

Science-based Substance Abuse Prevention

A checklist of key characteristics of effective prevention interventions

This checklist focuses on the characteristics of effective substance abuse prevention interventions, primarily for youth. The information in this document is derived primarily from the paper, Science-Based Substance Abuse Prevention, a collaborative effort on the part of several federal agencies to establish a baseline for commonly agreed upon principles of science-based prevention. This document may be useful to identify the key characteristics of prevention interventions that address substance use and abuse. This tool is recommended for prevention practitioners, community-based organizations, and state and federal officials in the design, implementation, review, and funding of substance abuse prevention interventions.

Who is the focus of your intervention?

It is important that prevention efforts are carefully targeted. In developing and implementing your prevention approach, be sure to consider the following factors when you choose your target audience:

- age
- ethnicity
- income
- sex
- nationality
- geographic location
- race
- culture

What domains do you want to address in your intervention?

Research shows that it is important to involve peers, parents, and other caring adults in prevention efforts. In developing your intervention, consider which domains your effort will address.

- individual
- school
- family
- community
- peers
- society

On which substances will you focus?

Research shows that narrowly targeted interventions (interventions that address one specific type of drug) are not as effective as those that target all major substances including alcohol and tobacco.

- alcohol
- inhalants
- other drugs
- tobacco
- cocaine
- marijuana
- heroin

What risk and protective factors should the intervention address?

Developed by
Centers for the
Application of Prevention
Technologies



CSAP Center for
Substance Abuse
Prevention
Substance Abuse and Mental
Health Services Administration

Reprint April 2001



Interventions are more likely to be effective when they address the major risk factors and major protective factors as opposed to less salient factors.

Which risk factors will your intervention choose to address?

- individual factors (e.g. predisposition, temperament, self-efficacy)
- family factors (e.g. parents who use drugs, family management problems)
- peer factors (e.g. friends with anti-social norms and behaviors)
- school factors (e.g. low commitment to school, academic failure)
- community/societal factors (e.g. access to drugs, economic deprivation)

Which protective factors will your intervention choose to address?

- bonding to family, school, and community
- neighborhoods with clear norms opposed to substance abuse
- development of effective socialization skills relevant to interpersonal communications, decision-making, self-assessment, and emotional regulation
- opportunities to reward participation in activities involving the family, school, and community

Does your intervention integrate any of the following principles, strategies, and approaches of effective prevention?

- Does your intervention provide accurate and useful information regarding:
 - harmfulness of substance use
 - prevalence of substance use
 - social norms around substance use
- Does your intervention communicate clear social norms?
- Does your intervention teach and reinforce life skills for youth?
- Does your intervention provide safe/healthy alternatives to substance use?
- Does your intervention attempt to influence community standards and policies that restrict youth access to substances?
- Does your intervention begin prevention efforts in early childhood and continue them through adulthood?
- Does your intervention operate in multiple settings such as:
 - communities schools homes
 - workplaces recreational settings
- Does your intervention use adequate dosage (e.g. frequency and intensity of sessions) according to the audience and setting it is addressing?
- Does your intervention use interactive prevention strategies?
- Does your intervention use multiple strategies to achieve its goals?
- Does your intervention measure success in terms of short- and long-term outcomes related to substance abuse and/or other related problem behaviors?