

Drug prevention work among Hong Kong youth should start with lending a listening ear

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In thinking that young people [use drugs](#) [1] only because they are curious to try new things, we overlook what may be truly making them more vulnerable to substance misuse. The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking falls on June 26 every year. Once again, the theme of the day is “Listen First – Listening to children and youth is the first step to help them grow healthy and safe”, highlighting that it is crucial for us to know what young people think about drugs when trying to improve our [drug prevention work](#) [2] in Hong Kong.

The major reasons for drug use among newly reported drug abusers aged below 21 are peer influence (56.4 per cent) and relief of boredom/stress/depression (45.5 per cent), [according to data](#) [3] from the government’s Narcotics Division. Young people tell us it is useful to learn how to reduce and better cope with [stress](#) [4], while knowledge of different resistance strategies can boost their confidence in staying away from negative [peer pressure](#). [5]

They also think a supportive school community could be a positive influence, which can prevent them from “going down the wrong path” and give them the confidence to share information about the risks associated with drugs with their peers.

These youth-centred insights tell us that reducing the chance of young people using drugs is just as important as drug treatment and rehabilitation. We need to perfect our upstream approach in prevention education to better reflect young people’s perspectives and needs.

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Looking at examples from overseas, we learned that successes in prevention education have included a greater focus on motivational and inspirational approaches to engage the youth. Young people in Hong Kong tell us that active participation in [creative campaigns](#) [6] in schools which share messages about drug prevention is a relevant and fun way for them to learn about and have ownership of the topic, while platforms such as drama can help them build trust and peer support, and express themselves through experiential learning.

The topic of drugs still remains taboo in Hong Kong. Let us rethink our approach to prevention education, starting by reducing the stigma in society and listening to young people first.

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Topics: Education
Drugs

More on this: [Darker dangers ignored in Hong Kong's youth drug abuse figures](#) [7]

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[1] <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/health-beauty/article/2102643/young-hongkongers-easy-access-illicit-drugs-ice-ketamine>

[2] <http://www.scmp.com/comment/letters/article/2127005/caring-parents-can-help-curb-youth-drug-abuse-hong-kong>

[3] http://www.nd.gov.hk/statistics_list/doc/en/t7.pdf

[4] <http://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/education/article/2140799/exam-stress-down-hong-kong-students-pushy-parents-are-still>

[5] <http://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/families/article/2113060/problem-peer-pressure-hong-kong-teenagers-warned-ignore-influence>

[6] <http://yp.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/article/108772/hong-kong-students-take-lead-preventing-drug-abuse-among-their-peers>

[7] <http://www.scmp.com/comment/insight-opinion/article/1201146/darker-dangers-ignored-youth-drug-abuse-figures>