

BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMMING

While prevention programs may target different outcomes (e.g., tobacco, substance use, delinquency, violence, teen pregnancy, drop-out), substantial evidence tells us that the key principles to effective prevention remain the same across program types and targets.

What are the key principles to effective prevention programs?

1. Based in **sound developmental and prevention theory**
2. Have **clear goals** and objectives
3. Attend to **multiple layers of youth development** (peer, family, school, neighborhood, etc.)
4. Use a **strengths-based approach**, building on strengths and wellness, as part of addressing risk; aim to build protective factors
5. Are **interactive and hands-on**, provide opportunities for skill building; do not overly rely on knowledge, information, or group discussion
6. Provide **exposure to positive adults and peers**; promote strong relationship and positive outcomes
7. Sensitive to target population in both content and structure/implementation
 - a. **Developmentally appropriate**
 - b. **Culturally sensitive**
 - c. **Sensitivity to potential stigma** (e.g., suicide or depression prevention)
 - d. **Variation within target population** (e.g., not all 10th grade youth are the same)
8. Are designed and delivered with **enough time (weeks, hours)** for program to have impact; booster lessons or follow-up sessions are provided to ensure effects last.

What approaches do not reduce risk?

1. **Infrequent/occasional presentations** (e.g., one-time visiting speakers, one-day events)
2. **Competitive approaches** (e.g., poster competitions, lotteries)
3. **Dramatic and emotional appeals, with a focus on danger or deterrence, like:**
 - a. Emphasis and dramatization of dangerous and harmful effects
 - b. Grim and dramatic re-enactments; gruesome photos and videos
 - c. Horror stories recounted by recovering addicts
 - d. Warnings of dire results and tragic consequences

Research has proven that these approaches are ineffective at reducing risk behaviors. For at least two decades, the ineffectiveness of danger and deterrence focused programs has been known in the scientific community.

Programs and practices that use any of these elements should be discontinued or be modified in favor of approaches with demonstrated evidence of effectiveness.

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What characteristics of program delivery can ensure program impact?

1. **Appropriately timed** – initiated early enough and sensitive to developmental needs of participants (e.g., age-appropriate)
2. Includes **high quality evaluation, implementation monitoring, and mechanisms for correcting drift/variation** in program delivery
3. Ensures **staff are well trained and supportive** of the program; supervisors are trained in the program
4. **Ability to translate and transfer program** to many sites/contexts (includes program flexibility, and availability of training and implementation materials)
5. **Attend to diverse resource needs** to implement and sustain the program (e.g., people, space, materials, training)
6. Have **champions able to debate about and advocate for the program** within community and with policymakers
7. Include **community based-collaborations**

Why are danger and deterrence approaches ineffective? A few observations...

1. Self Determination is Key: When youth are motivated for intrinsic reasons (inspiration, passion, interest) relative to externally driven reasons (fear, guilt, shame) youth are more likely to succeed, persist, and find greater satisfaction in their efforts.
 - o Danger and deterrence approaches **rely on extrinsic motivation to influence behavior**. Therefore reasons for not engaging in risk behaviors are unlikely to be adopted or maintained.
2. Youth have varying needs:
 - o **For low risk youth danger and deterrence programs are unlikely to be needed**
 - o **For higher-risk youth danger & deterrence programs may increase risk** by drawing attention to prospects of heightened danger and emphasizing it.
3. Adolescent brains are still developing: parts of the brain responsible for self-control, planning, and understanding long-term consequences are under-developed. The parts responsible for risk-taking and reward-seeking mature sooner and more rapidly.
 - o **Exposure to risk and risk scenarios** may not be processed by youth in the manner intended, and **may produce an interest in exploring the dangers presented**.
4. The vast majority of youth are not abusing substances: correcting misperceptions about prevalence and establishing conservative norms leads to lower rates of substance use in adolescents
 - o Programs that heavily emphasize the dangers of drugs and delinquency can **unintentionally send the message that dangerous behaviors are commonplace or the norm**.

Stakeholders in the well-being of youth, families, and communities need to be attentive to findings on effective, ineffective, and harmful practices, and adjust prevention programming to incorporate approaches supported by research evidence.

