

LifeBall: An Interactive Social learning Game by Information Plus
CD ROM, 2002, £39.95

Review for Drugscope online database of drugs related resources

This interactive package is suitable for classroom use, youth clubs, social work settings, counselling environments and in work with young offenders. Any professional working with this age group will find the package useful, informative and fun. The emphasis is not on purely substance misuse, it concentrates on areas of health, wealth, relationships and self-esteem. These are all important areas when working with young people who may be involved in substance misuse. The resource is also suitable for young people with learning difficulties or poor motivation for learning as minimal reading skills are required as nearly all the text is spoken. However, using the voices of young people and encouraging a peer-led approach could improve the spoken text.

The CD-ROM can be used with Macs, requiring a minimum of 12MB of memory; and PCs with Windows 95 or later and preferably a sound card - realistic for most schools or other informal settings. There is a helpful and jargon free 8 page instruction booklet, the game is easy to install and ready for immediate use. Once the players have been entered all subsequent activity is by the mouse. The resource is accessible and easy to use, with clear and precise visuals and playing instructions on screen.

LifeBall is described as “an interactive social learning game” and meets the description in both team playing; and in the situations and prompts shown on screen. There is an introductory index page, which includes a topic options section that allows adults to exclude or include subject areas therefore ensuring suitability for specific age groups. The game to be played - by up to four players or teams - presents a series of situations and three responses to choose from. Choices are scored for their impact on player's health, wealth relationships and self-esteem. Each choice selected by a player is then accompanied by an explanation of the outcome of that choice. Players can also see the outcomes of the other two choices.

The instructions and the choices are written in clear non-patronising language. The situations in which the choices have to be made are relevant and real for the age group, and the choices themselves can side-track players by making small but significant distinctions between choices. The game is over when one player or team has scores ten points on each of the four sliding scales. Points can be lost by choices made and random “News Flashes”. Scores can be checked throughout the game to ensure continued interest.

The situations cover a wide range of topics and behaviours. Favoured choices (i.e. Those scoring the most points!) emphasise the benefits of asking for help and advice from adults, mainly parents and teachers. Adults likely to be working in informal settings are not well represented here. A “Talk about It” option offers opportunities for the players to look at broader aspects of the social skills involved in the situations they have just looked at. This option seeks to extend thinking responses and alternatives to the behaviour choices

players might make by inclination or habit- adopting the perspective of another. This option and many of the choices also seek to challenge what might be normative assumptions by players from a particular age group or local background.

It is a strength of the resource that it includes substance use in the wider description of social decision making and does not separate it into a category or behaviour isolated from other adolescent behaviours. This was an enjoyable game and non-IT literate individuals, whatever their age, would find it easy to follow.