Youth Substance Abuse: Building Resilience & Reducing Harm
Resource Bundle

I. Building Resilience & Reducing Harm Resource

II. References
This is a reference sheet for actions you can take as an individual (or school community) to help protect students from the harms associated with youth substance abuse. These actions include:

- Understanding the factors that place young people at risk for substance use disorders.
- Taking steps to build student resilience against these risk factors.
- Using prevention education to delay the onset of substance use.
- Using harm-reduction education to increase the safety of young people who do use substances.

### Risk Factors for Youth Substance Abuse

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<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>Stress &amp; Mental Illness</th>
<th>Social Isolation</th>
<th>Environment</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical abuse</td>
<td>Economic hardship</td>
<td>Negative experiences in school</td>
<td>Poor parental monitoring or neglect</td>
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<td>Sexual abuse</td>
<td>Residential mobility</td>
<td>Low levels of connection to school and/or peers</td>
<td>Low levels of attachment to parent(s)</td>
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<td>Emotional abuse</td>
<td>Family problems</td>
<td>Rejection by family members or peers</td>
<td>Family substance abuse and genetics</td>
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<td>Witnessing violence</td>
<td>Parental separation or divorce</td>
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<td>Family mental illness</td>
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<td>Death or loss of a loved one</td>
<td>Social stigmatization</td>
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<td>Parental abandonment</td>
<td>Depression</td>
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(Dube et al., 2003) (Anthony et al., 2016) (Bond et al., 2007; Conner, Mason, & Mennis, 2012) (Ali, Dean, & Hedden, 2016; Anthony et al., 2016)

### Building Resilience

#### Prioritize Relationships
- A child's belief that he or she has support from peers and adult authority figures is a key form of protection against the risk factors listed above (Liebenberg et al., 2016).
- Pair students with teacher and/or peer mentors with whom they can discuss problems (Aldridge et al., 2016; Chandler, Roberts, & Chiolo, 2015).
- Take steps to develop positive, supportive teacher-student relationships (Bond et al., 2007).

#### Strengthen Connectedness to School
- Students who feel connected to school are more likely to make positive health choices and abstain from substance use (Bryant et al., 2003; Skager, 2013).
- Encourage students to participate in activities that foster connection to school and peers (Bond et al., 2007). For example: sports, clubs, peer mediation, peer support groups, student council, etc.

#### Foster Self-Efficacy
- Recognize students’ strengths and provide opportunities for them to demonstrate competence – academically, socially, athletically, etc. (Cunningham, 2010).
- Give students responsibility for mentoring and providing help to others. For example: peer mentoring, counseling, or tutoring.

#### Provide Validation
- Give students some degree of control and choice (Skager, 2013).
- Listen to – and encourage students to share – their beliefs and opinions.

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1 For example: LGBT students and the stress associated with coming out, and/or encountering homophobic prejudice.

2 For a list of helpful relationship-building strategies, see the module entitled Building Relationships with Students.
Focusing on Prevention

**Goal of Prevention Education:**
- To delay the initiation of substance use (Anthony et al., 2016; Hawkins et al., 2015).

**Prevention Programs** (Anthony et al., 2016; Chandler, Roberts, & Chiodo, 2015; Lee et al., 2016):
- Provide objective, science-based information about the effects of alcohol and other drugs.
- Help students develop pro-social behaviors and decision-making skills.
- Invite students to share and analyze their own experiences.
- Provide opportunities for students to talk, interact, and explore questions related to substance use.
- Teach students healthy coping strategies for dealing with stress and adversity.

**Resources for Prevention:**
- [Prevention Approaches](#) – Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- [Prevention Principles](#) – National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)

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Reducing Harm

**Goal of Harm Reduction:**
- To reduce the negative consequences associated with drug use and enhance safety (Harm Reduction International, n.d.; Kelly, 2012; Poulin, 2006).

**Harm Reduction Programs** (Kelly, 2012; Poulin, 2006; Rosenbaum, 2014; Skager, 2013):
- Are most appropriate for older adolescents, or adolescents who are already using.
- Neither condone nor condemn drug or alcohol use.
- Encourage moderation.
  - *Ex: Exploring the risks involved with binge-drinking and discouraging the behavior.*
- Promote an understanding of the legal and social consequences of drug or alcohol use.
  - *Ex: Exploring the short and long-term consequences of being charged with drug possession.*
- Recognize that some ways of using alcohol and drugs are safer than others, and prioritize safety.
  - *Ex: Understanding causes and signs of an overdose or alcohol poisoning; understanding the dangers of mixing illicit drugs, or combining illicit drugs with alcohol; avoiding drinking and driving.*

**Resources for Harm Reduction:**
- [Harm Reduction: An Approach to Reducing Risky Health Behaviors in Adolescents](#) – U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health
- [Harm Reduction Coalition](#)
- [Harm Reduction International](#)

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3 Harm-reduction strategies may be less appropriate for younger (elementary and middle school-aged) children because: 1) substance use is less common among these students; 2) younger students tend to be less emotionally and cognitively mature; 3) younger students may be more likely to misinterpret harm minimization messages as an endorsement of substance use (Poulin, 2006).


