

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEM PREVENTION PROGRAMS FOR YOUTH

Excerpts from [PREVENTING SUBSTANCE USE PROBLEMS AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE - A COMPENDIUM OF BEST PRACTICES](#)

The following principles are recommendations for effective programming to prevent and reduce substance use harm among youth. The principles represent a consensus by the project team and steering committee on the basis of evidence from the scientific literature. In our opinion, the more fully they are reflected in a program, the more likely the program will be effective.

Sponsors thinking of adopting a "packaged" program may benefit from using the principles to gauge the program's potential effectiveness, rather than blindly adopting the program. Those developing a program to address local circumstances should use the principles to guide their work. Finally, the principles may be useful in reviewing and strengthening an existing locally devised program. The principles and their categories are:

A. Build a Strong Framework

1. Address protective factors, risk factors and resiliency:

Focus on the factors that most directly promote resiliency or, conversely, contribute to substance use problems in the population of interest.

2. Seek comprehensiveness:

Tie activities to complementary efforts by others in the community for a holistic approach, and seek support through agency policy and municipal and other government regulation.

3. Ensure sufficient program duration and intensity:

Make certain there is sufficient contact time with participants; age appropriate coverage needs to occur through childhood and adolescence and needs to be intensified as the risk of participants increases.

B. Strive for Accountability

4. Base program on accurate information:

Base program aims on reliable and, ideally, local information on the nature and extent of youth substance use, problems associated with use and user characteristics.

5. Set clear and realistic goals:

Set goals, objectives and activities that address local circumstances, are linked logically and are measurable and time-limited.

6. Monitor and evaluate the program:

Evaluate the process and impact of efforts and ensure that costs are in line with program benefits.

7. Address program sustainability from the beginning:

From the outset, work toward long-term sustainability and integration of the program into the core activities of the relevant organization in the community.

C. Understand and Involve Young People

8. Account for the implications of adolescent psychosocial development:

See substance use issues within the context of the stages of adolescent development in order to respond most effectively.

9. Recognize youth perceptions of substance use:

In order to be credible with participants, programs need to take account of the way young people view the benefits and the risks associated with substance use.

10. Involve youth in program design and implementation:

Young people need to see themselves, and to be seen by others, as their own best resource for minimizing any harm associated with substance use.

D. Create an Effective Process

11. Develop credible messages:

Both the explicit and implied messages delivered in a program need to be viewed as realistic and credible by participants.

12. Combine knowledge and skill development:

Skill development needs to be a central element in programs and it needs to be accompanied by accurate, objective information.

13. Use an interactive group process:

Engage and involve participants in skill development activities and discussions.

14. Give attention to teacher or leader qualities and training:

Select and train leaders or teachers who demonstrate competence, empathy and an ability to promote the involvement and interaction of young people.