INEFFECTIVE PREVENTION CASE STUDY 1: SCARED STRAIGHT

Scared Straight and jail tour programs are deterrence programs intended to expose delinquent youth and youth at-risk of delinquency to the realities of being in prison. Programs typically include a tour of a jail facility and interaction with inmates. The goal? To scare youth from engaging in delinquent acts that would inevitably result in incarceration.

Meta-analyses of this type of program determined that they are ineffective and can actually increase youth re-offense rates as compared to youth who did not participate. The Washington State Institute on Public Policy estimates that **Scared Straight incurs a loss of \$146.15 to taxpayers and society for every \$1 invested in the program***.



* Washington State Institute of Public Policy. (Dec, 2015). *Benefit-cost results: Scared Straight.* <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/ProgramPdf/114/Scared-Straight>. Accessed January 2, 2016.

INEFFECTIVE PREVENTION CASE STUDY 2: D.A.R.E

Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) is delivered to students by police officers, for about one hour a week for 17 weeks. The original program has been characterized as **adults lecturing at youth about the dangers of drugs (NIH, 2006)**. Multiple evaluations and meta-analyses of the original D.A.R.E. program showed it to be ineffective at preventing youth substance use. Based on studies of the original curriculum (pre 2011), the Washington Institute of Public Policy estimated a **net loss to taxpayers and society of \$11.03 for every \$1 invested in the program***.



Old D.A.R.E. branding

In order to improve outcomes in response to these findings, D.A.R.E. America partnered with the **Keepin' it Real** program, which has demonstrated evidence of effectiveness. Updated D.A.R.E. curriculum includes branding and packaging that identifies it as the **Keepin' it Real** version.



New D.A.R.E. branding

* Washington State Institute of Public Policy. (Dec, 2015). *Benefit-cost results: Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.)* <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/ProgramPdf/407/Drug-Abuse-Resistance-Education-D-A-R-E>. Accessed January 2, 2016.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION CASE STUDY 1: LIFESKILLS TRAINING PROGRAM

LifeSkills Training (LST) program's primary objective is to enhance the **development of basic life skills, personal competence, and skills related to resistance** to social influences that promote substance use. LST is introduced in grades 6 or 7 depending on the school structure. The program is delivered in 15 sessions in year one, 10 sessions in year two, and 5 sessions in year three. Sessions last an average of 45 minutes and can be delivered once a week or as an intensive mini-course. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy reports that for every dollar invested in LST there is a **potential savings to taxpayers and society of \$15.04 for every \$1 invested in the program***.



Examples of research findings

When compared with control groups, youth who completed LST showed:

- Lower tobacco use by 87%
- Lower alcohol use by 60%
- Lower marijuana use by 75%
- Lower methamphetamine use by 68%
- Lower poly-drug use by 66%

For more information:

www.blueprintsprograms.com/factsheet/lifeskills-training-lst

* Washington State Institute of Public Policy. (Dec, 2015). *Benefit-cost results: Life Skills Training (LST)* <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/37> Accessed January 18, 2016.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION CASE STUDY 2: STRENGTHENING FAMILIES PROGRAM: FOR PARENTS & YOUTH 10-14

This parent, youth, and family skills-building program targets adolescents ages 10 to 14 and their caregivers. It is delivered in seven weekly sessions using independent learning sessions for parents and youth, followed by joint family sessions. SFP 10-14 uses realistic videos, role-playing, discussions, learning games, and family projects to enhance parenting skills, build life skills in youth, and strengthen family bonds and communication. The Washington State Institute for Public Policy reports that for every dollar invested in SFP 10-14 there is a **potential savings to taxpayers and society of \$3.78 for every \$1 invested in the program***.



Examples of research findings

When compared with control groups, youth who completed SFP 10-14 **were less likely to:**

- Begin using alcohol, cigarettes or marijuana 2 to 4 years after program completion
- Report past year narcotic (prescription drug) misuse 6 years after program completion.
- Report lifetime narcotic (prescription drug) misuse at 21.

For more information:

www.blueprintsprograms.com/factsheet/strengthening-families-10-14

* Washington State Institute of Public Policy. (Dec, 2015). *Benefit-cost results: Strengthening Families Program: For Parents & Youth (SFP 10-14)* <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/BenefitCost/Program/138> Accessed January 18, 2016.