

How Can Schools Help Prevent Children from Using Drugs?

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Schools can add a crucial component to the drug prevention efforts of parents by incorporating prevention strategies within the context of health, science, and family life curricula. Schools also provide an organized peer group setting in which children can develop communication and decision-making skills.

Schools need to have a clear no-use drug and alcohol policy. Some schools require students and parents to sign a form agreeing that all drug-related offenses will be referred to the police and that students who use drugs, including alcohol, will be required to obtain counseling.

For schools to respond effectively and complement the activities of the family, the entire community must be involved. When community members are asked to provide input into the school's strategy to combat drug abuse, they can make valuable contributions to the effort and, in turn, add legitimacy to the school's drug prevention program.

Student Assistance Programs (SAPs) have proven to be quite successful in combatting drug use in many schools. SAPs involve teams of students, teachers, administrators, parents, and counselors trained to recognize causes and symptoms of substance abuse and provide or recommend appropriate intervention. Within a SAP, school professionals are able to refer students confidentially to a "core" or "impact" team that follows up to determine whether intervention or further referral is required. These programs can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular community.

In their classroom practice, teachers can exert significant influence on the beliefs, attitudes, and opinions of their students and complement other drug prevention activities. For example, teachers can hone the problem-solving and decision-making skills

of students by incorporating drug prevention strategies into daily lesson plans that are geared toward the social and intellectual needs of their students. In middle school, for instance, peer pressure can be intense. Middle school teachers may use role playing to help small groups of students practice ways to resist peer pressure to use alcohol and other drugs.

The use of "peer leaders" has been successful both in and out of school. Peer leaders receive special training to help them develop strong communication and problem-solving skills. They may lead discussion groups to give other students a forum to voice their questions and concerns. The peer-leader strategy provides positive role models for other students and strengthens the self-esteem of the peer leaders.

How Can I Find Out More about School Drug Prevention Programs?

The following organizations provide materials, technical assistance, or other support to schools in developing a successful drug prevention strategy:

U.S. Department of Education
Drug Abuse Prevention Outreach Program
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW
Washington, DC 20208
(202) 401-3030

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
11426 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20850
1-800-729-6686

National School Safety Center
4165 Thousand Oaks Boulevard, Suite 290
Westlake Village, CA 91362

(805) 373-9977

Western Regional Center for Drug-Free Schools
and Communities Resource Center
Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory
101 Southwest Main, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204
1-800-547-6339

Conclusion

Parents play an important role in educating their children about drugs, but they cannot do it alone. Other groups also exert strong influence over children, including the school, clubs, and teams. Schools can increase children's awareness of the negative effects of drug use and equip them with skills to resist drug and alcohol use. When parents and schools work together within the context of the larger community, they gain the consensus that will strengthen drug prevention efforts.

Sources

Abstracts of the following journal articles and documents are available in the ERIC database. Journal articles marked with EJ can be found at most research libraries. Documents marked with ED can be found on microfiche at more than 900 locations or ordered in paper copy or microfiche from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Call 1-800-LET-ERIC for more details.

Gopelrud, Eric N. (1991). *Preventing Adolescent Drug Use: From Theory to Practice*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Substance Abuse Prevention. ED 341 002.

McGovern, John P. (August 1991). "Student Assistance Programs: An Important Approach to Drug Abuse Prevention." *Journal of School Health*, 61 (6), 260-64. EJ 436 748.

Monahan, Michelle (1991). *I Was Always Too Busy, Am I Too Late?* Practicum Report. Nova University. ED 337 734.

U.S. Department of Education (1989). *Growing Up Drug-Free: A Parent's Guide to Prevention*.

Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education. ED 314 217.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1991). *Parent Training Is Prevention: Preventing Alcohol and Other Drug Problems among Youth in the Family*. Rockville, MD. ED 341 008.

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