledge and positive attitudes toward addressing cannabis and mental health problems
- Positive staff attitudes toward seeking professional help
- Helpseeking for substance use and mental health as a school priority



## Step 2:

### Making the link with local and culturally appropriate agencies

**MAKINGtheLINK** encourages students to seek professional help and empowers young people and staff to be facilitators of helpseeking, using both school-based and external sources. Consequently, the school student services team needs to have the capacity to effectively cope with a potential increase in referrals, and have clear referral pathways to local and culturally appropriate youth support agencies (e.g. Community Health Centres, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Youth Drug and Alcohol Services, *headspace* or Aboriginal Youth Services).



#### Classroom teacher

Brief the Student Welfare Coordinator and year coordinator about **MAKINGtheLINK** and explain that it promotes helpseeking in young people.

Advise them in which class you intend to implement the program.



#### Whole-School approach

Invite key people from community agencies to your **MAKINGtheLINK** staff and parent information sessions and ask them if they want to be involved in the program.

Clarify the referral processes for students from your school; self-referral (by a student), student services referrals and parent referrals.

“[The Helpers activity was useful] because it tells you about the different types of help you can get and the boundaries they have when helping people.”

– Year 10 student

“It is a good program to encourage teens to seek help if they need it, and gives examples when they should.”

– Year 10 student

### Step 3: Driving the Program

It is often said that programs are only as good as the people who drive them. A dedicated classroom teacher has a unique opportunity to contribute to their students' wellbeing through implementing **MAKINGtheLINK**. Although the effort required to implement the program in one classroom is significantly less than a whole-school approach, the benefits of a whole-school approach in making sustainable changes to student wellbeing cannot be understated. The first step toward a whole-school approach may begin with one dedicated teacher, who has successfully implemented the program, and grow from there.

#### Classroom teacher

If you have already decided to implement all or some of the activities with your students then you are most likely motivated to ensure the students engage with the activities and receive the key messages.

Ensure you read the Implementation Guide, the Teacher Manual and watch the accompanying DVD prior to teaching so you are prepared and confident with the materials. Do your own background reading if you want more information.

The best thing of all is, the activities are FUN TO TEACH!

#### Whole-School approach

Establish a **MAKINGtheLINK** Helpseeking Team of 4-5 staff who will plan, monitor and drive the implementation. The Helpseeking Team may include the Principal or Vice Principal, the year level coordinator (of whichever year level is going to receive the program), the Student Welfare Coordinator or a representative from student services, and 1 or 2 key teachers or parents who are enthusiastic about the program and/or have experience in helpseeking, drug education or mental health and wellbeing. Some schools may choose to include a student representative or a health worker from a local agency to be on the Helpseeking Team.

“Excellent activities and design of lesson made this a very useful, engaging and worthwhile experience for all students. Thanks.”

– Home group teacher

#### Step 4:

### Planning 'best fit' with your current programs

Plan how **MAKINGtheLINK** fits into existing programs you are teaching and the goals of your school. Promoting a supportive school and classroom environment is a priority on most school improvement plans. Hence it should not be difficult to establish to which school priorities a helpseeking program relates. Examine your current health and wellbeing strategies and programs and see where **MAKINGtheLINK** can enrich or extend the work you are already conducting.

#### Classroom teacher

Consider the programs you teach, read through the six activities and choose which ones relate to your current programs. You may choose one activity or all six, or you may choose different activities for different programs.

The Teacher Manual includes curriculum assessment criteria to assist you to assess your students (using an example from the Victorian Education Learning Standards which can easily be adapted to your state).

#### Whole-School approach

To implement the program with all staff ensure that **MAKINGtheLINK** is not seen as 'just another program' to be implemented, nor a replacement for existing Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) programs. Rather, it is an extension or enrichment of these programs based on the latest research on young people's helpseeking and the impact of co-occurring cannabis use and mental health problems. This program is part of good teaching and learning and is best placed as part of normal curriculum in health and other areas.

### Making the link with existing national programs:

The National School Drug Education Strategy (NSDES) funded the development of Cannabis and Consequences and R.E.D.I. (Resilience Education and Drug Information). These initiatives can be enriched and updated by including activities from **MAKINGtheLINK** on how to help your mates and overcome barriers to professional helpseeking.

