

PROMISING PREVENTION STRATEGIES FOR THE 90'S

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The prevention of alcohol, tobacco and other drug use problems is a goal shared by many. Most people have been affected by alcohol, tobacco and other drug use problems in their families, schools, neighborhoods or workplace. Some problems are quite visible, such as accidents caused by impaired or intoxicated drivers or violent crimes related to the distribution of illegal drugs. Other problems are less visible but nevertheless very serious. Stress in families or worksites triggered by inappropriate alcohol use, premature death from heart disease, or lung problems caused by tobacco use, and academic or occupational performance problems caused by the use of alcohol or other drugs are significant concerns in most communities. In addition, schools and health care systems are becoming increasingly aware of the problems presented by children who have been adversely affected by parental alcohol, tobacco or other drug use. Alcoholism and other chemical dependencies affect men and women from all socioeconomic, ethnic and cultural groups and regions of the country.

Prevention strategies are designed to reduce specific problems resulting from alcohol, tobacco and other drug use as well as to promote the healthy development of individuals. These efforts are primarily directed toward individuals who do not have an identified alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use problem. Special goals of prevention include:

- Supporting abstinence as a health and positive decision.
- Delaying the onset of first use by young people.
- Preventing low risk patterns of use from becoming high-risk.
- Reducing current high-risk patterns of use.

Past efforts at prevention have included a variety of approaches.

The strategy of prohibition

Assumption: Restricting access to alcohol will reduce its use.

Use of scare tactics

Assumption: Fear of negative consequences will prevent use.

Presenting factual information

Assumption: Accurate information will discourage use of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Affective education

Assumption: People with positive self-esteem, good interpersonal skills and decision-making abilities will be less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs.

Providing alternatives

Assumption: Recreation, physical activities, performing arts and other activities will replace the need for alcohol or other drug use.

Interdiction at the border

Assumption: Restricting supply will limit the demand.

Social influence curricula

Assumption: Young people who can recognize and counter social influences to use chemicals will be less likely to use and therefore experience less problems.

Environmental control

Assumption: Social environment influences individual choices and the social environment can be structured to discourage use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Independently, none of these strategies have been demonstrated to be completely effective in preventing problems. When selected strategies are implemented concurrently, as part of a planned comprehensive community effort, greater success can be expected.

Current prevention theory suggests that programs should involve the entire community, make use of multiple strat-

egies, design ongoing programs that target audiences from the very young through older citizens, allow adequate time for prevention efforts, and seek to integrate prevention strategies into family, school, religious, and other community environments.

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Promising prevention programs that focus on strategies to reduce specific problems related to alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use include efforts to:

- Provide important health information that people need to make decisions about use and non-use. Although information alone is not likely to prevent problems, it is an important part of a comprehensive prevention effort. People of all ages need accurate information about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs and their effects. They also need to be exposed to individuals who model appropriate use and non-use.
- Teach people to identify and counteract social influences that encourage alcohol, tobacco, or other drug use. People need help in recognizing the power of advertising as well as the influence of friends or co-workers.
- Encourage and support alcohol and other drug-free activities and situations for young people. These activities go beyond the activity itself and physical skills required for participation and emphasize personal, social, and spiritual dynamics.
- Provide people with instruction and practice in personal and social skills to resist pressures to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Establish guidelines for safe, health, and appropriate behavior for members of families, social institutions, and the community. A variety of organizations can provide opportunities for people of all ages to discuss and develop guidelines for the appropriate use and non-use of alcohol and other drugs.

Other efforts focus on the health development of individuals, rather than on specific problems, health issues, and concerns. Examples of broad health promotion strategies include efforts to:

- Acknowledge and nurture each person's self-worth.
- Develop life skills that will promote a positive, healthy life-style.
- Encourage development of personal, social and spiritual support systems.
- Promote healthy life-styles that include good nutrition, stress management, and lifelong exercise and activity.

The Office for Substance Abuse Prevention's (OSAP) community prevention project grants have provided a number of communities with an opportunity to encourage collaboration and coalition building to assess local needs, plan local actions and implement plans within a total community context. These efforts often include multiple and integrated strategies, for example:

- Workplace efforts which may include employee assistance programs; employee health promotion efforts, alcohol, tobacco, and other drug policies; and educational efforts to help employees to establish personal and corporate guidelines about choices related to alcohol or other drug use.
- School-based efforts which include clear and equitably enforced policies; student assistance programs; parent involvement; age-appropriate curricula; and peer-led activities.
- Religious organization efforts which include strategies that are integrated into the teaching, preaching and service functions of many congregations.
- Community task forces that are designed to ensure broad community involvement and ownership, coordinating efforts and assuring that programs are meeting the needs of ethnic and cultural populations present in communities.
- Restricting availability of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs by supporting consistent enforcement of existing laws

that prohibit the sale of tobacco or alcohol to underage minors; encouraging cooperative efforts among the parents of adolescents to develop clear and consistent expectations of non-use and to chaperon adolescent activities; and limitation on sales of products such as banning the vending machine sale of tobacco products.

As we learn from past efforts of prevention, observe current efforts, and look to the future for the most promising prevention strategies for the 1990s, each of us can play a role in creating an environment that supports healthy and positive behavior and discourages inappropriate, unhealthy, and high-risk choices about alcohol or other drugs. Whether through schools, religious organizations, the work site, community task forces, or our own families, each of us can take action:

- Concerned citizens can examine personal choices about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Friends and relatives can tell people

how they feel when others act inappropriately when drinking.

- Friends can encourage others to use any product carefully and responsibly.
- Friends can listen and support each other in times of stress.
- Family members can create a home environment that allows their family to communicate openly and honestly about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- Parents and teachers can exhibit behavior they want young people to follow.
- Parents, teachers and other adults can encourage and help children to develop skills to make safe and healthy choices.
- Citizens can support and encourage our law makers to enact legislation that will reduce the likelihood of people developing or continuing alcohol and other drug-use problems.
- Citizens can work together, respecting each others talents, cultural perspectives and experiences toward the creation of safe and healthy communities that discourage unhealthy choices about alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

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READINGS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

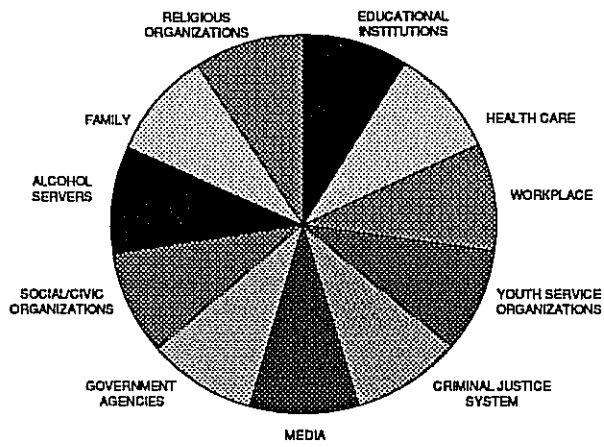
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