

9 Principles for Preventing Drug Abuse

Counselors and educators agree that the best way to prevent children from using drugs is to educate them early – before they're tempted to experiment. Before young children can say "No" to drugs, they need to learn basic skills for resisting peer pressure – skills of assertiveness communication, and decision-making.

Principles of Drug Abuse Prevention

The *Drug Free* lessons are based on the following nine principles.

- 1. Children need to know that drugs affect behavior.** Children need to be aware that drugs can change the way a person acts. They need to know that the effects of drugs differ for each person, and that people can become dependent on drugs to the point where nothing matters except getting high.
- 2. Children need to know the differences between legal and illegal drugs and between appropriate and in appropriate drug use.** Some drugs are beneficial and necessary for improving or maintaining health. Children should be informed about appropriate use of prescribed medicines and over-the-counter drugs, and be able to distinguish these drugs from illegal drugs. Children should understand that although alcohol is a legal drug and is socially acceptable and safe when used responsibly by adults, it is illegal for children to buy or use.
- 3. Children need to develop an appreciation of the importance of caring for their body and of how drugs can affect their physical health.** Drugs can damage their body and their physical growth and health. They also need to know that a good diet, exercise, sleep, and relaxation are important for a healthy body. Children can benefit from learning to identify and deal with stress.
- 4. Children need to know that their questions about drugs will be answered accurately and honestly.** It is important for adults to listen to children's questions and help them find answers. Keeping information about drugs from children will not help them become drug resistant.
- 5. Children need to know that it's important to talk with an adult they trust and to ask for advice when they have a problem.** Children have limited knowledge and experience. Often they don't know what to do when they have a problem and, because of their, they may feel confused. They need to be helped to identify adults who care about them and whom they can trust. An adult friend or parent who is willing to listen and encourage a child will reinforce and help build the child's ability to solve problems.
- 6. Children need to know that they always have a choice in what they do, and they need to develop basic problem-solving skills.** Knowing how to make choices gives children confidence. Children need to learn a process for making decisions that will work for everyday decisions and for decisions that have long-term consequences. The following problem-solving steps/questions can be applied to both kinds of decisions:
 - What is the problem?
 - How do you feel about it?
 - What are the choices? What will happen with each choice?
 - Make a choice and act on it.
- 7. Children need to learn how to choose friends and cope with negative peer influences.** It is difficult for children to stand up to their peers. Ways to cope with peer pressure and rejection can be learned. Another safeguard is learning how to select friends with similar values, so they will have support in resisting negative influences.
- 8. Children need to be encouraged and reinforced about their ability to make good decisions.** Children need to feel confident about their decision-making ability. Often children are criticized for their mistakes and the things they do right aren't given as much recognition. When children's efforts and accomplishments are given as much notice as their mistakes, positive action is reinforced.
- 9. Children need to know that it's okay to say no.** Frequently children are criticized for being assertive. Children need to know that adults support them when they say no to drugs.