Extend Mindmatters (2000) activities by using **MAKINGtheLINK** to further explore helpseeking for mental health problems as well as bringing the issue of substance use into classroom discussions involving mental health.

Keeping in Touch (DEST, 2006) acknowledges how students often seek help from teachers in groups and outlines the importance of talking to students who need help about what role they wish their friends to play. **MAKINGtheLINK** puts this concept into practice as it builds capacity of staff and students to become more aware of when young people need help, which barriers prevent them from accessing help and how to facilitate professional helpseeking.

***For more information on these programs go to [www.dest.gov.au](http://www.dest.gov.au)***

## Step 5:

### Deciding who leads and who receives

Think about which group of students or year level is 'ready' for the program and would benefit most from learning about helpseeking and where in the curriculum the Student Helpseeking Program would sit. Some schools may find that it fits with the Pastoral Care program, while others may want it to enrich the health curriculum when covering topics related to alcohol, cannabis and/or mental health.



#### Classroom teacher

To implement **MAKINGtheLINK** in your classroom you should be enthusiastic about the program, feel comfortable talking about mental health and substance use issues with young people, and be familiar with school policy and procedure around seeking help and intervention.

The program requires student participation so ensure the group you choose feels comfortable with you and each other, and are prepared to engage in the interactive activities.



#### Whole-School approach

Decide which staff member is best placed to facilitate the program with students. Some schools may choose the Student Welfare Coordinator while other schools may choose a home group or health teacher.

The key is that the facilitator(s) is enthusiastic about the program, feels comfortable talking about mental health and substance use issues with young people, and is familiar with school policy and procedure around seeking help and intervention.

Choose 1 or 2 people from the Helpseeking Team to run the staff and parent information sessions.

**Be aware that discussions about substance use and mental health can be sensitive issues for some young people.**

“The session allowed me to have more confidence to seek help if I ever needed it.”

– Year 10 student

## Step 6:

### Informing and involving staff and parents

It is important that parents and teachers know what the program is about, what the barriers to helpseeking are for young people and how to facilitate professional helpseeking PRIOR to students receiving the program.

#### Classroom teacher

Ensure your Student Welfare Coordinator, year level coordinator and school counsellor know that you intend to run some classroom activities about helpseeking for cannabis use and mental health problems. Keep them informed of your progress and the response from students.

You may want to send the Information Flier home to parents so they know a bit more about the program, or put a notice in the school newsletter or website.

Do not assume that all your students know who the student welfare coordinator or school counsellor is. Introduce them!

#### Whole-School approach

The Staff Professional Development Information Session and the Parent Information Session are PowerPoint presentations which provide an overview of the program and explore helpseeking behaviour and the barriers to helpseeking for young people. They can be tailored to meet the needs of your staff. Time permitting, the facilitator can take the teachers and/or parents through the classroom activities.

##### Staff:

During discussions with staff, it is important to keep referring back to procedures and policy issues around intervention with young people at risk.

It is recommended that staff are kept 'in the loop' throughout the implementation process by providing regular updates at staff meetings or via email.

##### Parents:

Choose a variety of methods to involve parents according to your knowledge of your parent community. For example, a Parent Information evening, a notice in the newsletter, information fliers sent home, posters around the school and posting information on the school website.

#### Parent Information Sessions

Do not be despondent if your parent information sessions only attract a small number of parents. Research indicates they can be effective agents of community change, as they provide information and social support to other parents who did not attend the parent information session and are often the adults whom young people will seek out for help (Toumbourou & Greg, 2002).

## Step 7:

### Evaluating the program

Included in the Teacher Manual are three evaluation tools to assist you to evaluate program effectiveness; a Facilitator Survey, a Student Survey and an Observer Survey. They are easy to read and can be given to the students or teachers at the completion of the program.

The information gained from these surveys can be compiled and reported back to staff, parents and students to demonstrate program outcomes and provide feedback to improve implementation in the following year.

## Summary

### Implementing MAKINGtheLINK

**STEP 1.** Assess readiness to promote helpseeking

**STEP 2.** Make the link with appropriate youth agencies

**STEP 3.** Drive the program

**STEP 4.** Plan 'best fit' with your current programs

**STEP 5.** Decide who leads and who receives

**STEP 6.** Inform and involve staff and parents

**STEP 7.** Evaluate the program