**Just Think Classroom Notes**

Just Think is an alcohol education program and campaign based on the Smart Generation program messaging and informed by the Nation Health and Medical Research Centre guidelines on alcohol and adolescents. This is a classroom version of the Just Think alcohol workshop that forms part of the Just Think full day excursion to the Geelong Cats. The primary functions of the program are to:

* **Ask students to consider not drinking,**
* **If already doing so, reduce their alcohol intake as under 18’s.**
* **Inform students about the actual harms of alcohol**

It is very important state that there is no judgement regarding those students who have and may continue to drink. Acknowledge that each person must manage different circumstances in life and the aim is to support students to make an informed decision about alcohol.

The National Health and Medical Research Centre recommends that people do not drink alcohol until at least 18, due to the developing brain and body. They recommend the same for pregnant women as there is no safe amount of alcohol to drink for developing babies or young people.

1. **Housekeeping**

It is important to explain to students that this is a general discussion about alcohol and not a forum to discuss our experiences. State that no one will be asked about their experiences and if a student asks whether you drink, refer back to this. Also remind them that Just Think is about young people and alcohol and why specifically it is recommended that they do not drink.

1. **Ambassadors**

Who are the Just Think Geelong Cats ambassadors?

* Renee Garing
* Cam Guthrie
* Mitch Duncan

1. **Just Think is supported by:**

* Barwon Child, Youth & Family
* St. John of God hospital

(You are most welcome to skip points 2 & 3 of the program if you feel they are not appropriate for the classroom setting)

1. **Evidence Base**

Indicate that Just Think is linked to Deakin University and uses only factual information about alcohol- distinct from marketing. All information and recommendations are taken from the Australian National Health and Medical Research Centre.

1. **How did Just Think start**

James Macready-Bryan was left brain damaged and a quadriplegic as a result of a coward’s punch. This happened in the Melbourne CBD and the offender was drunk. James was well known to the club and players at the time and the program was established at the request of players

* Mention that this happens to very few people, however it does happen and the largest immediate risk to young people from alcohol is injury and assault.

1. **How many Australians end up in hospital as a result of Alcohol everyday?**

**430**

* Point out that this figure includes those injuries and assaults- in public and in people’s homes (family violence)- alcohol a factor in 40-70% of assaults
* The longer- term effects such as cancer and other related diseases (will talk about shortly).
* Being triaged in Accident & Emergency costs about $500 and a stay overnight with no treatment is about $5,000- Cost to taxpayers. Alcohol companies do not contribute to paying these costs beyond what tax they may pay.

1. **How many people die as a result of alcohol use every day?**

**15**

1. **How does this compare?**

* 4 times as many people die from alcohol use as the road toll
* Why do we not have a massive campaign about reducing alcohol use but have an ongoing campaign to reduce the road toll?
* Profits to be made from alcohol sales
* Companies lobby government to say very little about the link between alcohol and early death.

1. **Video from Sweden that sums up neatly the difference between alcohol as it promoted and the reality**

What do students think about the reality vs. the marketed image of people always enjoying the effects of alcohol?

1. **What percentage of Australians drink alcohol? (drink alcohol defined as drinking twice in a year up to everyday)-**

**82%**

1. **What percentage of drinkers drink AT LEAST once a week?**

**41%**

* Australia ranks in the top 10 countries for the amount of alcohol consumed per year.

1. **Restate the aims of the Just Think program**
2. **ACTIVITY: Ask students to think of something they are grateful for- can be anything. If possible, have students stand in a circle. Start with a student, when they have answered have them nominate someone else and sit down. Completed when all students have answered.**

* **Students generally nominate family, friends, pets.**
* **Explain that we need to be connected to people for our own happiness. Our brains release chemicals (endorphins) to influence how we feel when we are with friends, family,**

**when we fall in love, when we play with pets etc.**

* **We have evolved these mechanisms in our brains to help us be more successful as a species, which we clearly have done.**
* **Ask students if they have a dog, explain that dogs release oxytocin, an endorphin, when you look into their eyes and pat them- oxytocin is the chemical released when we fall in love with someone.**
* Finally, explain that there are many things like alcohol and other drugs that influence the release of these chemicals in the brain to make people feel good. Unfortunately, they come with many unwanted and dangerous side effects such as dependence, mental health issues, social isolation, poverty and the risk of overdose and death in some cases.

