

### **Looking at the Issues**

There are lots of issues affecting young people, that as adults we sometimes forget about. It can be really useful to look at key issues that affect young people in a variety of areas, not just health. Without mental and emotional wellbeing, children and young people are not able to do the rest of their school work successfully

Schools can help in a number of important ways. Above all else they can provide a safe, caring, and supportive environment for children and young people to talk with each other about their thoughts and feelings. This helps them understand that they are not alone and that there are caring adults and other young people who share their concerns. Providing a caring network both at home and at school is reassuring to both children and young people, and supports a normal level of functioning.

Secondly, schools can help young people overcome the sense of powerlessness that often arises in a variety of situations, e.g. bullying, peer pressure, alcohol and drugs. Young people have many questions about the world. Helping them pursue answers to these questions and helping them learn more about ways they can deal with conflict creatively is empowering to young people. They gain confidence in their ability to understand what is going on around them, to acquire information from a variety of sources, to appreciate divergent perspectives, and to learn about complex issues.

### **One of the most effective ways to involve young people of all ages in this exploration is to ask them to brainstorm:**

1. What they already know about the issues at hand.
2. What they think they know but they are not sure about.
3. What questions they have about it. After prioritising their questions, the class can engage in interviews and readings.
4. What security and insecurity means to them, and how they can help keep each other safe.

*Adapted from <http://www.esrnational.org/guide/htm>*

## Mental Health Awareness Week 2003

### Health Issues

Asking young people can be really useful and can provide opportunities for a variety of school and community related activities. This list was compiled during a student health team workshop held in Christchurch in April 2001. The students were from secondary schools in Christchurch and were representative of year 9 – year 13.

### **Year 13**

- Peer pressure
- Stress
- Alcohol
- The future
- Depression
- Relationships
- Drugs
- Smoking
- Friends
- Parents/family
- Sexual health

### **Year 12**

- Relationships
- Drugs/alcohol/smoking
- Peer pressure
- Sex
- Pressure to succeed
- Stress and depression

### **Year 11**

- Responsibilities
- Bullying
- Stress
- Sex
- Alcohol/drugs/smoking
- Hygiene
- Friends
- Peer pressure
- School grades

### **Year 9**

- Changes e.g. moving into high school
- Trends
- The media – pop stars, the way other people look
- Eating and body size
- Family problems e.g. parents splitting up
- Smoking
- Being cool

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### **How can schools use this opportunity positively**

As well as providing a supportive environment, schools can use this as an educational opportunity. English in the New Zealand Curriculum includes many ways in which students can respond through reading fiction and non-fiction, through writing expressively or compiling reports. Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum also offers many opportunities to discuss, view and interpret creative works as well as ways to articulate views and express emotions. Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum includes relevant achievement objectives especially in the social organisation or time, continuity and change strands.

Martha Rogers (1) uses a framework for exploring such issues. The first step is 'awakening the mind'. This is where you gather information. It includes building the skills that you need to make sense of the situation. The second step is 'awakening the heart'. This is where you evaluate the information, separate fact and opinion and begin to connect with the issue. The final step is 'awakening the soul'. This has you considering what you could do about the situation. What are the positive actions you can take?

- (1) Rogers, Martha. (1998). Student responses to learning about futures. In D. Hicks and R. Slaughter. Futures Education. London: Kogan Page.

### **Another Opportunity to use this information**

#### Youth Parliament

A voice for young people - how do we influence decision-makers?

Youth Parliament is a special event that has been held every three years since 1994. The 3rd Youth Parliament was held on 28–29 August 2000. The next one is in 2004 so you could start looking at ways to highlight some of these issues at this Youth Parliament

#### **Youth Parliament exists to:**

- Help young people to understand and actively participate in parliament to have their views heard by key decision-makers and the general public
- Help young people learn how to influence governmental decision-making as active citizens
- Highlight the importance of helping young people to understand how decisions are made and how young people can have a say.

For more information see the Ministry of Youth Affairs website [www.youthaffairs.govt.nz](http://www.youthaffairs.govt.nz)