



Preventing Drug Abuse Among Children and Adolescents

(From the National Institute on Drug Abuse)



These principles are intended to help parents, educators, and community come together on prevention programs in their community. It is important to realize that it takes a combination of effort from parents, schools, and the community to effectively keep children and adolescents drug-free. When followed, these principles are proven to drastically reduce the chances of children and adolescents getting involved with substance abuse.

Risk Factors and Protective Factors

PRINCIPLE 1 - Prevention programs should enhance protective factors and reverse or reduce risk factors.

- The risk of becoming a drug abuser is affected by risk factors (such as deviant attitudes and behaviors, exposure to drug use, and dysfunctional families) and protective factors (such as parental support, academic success, and anti-drug education).
- Risk and protective factors change with age. For example, risk factors within the family have greater impact on a younger child, while association with drug-abusing peers may be a more significant risk factor for an adolescent.
- Addressing risk factors (such as aggressive behavior and poor self-control) early is much more successful than having to re-direct a child away from problems and toward positive behaviors later in life.
- Risk and protective factors have a different effect depending on a person's age, gender, ethnicity, culture, and environment.

Risk Factors	Domain	Protective Factors
Early Aggressive Behavior	Individual	Self-Control
Lack of Parental Supervision	Family	Parental Monitoring
Substance Abuse	Peer	Academic Competence
Drug Availability	School	Anti-drug Use Policies
Poverty	Community	Strong Neighborhood Attachment

PRINCIPLE 2 – You need to talk to kids about all forms of drug abuse, including the underage use of legal drugs (such as tobacco or alcohol); the use of illegal drugs (such as marijuana or heroin); and the inappropriate use of legally obtained substances (such as inhalants), prescription medications, or over-the-counter drugs.

PRINCIPLE 3 – You need to talk to kids about the types of drug abuse problems in the local community, try to reduce risk factors (such as helping to get drug dealers off the streets), and try to strengthen protective factors (such as community programs).

PRINCIPLE 4 – Try to help your community focus prevention programs on risks specific to your community's population, such as age, gender, and ethnicity – it doesn't help to focus efforts on middle aged users if most of the drug problem in your community is among teenagers.

Prevention Planning

Family Involvement

PRINCIPLE 5 - Enhancing family bonding and relationships is a strong substance abuse preventive measure. Improving parenting skills also helps keep kids drug-free. Being supportive of your children can go a long way toward improving their self image, which will also help them stay drug-free. Parents need to develop, discuss, and enforce family policies on substance abuse. They also need to become educated about drugs and drug abuse and pass this information on to their kids. This can open opportunities for family discussions about legal and illegal drugs. Parents need to take the time to monitor what their kids are doing. They need to set reasonable rules and watch to see that they are followed. They need to praise good behavior and provide moderate, consistent discipline, when needed, to enforce the rules.

School Programs

PRINCIPLE 6 – Check to see if your child’s preschool addresses risk factors for drug abuse, such as aggressive behavior, poor social skills, and academic difficulties. Also, pre-school aged children should hear an initial anti-drug message. It’s never too early to start addressing both sides of this issue.

PRINCIPLE 7 – Check to see if your child’s elementary school is taking steps to improve academic and social-emotional learning, addressing risk factors such as early aggression, academic failure, and school dropout. The school should help children develop self-control, emotional awareness, communication skills, and social problem-solving skills. They should also provide academic support, especially in reading.

PRINCIPLE 8 - Check to see if your child’s Middle School and High School is helping students increase academic and social competence. The school should help children develop good study habits, communication, peer relationships, and drug resistance skills. They should continue to provide academic support as needed, teach children to be self-sufficient and assertive in resisting drugs, reinforce anti-drug attitudes, and help children strengthen their personal commitment against drugs.

Community Programs

PRINCIPLE 9 – Encourage your child’s Middle School and High School to provide targeted prevention programs for 6th and 9th grade students. Prevention programs in these critical transition periods can produce beneficial effects even among high-risk families and children. Such programs do not single out risk populations, so they reduce labeling and encourage bonding to school and community.

PRINCIPLE 10 – Educate yourself and provide a similar message to your children in these transition periods. Prevention programs that combine two or more effective programs, such as family-based and school-based programs, are more effective than a single program alone.

PRINCIPLE 11 – Help your community to coordinate their efforts to provide the same types of messages in different settings, such as in schools, clubs, faith-based organizations, and the media. Anti-drug efforts are most effective when they present consistent, fact-based messages throughout the community.

Prevention Program Delivery

PRINCIPLE 12 – Although it is recommended that communities tailor drug prevention programs to match the needs and threats in that community, it is critical to retain the core elements of the drug prevention program. These include the structure (how the program is organized and constructed), the content (the information, skills, and strategies of the program), and the delivery (how the program is adapted, implemented, and evaluated).

PRINCIPLE 13 - Prevention programs must be an on-going effort, with repeated exposure and education to reinforce the original prevention message. Research shows that the benefits from elementary school and middle school prevention programs diminish without follow-up programs in middle school and high school, respectively.

PRINCIPLE 14 - Prevention programs should include teacher training on good classroom management practices, such as rewarding appropriate student behavior. Such techniques help to foster students’ positive behavior, achievement, academic motivation, and school bonding.

PRINCIPLE 15 - Prevention programs are most effective when they employ interactive techniques, such as peer discussion groups and parent role-playing, that allow for active involvement in learning about drug abuse and reinforcing skills.

PRINCIPLE 16 - Research-based prevention programs can be cost-effective. Similar to earlier research, recent research shows that for each dollar invested in prevention, a savings of up to \$10 in treatment for alcohol or other substance abuse can be seen.

Note: This is a highly abbreviated version of the original text for “Preventing Drug Abuse among Children and Adolescents”. The original document, with explanations, charts, references and suggested resources, is more technical and goes on for over 20 pages. If you would like to look at the full document, go to the web site below and follow the links.

<http://www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/principles.html>