



Addressing volatile substance use (VSU)

Tip sheet for schools

Ensure safety

- **Try** to keep the student/s calm and avoid agitating or startling them. This will reduce the risk of [Sudden Sniffing Death](#) (cardiac sensitisation to adrenaline resulting in cardiac arrhythmia/arrest).
- **Call** police if you feel unsafe or if the situation is deemed high risk for staff, student/s or bystanders.
- **Commence** DRSABCD if situation becomes a medical emergency (non-responsive, not breathing, seizure or difficulty breathing)
- **Be** aware of flammable gases or substances when handling or being around volatile substances (especially in confined spaces). Keep yourself and others safe.
- **Encourage**, if possible, student/s to move away from high-risk environments such as traffic or bodies of water.
- **Help** the student to understand that you have their best interests and safety at heart and keep them informed about how you are addressing the VSU. Be empathetic, this will show you care and want to help.
- **Notify** the principal and parent as soon as practicable.

Avoid

- **Confronting** or arguing with the student/s.
- **Managing** a VSU incident on your own. Always seek support from other staff.
- **Addressing** the specific reasons for use with the student/s. Leave this to the alcohol and other drug experts in your Central Coordinating Agency (CCA). To obtain contact details of the CCA visit the Mental Health Commission's website (<https://vsu.mhc.wa.gov.au/vsu-in-wa/working-groups-in-wa>).
- **Delivering** broad classroom education about VSU. This can increase harm.

Document and inform

- Contact the parent to explain the situation and arrange for them to collect the student if it is not a medical emergency.
- Principal or relevant staff member should complete a [VSU Incident Report form](#) (found on the Mental Health Commission website). You can request VSU support from your local CCA by submitting this form.
- Document as much about the incident as possible including details about what, where, when, and with whom. This will greatly assist the school, the CCA and medical personnel.
- Maintain student confidentiality.

A whole-of-community response to VSU

The most effective way to address VSU is through a whole-of-community response. This allows VSU and associated issues to be addressed more broadly and at a local level. Schools play a key part in this response, but the CCA will coordinate, guide and support schools to address the issue. You are not alone!

Refer to the Mental Health Commission's [Volatile Substance Use in Western Australia](https://vsu.mhc.wa.gov.au) website (<https://vsu.mhc.wa.gov.au>) for information and resources to support an effective response to VSU both locally and across the State.