

3 Big Prevention Ideas to Keep Young People Safe and Healthy



Navigating teen life while confronted with current issues like vaping, teen suicide, social media bullying, and illicit drugs, including today's opioid epidemic, mean young people today must make critical choices at an early age. The hopeful news is communities that work together can make a big difference in the lives of children and young adults.

For 36 years, D.A.R.E. has been committed to helping young people make good decisions that support a safe and healthy life, and we've learned a few things about effective prevention through partnering with schools, families, and law enforcement in communities across the United States and the world.

Today, communities can implement prevention programming that is more effective than ever, with decades of scientific evidence guiding the way. Here are three big ideas that are supported by research:

1. Effective prevention programs are community-wide, with consistent messaging about risk behavior appearing in more than one setting. For example, school-based prevention programming that is reinforced by family talks at home or a city-wide social norms campaign. Community programming should address issues highly relevant to the local area. Families can boost this effect by encouraging conversation about risk behaviors at home. It helps when many community members are involved in shaping teens' thoughts about challenging issues — especially when they offer an opportunity to see things in new ways. Pacific Grove (Calif.) Police Department school resource officer Justin Hankes sees this happen almost every day at the schools he serves. He says “getting the chance to connect with students and teachers in the classroom provides each of us with a broader understanding of the other’s perspective — we live in the same community and want to live happy and healthy lives. My job allows me to connect with kids in my community to foster leadership and a culture of safety and care.”
2. Another thing to look for is long-term prevention programming. Although speakers or school assemblies may provide information or a motivational boost, they are most effective when they supplement an effective program that connects with kids at multiple ages or grade levels, with repeated contacts over time. It takes time to build the skills needed to avoid risk with good decisions. To maximize success, it’s critical for kids to practice these skills when they are young. It’s equally important that teens continue to be engaged in prevention activities at the ages when they will start to be faced with new challenges, in order to effectively apply these skills in real-life scenarios.
3. Good prevention programs for elementary-age children are based in social-emotional learning — teaching kids the skills they need to understand and communicate how they are feeling, exercise control over their bodies and minds, and to interact with others. As children transition into middle and high school, programs should continue to focus on peer relationships and social competence at a more complex level. Programs should help teens develop the knowledge and experience to make decisions that align with their own values and goals, and the skills to effectively and confidently express their choices, even under pressure.

Ashley Frazier, Ph.D.
Director of Curriculum and Training, D.A.R.E. America

<https://www.modernwellnessguide.com/summer-health-safety/3-big-prevention-ideas-to-keep-young-people-safe-and-healthy/#>