


Programs That Work with Youth

Is there a secret formula?

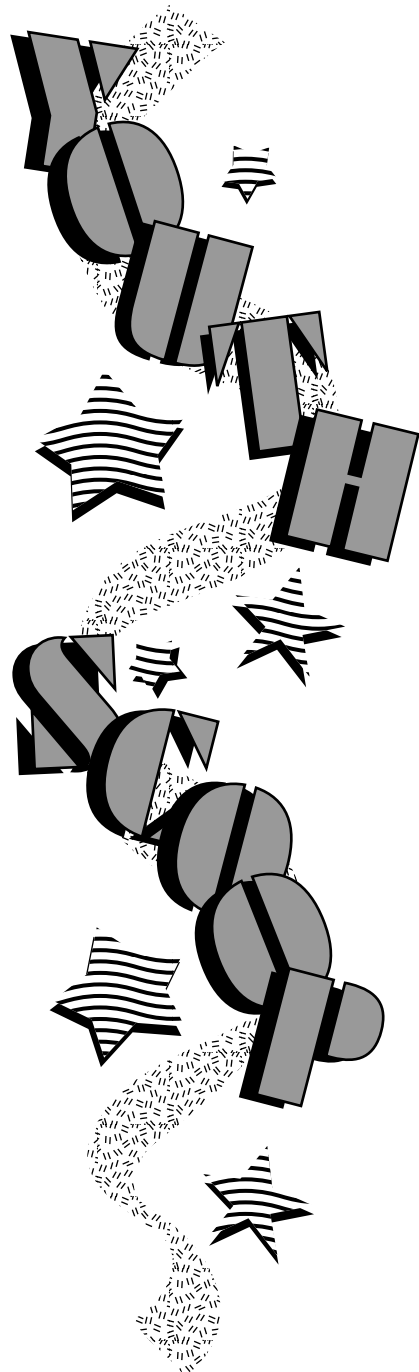
 So you want to start up a new youth program to prevent alcohol and other drug use. Where do you begin? Will this program change young people's lives? Will they even take part? Is there a secret formula?

Keep in mind that one program can't address all the issues. Making lasting changes in behaviour and attitudes takes a comprehensive approach, a continued effort, and a variety of committed partnerships in your community that are sustained over time.

There's no secret formula for school or community programs, but there are some general guidelines to increase the chance that your prevention efforts will work.

General Tips for School-Based Drug Education

- Try to implement programs that are ongoing, from kindergarten to the final year of high school, with an emphasis on junior grades. Repeat messages and reinforce skill development throughout higher grade levels. Use different approaches for different groups (based on members' age, sex, level of use, attitudes, etc.).
- Get students involved in planning and delivering the program.
- Talk about why people use drugs, and what kinds of things they could do instead.
- Present honest and factual information.
- Don't rely on exaggeration or scare tactics.



Fast Facts & Topical Tips for Working with Youth



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- Include realistic information about the dangers of using drugs and the benefits of not using drugs.
- Discuss and correct perceptions about the use of alcohol and other drugs in society.
- Provide an open, non-judgmental and tolerant environment.
- Provide opportunities for active learning, rather than a lecture-only format.
- Use leaders that the students trust, including peers.
- Reinforce messages in the community, given by parents, media, and health policies.

General Tips for Community Substance Abuse Prevention Efforts



Use a variety of health promotion strategies in your programming, such as:

- mass communication (media, displays, flyers, etc.)
- health education (knowledge, skill building, etc.)
- advocacy and public policy (policy change, environmental supports)
- research on tobacco, alcohol and other drug use
- self-help resources or groups
- community development.

Include families in prevention efforts.

- Encourage parents to reinforce prevention efforts delivered at school, by taking opportunities to discuss alcohol and drugs.
- Stress the importance of parental monitoring and spending time with their children and teens.

- Encourage parents to be strong role models and show their child that alcohol and drugs are not a necessary part of a happy life!

Make sure young people are involved in choosing a program they think will work.

- Take advantage of their energy and interest.
- Involve them actively in planning and implementing the program.



Consider carefully who is the most appropriate person to deliver the program.

- Use peer leaders where appropriate. They may be better at reaching other young people and they can learn from the experience themselves.
- Have a young person help out, rather than lead, if more appropriate.

Use a “social influences” approach.

Include information about the health and social consequences of drugs, as well as teaching young people ways to deal with social pressures to use. This approach also gives young people a chance to talk about other ways to achieve the perceived benefits of drug use.

Focus on teaching and building skills.

