

Enforcing a 100% Tobacco Free School Policy



Tobacco use continues to be the leading cause of preventable death and disability in the United States. Over 80% of adult tobacco users started smoking before the age of 18. According to American Academy of Pediatrics the earlier someone starts using tobacco products, the more likely they are to continue to use tobacco.ⁱ

100% Tobacco Free School policies provide opportunities for adults to role model tobacco-free lifestyles while reducing exposure to secondhand emissions from tobacco products. Research shows that 100% Tobacco Free School policies can reduce initiation of youth tobacco by up to 30%, when properly enforced.ⁱⁱ

Equally as important as passing the policy, however, is enforcement of the policy. One recent study found that “enforcement of school tobacco policies...was associated with fewer observations of tobacco use by minors on school grounds as well as lower rates of current smoking among students.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Below is information on how schools can increase student compliance with tobacco-free school policies and best practices on responding to student violations.

Note: In this document, the term tobacco product refers to combustible products such as cigarettes, cigars, cigarillos, smokeless products such as snuff, dip, and chew, and electronic cigarettes, such as JUUL, whether they do or do not contain nicotine.

Communication

The most important step your school can do to enforce a 100% Tobacco Free School is clearly communicate the policy to students, personnel and visitors.

- 1) Signage at any school-board owned property that includes but is not limited to the entrance to school grounds, at athletic fields and properties, and on entrances to school buildings.
- 2) Information clearly and visibly posted on school district and individual school websites.
- 3) Announcements read at the beginning and throughout athletic events.
- 4) Regular reminders on social media and school websites.

Progressive Discipline

Progressive discipline means that disciplinary procedures start with less punitive consequences and become more punitive with each violation. Ideally, tobacco prevention education and cessation opportunities should be included in the discipline plan. Progressive discipline is important because tobacco use is more than a discipline issue; it is an addiction issue. Research shows that adolescents can quickly become addicted to nicotine, even if they are not daily tobacco users.^{iv} Additionally, studies indicate that smoking policies that prohibit tobacco use and assist smokers in overcoming addiction are associated with lower smoking rates.^v A progressive discipline policy can use a variety of strategies; the right combination should reflect the schools' philosophy, climate, and unique needs.

The following strategies can be combined to create a progressive discipline policy:

1. Verbal warning
2. Confiscation of tobacco product or e-cigarette device
3. Parent/guardian notification
4. Referral to guidance counselor, school nurse, or Youth Service Center
5. Conference with school administrator
6. Mandatory alternative to suspension tobacco education program
7. Academic assignments focusing on tobacco use
8. Referral to student court (if available)
9. Restorative justice practices
10. School/community service
11. In-school suspension

Legal Options

Some school districts may consider exploring legal options to minor possession of tobacco products. KRS 438.350 states that minors may not possess or use tobacco products, including e-cigarettes and alternative nicotine products.

A checklist of possession points to consider:

- School tobacco policy should indicate that it is against the law for youth under the age of 18 to possess tobacco.
- If schools or districts determine they will enforce a tobacco possession policy, it is recommended they implement a progressive disciplinary strategy, utilizing education options for first or second time offenders.
- The policy may indicate that schools will only enforce policies regarding “visible” possession of tobacco to prevent students from being searched.
- If lockers are being searched for other purposes and tobacco is found, the consequences should be outlined in the policy.
- The school/district should be aware of any possession ordinances in place in the community and work with local law enforcement or School Resource Officers (SROs) to coordinate messaging and enforcement practices.

Cessation

Nicotine dependence can start early in adolescents’ tobacco use experience, so cessation resources should be offered to students as early as the first offense. Research has shown that most teen smokers do want to quit but have been unsuccessful in their previous attempts.^{vi}

Cessation resources for teens:

- Quit Now Kentucky provides cessation resources for Kentuckians ages 15 and up. Go to www.quitnowkentucky.org or call 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-855 DejeLo Ya) to enroll.
- The American Lung Association’s Not on Tobacco (N-O-T) teen tobacco cessation program is offered as an eight week group program. For more information, contact Tami Cappelletti at tami.cappelletti@lung.org.
- The National Cancer Institute offers text messaging and an app tailored for teens at <http://teen.smokefree.gov>.

