

Body art: tattoos and piercings

Body art is a popular form of artistic and self-expression. There are associated risks with certain types of body art, such as the risk of infection from a blood-borne virus (BBV), if practices are not carried out properly and safely. Tattoos, body piercings, branding, scarification, and three-dimensional art or body modifications, such as beading, are all forms of body art. In Western Australia, the most popular forms of body art are tattoos and body piercing.

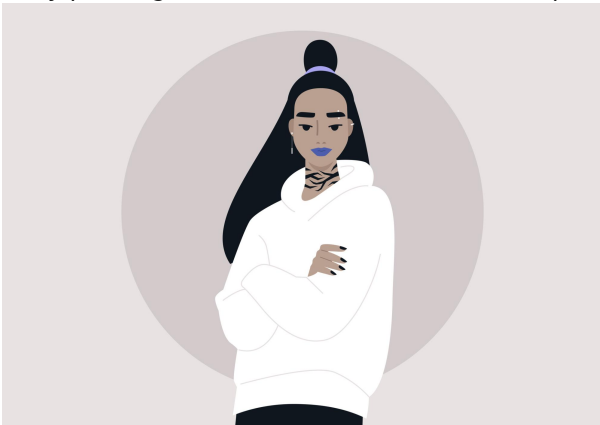
Tattoos are permanent designs on the skin. They are made with coloured inks put under the skin with a machine that uses a needle.

Body piercings are holes in the skin that are made so jewellery can be worn. The holes are made with a sharp instrument, often a needle or a piercing gun.

It is against the law in Western Australia to tattoo (or brand) a person under the age of 16, or between the ages of 16 and 18 without the written consent of their parent. It is also against the law in Western Australia to:

- carry out intimate body piercing (nipples, genitals, anal area, perineum) on a person under 18 years of age, **even with parental consent**.
- carry out non-intimate body piercing (such as nose, tongue, face, belly button or other skin surfaces except ears) on a person under 18 years of age without written parental consent.
- carry out piercing on the ears of a person under 16 years of age without written parental consent.

Under the Children and Community Services Act 2004, fines and imprisonment may be applied for breaches of the laws relating to age and tattooing and piercing (although the relevant section of the Act does not apply to body piercing carried out for medical or therapeutic purposes).



Health and safety

If not done properly by adhering to important safety standards, tattooing, body piercing and other forms of body art carry the risk of blood-borne viruses (hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV) transmission, as well as bacterial infections, scarring and nerve damage.

These risks may be increased if tattooing, piercing and other body art is done by friends or outside of registered studios. Under health legislation, premises where body art is conducted must be registered with the local government and must comply with infection prevention and control standards.

Tattoos and body piercings are often done with the use of needles. Body art studios will typically open the packaging of the needle to be used on you, in front of you, to ensure you can see they are using safe and clean materials. You have the right to ask if you are unsure if the instruments being used in your body art are clean and safe.

Remember, although all body art studios in WA will adhere to these strict safety requirements, they may not apply overseas. If you are planning on getting a tattoo, piercing, or other body art whilst travelling, it is important that you research the studio and artist, make sure they are reputable, have good reviews, and practice BBV safe methods.

Teaching tips

Some students may already have body piercings or tattoos or might be considering getting one. It is important to tell students to think about the consequences of getting a tattoo or piercing. This includes:

- Does your workplace have policies surrounding tattoos or piercings?
- Some venues (bars, restaurants, clubs) will have the right to restrict entry for any reason, including body art. It is important to be mindful of this when choosing what/where you place your body art.
- What are your parents' opinions on body art?
- What is your school's policy on tattoos and body piercings?
- Will you be made to take the piercing out or cover up your body art?
- Does the studio use BBV safe methods?

Tattoos, piercings, and other forms of body art can be of cultural significance to some. It is important for teachers to be mindful of this, and their own attitudes/values when teaching about body art to their students.

Relevant resources

Fact sheets

[Body art](#), Get the Facts

[Body art](#), Healthy WA

[Body piercing, tattooing and branding young people](#), Department for Child Protection and Family Support

["What is the legal age for getting a tattoo ..."](#), GDHR Student FAQs

This Background Note relates to the following Learning Activities

- [Blood-borne virus safety](#)

