

Coláiste Choilm Tullamore



Policy on Substance Abuse (Tobacco, Alcohol and other Substances)

Introduction

Coláiste Choilm values respectful relationships between students, staff and parents and encourages the development of solid friendships among the students themselves. It is a hallmark of the School that it provides a safe, disciplined, learning and social environment for students and staff. The School is not complacent however, and is aware of the pressures which come to bear on students to experiment with, and indulge in, substance abuse.

This Policy is intended to build on the foundation of the friendships between our students, and on the trust between our students, staff and parents. It is the School's hope that through the implementation of this Policy, our students will be empowered to avoid substance abuse, to negotiate social situations where they might otherwise be at risk and so be in a better position to lead healthy lives.

Definition of Substance

In this Policy document, the word 'substance' refers to any substance which changes the way a person functions, whether mentally, physically or emotionally. Substance includes, but is not limited to, tobacco, nicotine, alcohol, prescription drugs and illegal drugs.

Context of this Policy

This Policy has been framed within the following contexts:

- **School Mission Statement**

To provide a caring Christian Education, in a community of pupils, staff, parents and management, where each individual is valued as a unique human being.

- **Promoting Healthy Lifestyles**

The School encourages our students to live healthy lives. To this end the School promotes student self-esteem, healthy eating, body awareness, physical activities and awareness of mental health issues. The School aims to educate students on the potential impact of substance abuse on their health and wellbeing, taking into account both short and long-term health effects.

- **Criminal offences**

Young people may be unaware of the criminal aspects of substance abuse. They may not realise that what may seem negligible to them, is in reality a criminal offence. The School aims to outline to the students the criminal offences associated with substance abuse and the possible future consequences for students of such criminal activity.

School Code of Behaviour

A high standard of conduct is expected of students and in this the School requires the full support of parents/guardians. This Policy operates in conjunction with the School's Code of Behaviour which deals with substance abuse from a disciplinary perspective.

- **School's Duty of Care**

The School has a duty of care to students. The protection and welfare of the students is of paramount importance and is the bedrock of this Policy. It is in this context that the School may need on occasion to intervene and refer School concerns in respect of a student to an appropriate third party such as TUSLA, the HSE or the Juvenile Liaison Office of An Garda Síochána. Save in exceptional circumstances, the School will engage with parents/guardians before making a referral.

Policy Objectives:

The principal objective of this Policy is to empower students to make sound decisions through education and training and the maintenance of a supportive school environment. To fulfil this objective, the School will endeavour to:

- Maintain a safe environment for students and staff both in School and on School activities
- Promote student self-esteem and respect for others
- Promote healthy behaviour and attitudes in students
- Discourage criminal behaviour by students.

Methods to achieve the Objectives:

1. *Adult Attitudes within the School community*

It is vital to the success of this Policy that the issue of Substance Abuse be regarded and dealt with seriously by all of the adults within the School community including members of the Board of Management, parents, guardians, teachers and non-teaching staff. Our students are exposed to the risk of substance abuse at an early age, most commonly tobacco and alcohol. This Policy has been prepared on the basis that each adult in the School community will promote this Policy and will take seriously any incident of substance abuse which may arise.

2. *Role of Parents/Guardians*

The School sees parents/guardians as the most important influence on students so far as substance abuse is concerned. The full support of parents/guardians for this Policy is essential. The School asks parents/guardians to pay close attention to any issue arising for their son on substance abuse and to communicate any concerns they may have promptly to the School. Parents/guardians are asked to engage with any concern the School may express to them about their son - and to trust that the School will act carefully knowing that the School's focus will be on the safety and welfare of their child.

3. *Role of Students*

The School encourages any student with a concern* about substance abuse to approach any trusted member of the School teaching staff (*whether about himself, a fellow student or some behaviour within the school community). Any student making such an approach will be treated with respect and his concerns will be dealt with sensitively in accordance with the confidentiality guidelines set out in Section 8 below.

4. *Education programmes within the School*

The School, insofar as resources permit, will provide appropriate education programmes on substance abuse for all students. These education programmes will be founded on the **promotion of self-esteem in every student** to enable students develop the necessary skills to think and act independently in their own best interests. The programmes will include training in social skills to assist students negotiate and manage social situations where they may come under peer pressure to experiment with

tobacco, vape, alcohol or other substances. These programmes will encourage students to support one another in their efforts to steer clear of substance abuse.

These education programmes will focus on the possible impact of substance abuse on:

- Student behaviour (less caution, more risk-taking and poor behaviour towards others)
- Student health (immediate short-term impacts, long term impacts, also addiction)
- Risk to students of committing criminal offences

The education programmes will focus in particular on tobacco, nicotine and alcohol, as these are the substances likely to be abused first and likely to act as a gateway to the abuse of other substances such as cannabis, ecstasy and other banned substances. Education will be provided also on some of the banned substances students may encounter, to help them recognise these prohibited drugs and understand what they involve.

These education programmes will be age appropriate and will be incorporated into existing School programmes such as SPHE, RE, PE and Science subjects. From time to time external speakers with relevant expertise or experience may be invited to supplement the existing School programmes.

Teachers will be encouraged to avail of appropriate training in substance abuse education. This Policy will also be considered annually by a core group of teachers involved in SPHE, RE, PE and Science subjects, as part of relevant subject department planning.

Parents and guardians will be provided with information from time to time on School substance abuse education programmes. The School will also liaise with the Parents' Association to encourage evening adult education sessions in Substance Abuse for parents and guardians.