**Some other more benign things that impact our reward system are:**

Chocolate, Carbohydrates and Fat (e.g. hot chips/crisps/snacks – e.g. Twisties, Maccas, Hungry Jacks), exercise, sex

1. **What is Normal?**

**What percentage of people globally consume alcohol? (same definition as previously mentioned)**

**50%- Remember Australia- 82%**

* Why do Australians drink more than the global average?
* Advertising has been linking drinking with being “Australian” for years

1. **Why would people not drink alcohol at all? – Brainstorm**

* Religion (Islam, Jewish Orthodox, Greek Orthodox)
* Health reasons (chronic Illness)
* Socially not acceptable (In Thai culture alcohol is frowned upon)
* Some people do not enjoy being out of control
* Having seen other family members struggle with alcohol some choose not to drink
* Impact of social media
* Alcohol use can affect relationships with people who do not drink or do not drink much.

1. **What else effects how we think about alcohol? –**

**Media:** Move through examples, they will be familiar- ads, TV, movies.

**Sponsorship of sport:** Very expensive for alcohol companies but allows them to display their products and logos during times that alcohol advertising on TV is not allowed – during the day. **Why is this?**

* Young people can be exposed to alcohol advertising- this makes alcohol seem a normal thing to young people
* Links alcohol with the common activity of watching sport and leisure in general
* The younger people start regularly drinking the harder their drinking is to control.

**Friends- we tend to do what our friends do**

**Family- Set standards of behaviour**

**Access- how do you obtain alcohol under- age?**

**What we think is normal- marketing and culture**

**Stress:** Whenpeople start to use alcohol to influence how they feel generally, say after a bad break up, people can end up drinking every day and this becomes a difficult habit to break, even if it starts to effect other aspects of someone’s life. This is dependence and it is very powerful as the alcohol effects those endorphins we need (and love!)

1. **Alcohol Toxicity.**

Ethyl Alcohol is a poison and is the only type of alcohol you can drink without dying or becoming extremely sick

Our bodies recognise alcohol as a poisonous, toxic substance as soon as it hits the mouth. Before it is swallowed, we are converting the alcohol into Acetaldehyde, which is even more toxic than alcohol but can be processed by the body quicker.

**Alcohol impacts the body in 4 main ways- 2 short term, 2 long term**

* The brain is stimulated to produce Dopamine (an endorphin), which makes people feel relaxed and comfortable. This does not last though.
* Alcohol disrupts the millions of messages that pass between parts of our brains making it hard to think and makes us loose track of time. Any worries and stress people might have will fade. Eventually the brain will blackout with enough alcohol consumed.
* Alcohol damages our DNA, this can cause problems like cancer when damaged cells start multiplying and become tumours.
* Alcohol damages neurons in our frontal cortex (forehead) and this can lead to memory loss, problems with thinking logically and regulating emotions

1. **What does this mean? - Kate Darby, Geelong Cats AFLW Player**

Pixilation of the brain- Flick through the images of Kate getting more pixilated until the black screen- which is where the conscious brain shuts down completely. If enough alcohol is consumed, then the brain will not be able to maintain breathing and the person will overdose and die without medical attention.

**Alcohol and Anxiety**

Alcohol will make any anxiety or worries worse for the following reasons:

* Our brains compensate for the way alcohol slows down our brain’s activity by releasing chemicals to speed things up again This creates a chemical imbalance that, the next day, leaves us feeling anxious
* Alcohol also makes our brain release Dopamine which makes us feel happy, but this wears off and the next day, we may feel unhappy, some people will want to drink again quite quickly and some will not, it just depends on the person and their situation

1. **The Adolescent Brain- Why we recommend on alcohol until 18**

Play the Turning Point video- The video explains how alcohol affects different parts of the brain. It also refers to a process called Myelination and to the underdeveloped part of the adolescent brain- the Frontal Cortex

1. **Myelination**

Happens periodically from birth and between 12 and 18 is the last time it undertakes this process.

We use the metaphor of a topiary animal shaped shrub and what can be the result of alcohol disrupting the process, leaving you with a brain that is sub-par.

Flick through the images to show the well pruned Panda shaped shrub and the one that is not so good. Which one would you like to end up with?

**Note:** This is about ongoing alcohol use and not a one off or occasional drinking session.

1. **Frontal Lobe Development**

The frontal part of the brain does not fully develop until at least 26years, probably older. It is involved in controlling movement, forming memories, making choices, assessing risk, managing emotions and behaviour and learning. Regular alcohol use will affect the physical development of the brain and can create permanent damage.

1. **Scans of developing brains**

The scan shows a brain at various stages of development and highlights one area of the frontal lobe. Red areas are under-developed and deep blue are fully developed. We can see that at 20 years old the area highlighted still has not fully developed.

1. **First Experiences of Alcohol**

The main point here is that despite the guideline that an adult can process 1 unit of alcohol (about what is pictured) per hour, this is not something that can be relied upon.

Also note that there are different amounts of alcohol in different drinks: wine has more alcohol than beer, spirits have more than wine- how can you tell how much alcohol is in a drink? It is almost impossible. If people are mixing their own drinks, they will almost always use more alcohol rather than less.

