



Substance Use Prevention Curriculum Do's and Don'ts

One of the most effective ways for educators to address substance use is by teaching substance use prevention skills as part of daily teaching practice. When planning substance use prevention education activities, let's think about "What Works and What Doesn't Work."

Substance Use Prevention Education

What Works	What Does NOT Work
Non-judgmental approach with factual information about substance use risk	Abstinence-based approach
Focus on building protective factors and reducing risk factors	Focus only on risk reduction and not on increasing protective factors
Interactive instruction that is educational and skill building	Lecture-based format
Multi-component approaches that target individuals, schools, families, community, media	Narrowly-focused education that doesn't consider the many factors contributing to substance use
Developmentally appropriate education delivered repeatedly across grade levels	One-time interventions (e.g., school assembly)
Education that involves family members/caregivers	Student-only education, not involving family members/caregivers

Researchers have examined elements of successful substance use programs. Interactions between instructors and students, particularly practicing social skills with one another, are the most effective. In fact, prevention programs with very little social interaction are the least effective. Encouraging students "to just say no" does not produce lasting effects on substance use among students. The most effective programs tend to occur over many sessions, often over several years. These programs provide students with various developmentally appropriate scenarios as they age. Programs that involve family members and caregivers have better outcomes. Finally, effective programs distinguish between typical curiosity and experimentation and problematic substance use and have moved away from fear and shame that were foundational among previous anti-drug campaigns.

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