- The M.D. Anderson Cancer Center offers an online cessation program called ASPIRE. More information is available at <https://www.mdanderson.org/about-md-anderson/community-services/aspire.html>.
- My Last Dip is an ongoing research project for web-based smokeless tobacco cessation available at www.mylastdip.com.

It can be tempting to require participation in a cessation program as one of the consequences in a discipline plan. Cessation programs should not be used as an alternative to suspension program. Participation in a cessation program should be voluntary as every person has to make their own decision to quit. Additionally, having an unwilling participant in a group setting can negatively impact willing participants in the program.

Alternative to suspension programs should include:

- The health consequences of tobacco use;
- Refusal skills
- Tobacco industry tactics
- Strategies for dealing with cravings
- Mindfulness and stress management.

Support/Education/ Community Service

Tobacco use is often an indicator of other issues in a student's life. One study found that adolescents who use tobacco are more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviors, risky alcohol-related behaviors, to not wear seatbelts or use bicycle helmets.^{vii} Students who use tobacco are also more likely to struggle academically.^{viii}

Students who use tobacco may benefit from a meeting with the school counselor, nurse, or Youth Service Center, to develop strategies for dealing with stress, academic issues, or addiction issues that may have been overlooked.

Community service give tobacco users an opportunity to feel connected and provide positive message to support behavior change. Tobacco-related activities could include cleaning up cigarette butts or cleaning up other tobacco-related litter. Service can also be done at school or with local community organizations. The more options offered the more likely a student will find a meaningful way to be involved.

Students Leave School Grounds to Use Tobacco

Once enforcement is more consistent on school grounds, students may try to leave school property to use tobacco. This is a very challenging issue for schools. Often the use occurs where it is visible from the school or in close proximity to school grounds. The school does not necessarily have legal responsibility to address tobacco use off school grounds, but tobacco use off school grounds affects student attendance, health, and the tobacco-free lifestyle promoted by the school.

Here are some suggestions to address off-campus tobacco use:

- Involve the community decision making and enforcement of policy
- Use community and neighborhood groups for support
- Close the campus so students don't leave school grounds

- Work with local law enforcement, including the School Resource Officer (SRO) on options for actions off school grounds that are effective and not just punitive
- Clearly identify who will monitor school grounds and who will deal with violations

Athletics and Other Extracurricular Activities

Tobacco use, frequently in the form of smokeless tobacco by student athletes, is a major issue in some schools. 100% Tobacco Free School policies should be adopted and communicated to students, coaches, and visitors participating in school athletics and other extracurricular activities.

Consider the following options:

- Specify that school tobacco policies include school grounds and student-related school trips.
- Have students and parents participating in athletics and extracurricular activities sign a contract that spells out the school tobacco use policy.
- A progressive discipline policy should be implemented and resources provided if the student is ready to quit. Opportunities for cessation should be included as an alternative for being removed from the team or program in first or second offenses.
- Coaches and volunteers should role model tobacco-free lifestyles and should not use tobacco products on board-owned property, during athletic events, or during student-related school trips. Make sure coaches and volunteers understand this responsibility.

Enforcement with Staff

Staff contracts often contain provisions that prohibit them from using tobacco on school property or at school sponsored events. Staff should be informed of the policy and the specific provisions that apply to them. Consequences of violating the tobacco policy should be written in the staff handbook so personnel know in advance what to expect. In addition to policy and contract reasons, it is important that adults role-model tobacco free lifestyles for students.

If the school district has a worksite wellness policy or plan, tobacco education and cessation opportunities should be included. Tobacco is an addiction. Kentuckians ages 15 and older can go to www.quitnowkentucky or call 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-855 DejeLo Ya) for free tobacco cessation support. Additionally, staff can explore the cessation benefits offered through their health insurance.