**Brainstorm what effects how well we process alcohol?**

**Height & Weight:** The more muscle we have the better we process alcohol

**Gender:** Female’s livers do not fully develop until around 22. Alcohol is processed in the liver so generally females are slower to process.

**How you are feeling:** For reasons we are not completely clear about mood can affect how alcohol makes us feel at any given time. It can sometimes really bring you down.

**If you have eaten:** Eating before drinking makes the absorption of alcohol into the blood slower and more uniform.

**Experience:** Alcohol takes about 20 minutes to really hit the bloodstream and travel around the body- getting into the brain. Often when people first start drinking they are not aware of this and end up drinking way too quickly, getting very drunk and putting themselves at risk of alcohol overdose or being very vulnerable and needing to be looked after.

1. **Effects of Standard Drinks**

The picture of the brain shows how the more alcohol consumed, the greater effect on the brain and its functions.

**1-2 drinks:** Reward system (releases Dopamine), starts to affect memory

**3-4 drinks**: Judgement and the ability to assess risk and make decisions is affected

**5-6 drinks:** Ability to control fine motor movement is affected, person becomes clumsy and loses some spatial awareness. Ability to sense heat, cold and pain is also affected.

**7-8 drinks:** Vision is affected, may become blurred and/or have a sense of “tunnel vision”

**9-10 drinks:** Coordination completely affected falling over and bumping into things. Risk of injury increases dramatically.

**10+ drinks:** The brain’s ability to control breathing, heart rate and body temperature is compromised. The person is usually unconscious or close to it at this point. The person is at risk and their condition considered a medical emergency.

1. **How alcohol effects how we are connected to others**

Brainstorm how alcohol may affect how we are connected to ourselves, others and the world in general. Reference that as mentioned we need to be connected to people around us and to feel good about ourselves to be happy. Alcohol or any other chemical cannot substitute for this.

**How might alcohol affect:**

**Friendships**

**Family**

**Romantic partners**

**Work/school performance**

**What others think of us**

**How we feel about ourselves.**

1. **Regular drinking under 18 years can lead to a risk of:**

* Increased risk of injury and assault, including sexual assault. This is the number 1 short term risk for young people.
* Poor school results- This will limit future opportunities for further education and work.
* The younger people start drinking, the more likely they will carry on drinking into adulthood and as time goes by will find it harder to control their drinking.

1. **Alcohol and Feelings**

* Our brains like Dopamine and can trigger thoughts about alcohol – cravings and desire to drink more
* Because alcohol effects how we feel can use alcohol to manage our emotions in the short- term but the long-term effect is to increase anxiety and possibly depression (remember Alcohol and Anxiety)
* We can use alcohol to avoid external stress but not deal with it- Stress becomes worse

1. **Interesting.**

The most common thing males in prison share is that they started drinking at a young age and drank regularly. They could have been encouraged by family members drinking, or perhaps developed cravings for alcohol quickly, or both.

The alcohol use has limited their options in terms of education and work and have likely found themselves thinking about crime to make money. They could have also assaulted someone when drunk, as the young man who attacked James MacCready- Bryan.

**ACTIVITY- Brain Effects: In pairs, students are given the A3 Effects of Standard Drinks sheet to write in the spaces provided the effects of alcohol, from the list on the sheet, as more is consumed.**

1. **Physical Activity & Health**

Physical activity has a whole range of health benefits and like most animals, the more physical movement we undertake the fitter and more efficient and stronger our bodies will be. This is the case for all animals to some degree, but a human body has the most potential to improve.

Our brains reward us for exercise with a release of Dopamine and other chemicals (endorphins that leave us feeling happy and confident. This also has to do with setting goals (say a run) and achieving that goal (see brain image slide).

The exercise, done regularly enough will result in not only physical fitness but will make long term improvements to our brain functions.

**30 Emergency First Aid**

Refer back to slide indicating that eventually after enough drinks alcohol will slow down the Central Nervous System and impact vital functions. Unconsciousness indicates that someone is at risk.

Emphasise that an unconscious person should never be left alone. You can use an example of a young woman from Sydney (2016) had her 18th and decided to drink 18 shots for the occasion. Surrounded by family and friends. She did the shots and was then put to bed to sleep it off. She died as a result. Acknowledge that taking control in these situations is difficult but life can be saved by following first aid protocols.

Acknowledge that calling an ambulance is scary but better to be safe and no one gets in trouble.

1. **Wrapping Up What have we learnt so far?**

**The best medical advice tells us to not drink until you are at least 18 years old in order to avoid:**

* Permanent brain damage
* Immediate physical Injury to yourself and others
* Developing a dependence on alcohol
* Impacting good judgement- You may be filmed!!
* Impacting on your school results
* Impacting relationships- Please don’t send those Photos!