

Evidence-Based Principles for Substance Abuse Prevention

The *National Drug Control Strategy's* Performance Measures of Effectiveness require the Office of National Drug Control Policy to “develop and implement a set of research-based principles upon which prevention programming can be based.” The following principles and guidelines were drawn from literature reviews and guidance supported by the federal departments of Education, Justice, and Health and Human Services as well as the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. Some prevention interventions covered by these reviews have been tested in laboratory, clinical, and community settings using the most rigorous research methods. Additional interventions have been studied with techniques that meet other recognized standards. The principles and guidelines presented here are broadly supported by a growing body of research.



Office of National Drug Control Policy

Evidence-Based Principles for Substance Abuse Prevention

ADDRESS APPROPRIATE RISK AND PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE IN A DEFINED POPULATION

1. **Define a population** A population can be defined by age, sex, race, geography (neighborhood, town, or region), and institution (school or workplace).
2. **Assess levels of risk, protection, and substance abuse for that population** Risk factors increase the risk of substance abuse, and protective factors inhibit substance abuse in the presence of risk. Risk and protective factors can be grouped in domains for research purposes (genetic, biological, social, psychological, contextual, economic, and cultural) and characterized as to their relevance to individuals, the family, peer, school, workplace, and community. Substance abuse can involve marijuana, cocaine, heroin, inhalants, methamphetamine, alcohol, and tobacco (especially among youth) as well as sequences, substitutions, and combinations of those and other psycho-active substances.
3. **Focus on all levels of risk, with special attention to those exposed to high risk and low protection** Prevention programs and policies should focus on all levels of risk, but special attention must be given to the most important risk factors, protective factors, psychoactive substances, individuals, and groups exposed to high risk and low protection in a defined population. Population assessment can help sharpen the focus of prevention.

USE APPROACHES THAT HAVE BEEN SHOWN TO BE EFFECTIVE

4. **Reduce the availability of illicit drugs, and of alcohol and tobacco for the under-aged** Community-wide laws, policies, and programs can reduce the availability and marketing of illicit drugs. They can also reduce the availability and appeal of alcohol and tobacco to the under-aged.
5. **Strengthen anti-drug-use attitudes and norms** Strengthen environmental support for anti-drug-use attitudes by sharing accurate information about substance-abuse, encouraging drug-free activities, and enforcing laws, and policies related to illicit substances.
6. **Strengthen life skills and drug refusal techniques** Teach life skills and drug refusal skills, using interactive techniques that focus on critical thinking, communication, and social competency.
7. **Reduce risk and enhance protection in families** Strengthen family skills by setting rules, clarifying expectations, monitoring behavior, communicating regularly, providing social support, and modeling positive behaviors.
8. **Strengthen social bonding** Strengthen social bonding and caring relationships with people holding strong standards against substance abuse in families, schools, peer groups, mentoring programs, religious and spiritual contexts, and structured recreational activities.

9. **Ensure that interventions are appropriate for the populations being addressed** Make sure that prevention interventions, including programs and policies, are acceptable to and appropriate for the needs and motivations of the populations and cultures being addressed.

INTERVENE EARLY AT IMPORTANT STAGES AND TRANSITIONS

10. **Intervene early and at developmental stages and life transitions that predict later substance abuse** Such developmental stages and life transitions can involve biological, psychological, or social circumstances that can increase the risk of substance abuse. Whether the stages or transitions are expected (such as puberty, adolescence, or graduation from school) or unexpected (for example the sudden death of a loved one), they should be addressed by preventive interventions as soon as possible—even before each stage or transition, whenever feasible.
11. **Reinforce interventions over time** Repeated exposure to scientifically accurate and age-appropriate anti-drug-use messages and other interventions—especially in later developmental stages and life transitions that may increase the risk of substance abuse—can ensure that skills, norms, expectations, and behaviors learned earlier are reinforced over time.

INTERVENE IN APPROPRIATE SETTINGS AND DOMAINS

12. **Intervene in appropriate settings and domains** Intervene in settings and domains that most affect risk and protection for substance abuse, including homes, social services, schools, peer groups, workplaces, recreational settings, religious and spiritual settings, and communities.

MANAGE PROGRAMS EFFECTIVELY

13. **Ensure consistency and coverage of programs and policies** Implementation of prevention programs, policies, and messages for different parts of the community should be consistent, compatible, and appropriate.
14. **Train staff and volunteers** To ensure that prevention programs and messages are continually delivered as intended, training should be provided regularly to staff and volunteers.
15. **Monitor and evaluate programs** To verify that goals and objectives are being achieved program monitoring and evaluation should be a regular part of program implementation. When goals are not reached, adjustments should be made to increase effectiveness.



Reference Guide for Substance-Abuse Prevention

National Drug Control Strategy, Budget, and PME	www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/policy/policy.html	Office of National Drug Control Policy	National Drug Clearinghouse 1-800-666-3332
Principles of U.S. Demand-Reduction Effort	www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/drugabuse/2d.html	Office of National Drug Control Policy	National Drug Clearinghouse 1-800-666-3332
Science-Based Substance-Abuse Prevention	www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/prevent/progeval.html	Department of Health and Human Services	National Drug Clearinghouse 1-800-666-3332
Prevention Principles for Adolescents and Children	www.health.org/pubs/prev/prevopen.html	National Institute on Drug Abuse	National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686
Meta-Analysis of Drug-Abuse Prevention	www.nida.nih.gov/pdf/monographs/monograph170/download170.html	National Institute on Drug Abuse	National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686
Cost-Benefit/Cost-Effectiveness Research	www.nida.nih.gov/pdf/monographs/monograph176/download176.html	National Institute on Drug Abuse	National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686
Prevention Principles for Alcohol-Related Problems	Make all requests for information directly to the author	National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism	Jhoward@willco.niaaa.nih.gov
Science-Based Practices in Substance-Abuse Prevention	www.whitehousedrugpolicy.gov/prevent/progeval.html	Center for Substance Abuse Prevention	National Drug Clearinghouse 1-800-666-3332
Prevention Enhancement Protocols (PEPS)	www.health.org/pepspractitioners www.health.org/pepscommunity www.health.org/pubs/pepsfamily/index.htm	Center for Substance Abuse Prevention	National Clearinghouse on Alcohol and Drug Information 1-800-729-6686
Principles of Effectiveness for Safe and Drug-Free Schools	<u>Final Principles of Effectiveness</u> www.ed.gov/legislation/FedRegister/announcements/1998-2/060198c.pdf <u>Non-Regulatory Guidance on Principles</u> www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/SDFS/nrgfin.pdf	Department of Education	1-877-4-ED-PUBS
Blueprints for Violence Prevention	www.colorado.edu/cspv/blueprints/index.html	Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs	Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse 1-800-638-8736