
EFFECTIVE PREVENTION

Program Types

Delinquency prevention can take many forms, from general parental supervision to developed curricula taught in classrooms. There are three general types of prevention program currently recognized:

- **Universal Prevention:** Universal Prevention programs target an entire population or a group (e.g., 5th graders, 7 year olds, etc.). The population or group has not been identified as individually at risk.
 - **Selective Prevention:** Selective Prevention programs target individuals or groups with specific characteristics that put them at higher risk for relevant problems (e.g., low-income youth, youth with incarcerated parents, etc.).
 - **Indicated Prevention:** Indicated Prevention programs target youth who are identified as high-risk in an area related to the prevention program.
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Principles of Effective Prevention

In 2003 (Nation, et al.) researchers analyzed a variety of prevention programs outcome data. Using that information the researchers developed a list of nine principles, which fell within three general categories, which were common to successful programs.

The following list of principles comes from the above stated reference. A brief description of each principle is followed by questions that may be helpful when choosing a prevention program or evaluating one presently in place:

- **Program Characteristics**
 - o **Comprehensive:** “Multicomponent intervention that addresses critical domains (e.g., family, peers, community) that influence the development and perpetuation of the behaviors to be prevented,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Does the program include a variety of interventions, e.g., education about the topic, teaching of relevant skills, information on accessing additional services?
Q: Does the program span settings, e.g., involve school, community, and families.
 - o **Varied Teaching Methods:** “Programs involve diverse teaching methods that focus on increasing awareness and understanding of the problem behaviors and on acquiring or enhancing skills,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Does the program involve the teaching of skills, allow for practice and interactive instruction, and not just “lecturing.”
 - o **Sufficient Dosage:** “Programs provide enough intervention to produce the desired effects and provide follow-up as necessary to maintain effects,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452). “One-time” interventions, such as an assembly on “gang prevention” or school counselor presenting about the effects of “bullying” during one class period, are found to be ineffective prevention strategies. Also, the higher the risk of the target group, the longer and more intense the program should be.
Q: How long is each session, and how many sessions are recommended?
Q: Does the length and intensity of the program fit the target population?
Q: Does the program include booster sessions?

- **Theory Driven:** “Programs have a theoretical justification, are based on accurate information, and are supported by empirical research,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Has the program been developed based on research or “logic” and “experience.”
- **Positive Relationships:** “Programs provide exposure to adults and peers in a way that promotes strong relationships and supports positive outcomes,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Does the program incorporate developing prosocial relationships?
- **Matching a Program With Target Population**
 - **Appropriately Timed:** “Programs are initiated early enough to have an impact on the development of the problem behavior and are sensitive to the developmental needs of participants,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Does the program take place prior to the onset of behavior problems?
Q: Is the program developmentally appropriate?
 - **Socioculturally Relevant:** “Programs are tailored to the community and cultural norms of the participants and make efforts to include the target group in program planning and implementation,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Is the program culturally appropriate for the target population?
- **Implementation**
 - **Outcome Evaluation:** “Programs have clear goals and objectives and make an effort to systematically document their results relative to the goals,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Has an outcome evaluation been performed with this (your) target population?
 - **Well-Trained Staff:** “Program staff support the program and are provided with training regarding the implementation of the intervention,” (Nation, et al., 2003, pg. 452).
Q: Is the staff skilled and trained in the program?

Examples of Exemplary Prevention Programs (as rated by the OJJDP website):

- Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies
- Project Toward No Drug Abuse
- Safe Dates
- Responding in Peaceful and Positive Ways
- Strengthening Families Program
- Too Good for Violence

Examples of Ineffective Programs:

“Scared-straight” (scared-straight programs, where youth experience prison life, interact with prisoners, or visit morgue, not only fail to prevent delinquency, but often increase delinquency, Petrosino, A., et al. 2000).
 Drug Abuse Resistance Education,(D.A.R.E.) (Bikland, et al., 2005)

References:

- Birkeland, S., Murphy-Graham, E., & Weiss, C. (2005). Good reasons for ignoring good evaluation: The case of the drug abuse resistance education (D.A.R.E.) program. *Evaluation and Program Planning, 28*(3), 247-256.
- Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Retrieved from website: <http://www2.dsgonline.com/mpg/prevention.aspx?continuum=prevention> on 1/13/10.
- Nation, M., Crusto, C., Wandersman, A., Kumpfer, K., Seybolt, D., Morrissey-Kane, E., Davino, K. (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of effective prevention programs. *American Psychologist, 58*(6/7), 449-456.
- Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., Buehler, J. (2000) "Scared Straight" and other juvenile awareness programs for preventing juvenile delinquency. *Crime and Delinquency, 46*(1), 345-379.

Additional Prevention Resources:

- Wandersman, A., Florin, P. (2003). Community intervention and effective prevention. *American Psychologist, 58*(6/7), 441-448.
- Weissberg, R., Kumpfer, K., Seligman, M. (2003) Prevention that works for children and youth. *American Psychologist, 58*(6/7), 425-432.