5. Code of Behaviour – Discipline

- Smoking or vaping or the possession of cigarettes or tobacco or vaping material is strictly forbidden in School, in School uniform or during any School-related activity whether on the School premises or elsewhere
- The possession and/or consumption of alcohol, drugs or any illegal or potentially dangerous substance is strictly forbidden in School, in School uniform or during any School-related activity whether on the School premises or elsewhere
- No student may give any form of medication to another student. (Note also that staff members may not give medication to a student unless authorised by the parent/guardian in accordance with the School's policy on the administration of medicine and first aid.)
- Students who need to take any form of medication while in School or during any School-related activity must inform the School authorities of this.

Students will be subject to sanctions in accordance with the Code of Behaviour. In addition to these sanctions, the School may also deal with any incidents involving substance abuse in accordance with the procedures set out below.

6. Smoking tobacco, vaping

The School is a smoke-free zone. Smoking or vaping is not tolerated within the School whether indoors or outdoors or when in School uniform or on School related activities.

- Any student smoking or vaping, or found in possession of tobacco or vaping materials will be reported immediately to the Principal who will record the incident
- A School staff member will advise the student on the consequences of smoking/vaping and will suggest possible ways to stop. If appropriate, School counselling will be offered.
- The student's parents/guardians will be informed
- The School Code of Behaviour will be applied.

7. Incidents involving alcohol or other substances

- Any student in possession of alcohol or other substances will be reported immediately to the Principal who will record the incident, and arrange an investigation.
- The student's parents/guardians will be informed and invited to engage with the investigation.
- The School will take possession of any alcohol or banned substance and/or associated paraphernalia found on a student or in the School, carefully recording all such items and retaining them pending completion of an investigation by the School, unless otherwise instructed by An Garda Síochána.
- The Juvenile Liaison Office of An Garda Síochána may be informed where appropriate of an incident involving alcohol or banned substances.
- Where a student is under the influence of alcohol or another substance, the student will be brought without delay to the Principal, Deputy Principal, Guidance Counsellor or other senior teacher. His parents/guardians will be contacted and required to come to the School and take their son away from the school. If necessary, the School may seek medical attention immediately for the student.
- Where a student under the influence of alcohol or another substance appears to pose an immediate danger to any member/s of the School community, the School may suspend or remove the student from the School pending investigation of the incident by the School.
- The School reserves the right to intervene in the interest of any student or students, to liaise with any appropriate outside authority and to seek such advice or assistance as it deems appropriate in relation to its investigation of an incident. Save where it would be contrary to the best interests of a student, the School will advise the student's parents/guardians of its intention to intervene.
- In all cases, pastoral and School counselling support will be offered to students involved in substance abuse incidents

8. *Communication – Confidentiality*

- The School encourages any student who finds himself in difficulty with substance abuse, or any student aware of another in difficulty, to seek advice from any member of the School teaching staff, such as their class teacher, the School Guidance Counsellor or any trusted teacher. Information received by the School from a student in these circumstances will be treated sensitively and will only be disclosed to others on a 'need to know' basis in accordance with law and current best practice guidelines.
- The School cannot offer an absolute guarantee of confidentiality to students. Any student considering whether to make disclosure concerning himself or another student may look to meet with the School Guidance Counsellor to discuss the confidentiality rules before deciding on whether to make that disclosure.
- Parents/Guardians are encouraged also to keep the School informed of any substance abuse issue arising for their son. The students are in the care of the School five days a week, the School is in loco parentis, and the School needs this information to fulfil its duty of care. Parents/guardians are encouraged to contact the Principal or Deputy Principal and to seek the School's help in supporting their son.
- Any enquiry from a third party whether a journalist or otherwise, in relation to any incident involving substance abuse, should be referred immediately without comment to the Principal, or the Deputy Principal. No acknowledgement should be made to any third party that an incident has taken place, no comment whatsoever should be made unless otherwise decided by the Principal/Deputy Principal. In the case of a serious incident the School will follow the procedures outlined in the Critical Incident Management Policy and Plan.

9. External agencies

- JLO Scheme of An Garda Síochána

The School will engage with the JLO Scheme whenever appropriate. The purpose of this Scheme is to divert people under 18 from the criminal justice system where

possible, by offering the young person a second chance through mediation with the young person and their family, by delivering a formal caution to the young person and providing/suggesting follow-up support to divert the young person from further criminal behaviour. As well as dealing with individual cases, the JLO Scheme is also involved in educational work with young people and the School may seek the assistance of the JLO Scheme in this regard as well.

- TUSLA Child and Family Agency - HSE

The School may also avail of the services of TUSLA and the HSE where the School feels that this is necessary and appropriate. These State bodies provide care, welfare and health services for young people. Save in exceptional circumstances, the School will engage with parents/guardians in advance of referring any student to any of these services and will inform the parents/guardians if the School decides to make a referral.

10. Conclusion

The Board of Management has engaged with students, teachers, parents/guardians and the Garda Juvenile Liaison Office in the preparation of this Policy. Substance Abuse is a complex social issue which is constantly evolving. For this reason the School welcomes any suggestions or feedback from members of the School community on the ongoing operation of this Policy. We ask anyone with suggestions or thoughts they wish to share to direct these in writing to the Principal or Deputy Principal for consideration by the Board. This Policy will be posted on the School website together with any updates approved by the Board from time to time.

11 Review of the Policy on Substance Abuse

11.1 The Board of Management of Coláiste Choilm will review this policy in consultation with the relevant partners from time to time as appropriate, but in any case at the commencement of each new Board of Management.

11.2 The Board may, subject to relevant legislation, and subject to Department of Education and Science regulations, alter or amend any section of the Policy as appropriate.

11.3 This Policy on Substance Abuse was approved by the Board of Management of Coláiste Choilm on 6th March, 2018.

Signed:

Chairperson (BOM)

Date: _____

Principal

Date: _____

This policy will be reviewed and revised in light of any change in circumstances should such changes occur.