Implement programs that focus on helping young people build skills such as:

- communication
- coping
- assertiveness
- goal setting
- social skills
- decision-making and problem solving.



Use approaches such as role-playing, peer-based programs, videotaping, refusal skill techniques and safety intervention

techniques (e.g., how to refuse a ride with someone who has been drinking). Make sure there is enough time for participants to practise using these skills.

Focus on short-term effects of drug use.

Include information on the immediate drawbacks of drug use, such as being less attractive, smelling of tobacco, doing things you will regret afterwards, negative stereotypes, etc. in addition to the longer-term effects on health.

Present messages about health risks and consequences in a straightforward way.

- Avoid scare tactics. Young people tend not to believe exaggerations and may discount the whole program as a result.
- Avoid moralizing. Sometimes these kinds of messages actually backfire, because they may contradict youths' own experiences.
- Consider promoting other messages in addition to abstinence, such as safer ways youth can use alcohol.

Promote partnerships between schools and the community.

Develop partnerships that can also provide support to young people. An example would be treatment agencies providing counselling for students on school premises.

Advocate policy changes and legislation that support decreased substance use, such as:

- Advocate for increases in alcohol and tobacco prices. Adolescents are affected by price. Price also affects when young people start to use drugs.
- Educate merchants and the community to enforce laws restricting the sale of tobacco to minors.
- Support graduated licensing programs.

Together with public awareness campaigns, legislative changes affecting drivers under the legal drinking age have reduced fatal crashes.

Use the media carefully.

- Be strategic about how you use the media.
- Media coverage often works well as a catalyst, but should not be the only format for programming. Anti-drug media campaigns can increase knowledge and awareness, but they are less effective in changing attitudes and behaviours.
- Use the media to reinforce other prevention efforts, to get more people talking about the issue, and to increase community participation.
- Be wary of using celebrities to speak out against drugs, as young people often tend to be skeptical.

Take the time to evaluate your program.

- Use approaches such as surveying participants before and after your program, and recording attendance at each session.
- Make use of outside resources — you don't have to be an expert to conduct an evaluation.



References

Paglia, A. & Room, R. (1998). *Prevention of Substance-Use Problems Among Youth: A Literature Review and Recommendations*. Research Document Series # 142. Toronto: Centre for Addiction and Mental Health.

Weber, T. (1997). *A Summary of the Research on Effective Alcohol and Other Drug Programs for Young People*. Unpublished Report. Toronto: Addiction Research Foundation.



Resources and Services for and about Youth

Information Line

This service is free, completely confidential and available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It's available in English and French and offers facts on alcohol and drugs, and a wide variety of related topics. Taped messages include: *Alcohol, Children and the Family; Talking with your Kids About Drugs; and An Early Start: Drug Education Begins at Home*. Information on some topics is also available in other languages, including Cantonese, Greek, Italian, Polish, Punjabi and Spanish.

- Ontario Toll-Free: 1-800-463-6273
- Metro Toronto: 1-416-595-6111
- Substance Abuse Network of Ontario (SANO): <http://www.camh.net>

Other Information

There is a large variety of information available via fax, free of charge. To access the FaxBack Library, dial (416) 595-6099 and follow the prompts.

If you need more details about alcohol and drug treatment, call the Drug and Alcohol Registry of Treatment (DART). Ontario Toll-Free: 1-800-565-8603

For courses related to specialized addiction knowledge and skills, contact Education and Training Services at (416) 595-6020.

Web-based Resources

- Virtual Party: www.virtual-party.org
- Educating Students about Drug Use and Abuse: Ready-To-Use Lesson Plans for Drug Education in Your Classroom:
<http://sano.camh.net/curriculum>

Public Information Materials

- An Early Start
- About Cocaine
- About Marijuana
- Help! There's a Teenager in My Home!
- Take Action: Alcohol, Other Drug Problems and Your Family
- My Kid On Drugs?
- About Smoking
- About Alcohol

Other Resources

- Let 'Em Go: How to Support Youth in Creating Their Own Solutions
- Drug Use Among Ontario Students: Findings from the Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (1977-1999)
- Youth and Drugs: An Education Package for Professionals
- Youth Action Program
- The Smart Report: Substance Abuse and Canadian Youth
- Opening Doors (school-based program for Grade 9 students at risk)
- Freedom to Act: The Harm Reduction for Rural Youth Project Experience; Supporting Youth Creating Solutions for Youth

For additional information about these or other CAMH resource materials, or to place an order please contact:

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