The following elements can be combined to create a progressive discipline policy for staff:

- Verbal warning
- Education/support
- Enrollment in a tobacco education program
- Disciplinary action (e.g. written warning, formal reprimand or letter in staff file)

Enforcement with Visitors

A tobacco-free environment means no use by anyone, including parents and community visitors to the school. Enforcement with visitors can be intimidating for schools because it requires approaching someone outside the school system and requesting them to follow a school policy. This task gets easier as norms around tobacco use change in the community.

Some of the following tips may be useful:

- Place prominent signage publicizing the tobacco-free schools policy particularly in areas where visitor use occurs. Use positive, health-promoting messages.
- At athletic events, give announcements before events and throughout to remind visitors of the 100% TFS policy.
- Politely request the visitor stop using tobacco by:
 - Verbal request by an administrator, parent, staff or community member, or
 - Printed request using a small card containing a message referencing the 100% TFS policy
- If the visitor will not comply, ask them to leave the premises.
- If the visitor will not leave, contact law enforcement. If the school SRO or other security is present, ask him/her to assist.

Sample Statements

Not sure what to say when enforcing a tobacco-free policy? Try some of these statements:

- “I need to ask you to put away your cigarette/e-cigarette/dip/chew. We have a 100% Tobacco Free policy, which includes staff and visitors. Thank you for understanding.”
- “We need visitors to comply with our school’s tobacco-free policy. Our goal is to role model tobacco-free lifestyles to our students and to protect students, staff and visitors from secondhand smoke. Thank you for your help.”
- “Allowing adults to use tobacco on campus makes it more difficult to enforce a no-tobacco use policy for students. Thank you for your cooperation.”
- “You may not have noticed the signs, but our school is now tobacco-free. Please refrain from using tobacco while here.”
- “Our tobacco-free policy extends to off campus events with students. To keep our healthy message consistent, please do not use tobacco of any kind during this event. Thank you for your cooperation.”

Sample Progressive Discipline Policy

This is one example of a progressive discipline policy for students. Schools/districts must decide how quickly to ratchet up the consequences for students caught using tobacco at school.

First Offense:

- Confiscate tobacco
- Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- Hold conference with school administrator
- Refer to school counselor or nurse
- Refer to alternative to suspension program

Second Offense:

- Confiscate tobacco
- Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- Hold conference with school administrator
- Community service or in-school suspension

Third Offense:

- Confiscate tobacco
- Notify parent/guardian of infraction
- Hold conference with school administrator
- In-school or out-of-school suspension
- Provide cessation information

Citations

ⁱ Tobacco's Toll: Implications for the Pediatrician. Committee on Substance Abuse. *Pediatrics* Apr 2001, 107(4) 794-798; DOI: 10.1542/peds.107.4.794.

ⁱⁱ Moore L, Roberts C, Tudor-Smith C. School smoking policies and smoking prevalence among adolescents; multilevel analysis of cross-sectional data from Wales. *Tobacco Control* 2001; 10: 117-123.

ⁱⁱⁱ Adams, Monica L et al. "The relationship between school tobacco policies and school tobacco use," *Journal of School Health*, Vol 79, No. 1, January 2009 pp. 17-23.

^{iv} Klein, Jonathan, "Adolescents and smoking: The first puff may be the worst" *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, Vol . 175 (3) August 1, 2006 p.262-263.

^v Sabistan, CM et al. "School smoking policy characteristics and individual perceptions of the school context: Are they linked to students' smoking status?" *Journal of Youth Adolescence* (2009) Nov (10); 38:1374-2387.

^{vi} Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "High school students who tried to quit smoking cigarettes—United States, 2007," *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, 58 (16); 428-431, May 1, 2009.

^{vii} Camenga, Deepa et al., "The changing risk profile of the american adolescent smoker: Implications for prevention programs and tobacco intervention," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, Vol., 39, No. 1 July 2006.

^{viii} Durant, RH, et al. "The relationship between early age of onset of initial substance use and engaging in multiple health risk behaviors among young adolescents," *Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine*, 1999 March: 153(3): 286-91 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services CDC, 2008).