



## What Can Schools Do To Reduce Substance Use Among Students?

Substance use in schools is a real problem. Substance use interferes with children's learning and threatens their academic performance. Kids who witness drugs being sold, kept, or used on their school's property are more likely to smoke, drink and use drugs than children who attend drug-free schools. Unfortunately, most high schools and more than a third of middle schools are drug infected.

Most parents agree that it's important that their teen's school is drug free. But among parents whose children attend a drug-infected school, more than half believe that the goal of making their children's school drug free is unrealistic. They're wrong. Here are some proven actions that schools can take to reduce student substance abuse.

1. **Train all school staff** to spot the signs of substance abuse and know how to respond.
2. **Provide strong no-use messages** every year from preschool through the twelfth grade, tailored to the age, culture and sophistication of the child. Intensify these messages at the transitions from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school when students are at increased risk for substance use. Schools should make every effort to incorporate these messages not only into specific prevention programs, but into health and other academic curricula and school sponsored social settings.
3. **Develop strong and common sense substance use policies** that prohibit the possession, sale or use of cigarettes, alcohol, illegal and abused prescription drugs on school property or at school sponsored events. Identify and enforce clear consequences for noncompliance that assure continued education and access to treatment, and employ graduated sanctions for noncompliance with a treatment plan or repeat infractions of school policies.



4. If school administrators determine that a student has been using tobacco, alcohol or other illicit drugs, the school should **work with community agencies** to arrange for proper assessment, referral, counseling, treatment and follow-up care. Schools should establish student and employee assistance programs to provide counseling for students and staff with substance abuse problems of their own or among their families and friends. For students who voluntarily request help with a substance abuse problem, assure access to treatment and education without penalty.
  
5. **Offer evidence-based prevention programs.** Prevention program messages should be delivered by people who have the greatest chance of influencing youth--such as health professionals, parents and peers, as well as teachers--and who have been appropriately trained. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices (NREPP) provides a list of evidence-based prevention programs, available at <http://nrepp.samhsa.gov>.
  
6. **Offer evidence-based programs for high-risk students.** Schools should offer targeted prevention and intervention services to youth at high risk for developing substance abuse problems, including children with learning disabilities and conduct disorders, who are failing or doing poorly in school, who have moved frequently, who are engaged with the juvenile justice system, who have parents with addiction problems, and who have co-occurring problems such as anxiety, depression and eating disorders. The NREPP database contains prevention and intervention programs for high-risk students. One good example is CASASTART<sup>SM</sup> (Striving Together to Achieve Rewarding Tomorrows). To learn more about CASASTART<sup>SM</sup> visit <http://casastart.org>.
  
7. Create a school climate to:
  - **Engage parents in each child's education.** Teachers should communicate routinely with parents about the child's progress in school and any problems that he or she is encountering. Teachers and administrators should provide information to parents of day and evening hours when they are available to meet with them to respond to their concerns about their children's education.
  
  - **Develop high levels of student attachment to schools.** Schools should require and foster positive interactions between students and



staff and cultivate a sense of student empowerment. They also should create varied opportunities for student participation in academic and extra-curricular activities.

- **Help students build supportive peer groups and resist negative peer pressures.** Schools' curriculum programs should seek to help students provide support to each other to resist substance use and abuse and build skills to resist peer pressure.
- **Encourage students to report classmates** who have substance abuse problems so they can be helped and classmates who deal drugs so that appropriate action can be taken.

