Jesse’s Story

In the fall of 2012, a 17-year-old student named Jesse came home from school and told his parents that he’d made a friend. Jesse had Asperger’s Syndrome, cognitive impairments, and had been bullied in the past. He had also just started at a new school, so his parents were pleased that he’d found a peer to bond with (Erdely, 2014).

Over the course of a few weeks, Jesse’s friend began pressuring Jesse to sell him drugs. Jesse finally agreed, and - about a week later - met his friend in an empty parking lot off campus and handed him a small bag of marijuana (Adams, 2015; Erdely, 2014).

A few weeks later, five police officers entered Jesse’s classroom and arrested him. It turned out that Jesse’s “friend” was an undercover officer and Jesse - along with about 30 other students - had been caught in a drug sting (Erdely, 2014).

Jesse spent two days in jail despite the fact that he had no idea why he was in trouble or what was happening to him. Upon his release he and his parents received a letter from the school district informing them that - in accordance with their zero-tolerance policy - they were suspending Jesse and recommending expulsion (Erdely, 2014).
The Rise of Zero Tolerance

Transcript:

In many respects Jesse’s story - and others like his - are the end result of an approach to youth substance use that is mainly based on punishment and deterrence.

This approach is embodied in zero-tolerance discipline policies, which are used in over 90% of U.S. schools (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Brown & Clarey, 2012; Hoffman, 2014). These policies mandate suspension or expulsion as consequences for drug and alcohol use, possession, or sale on school grounds (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; American Psychological Association, 2008; Teske, 2011).

Module Goals
Transcript:

This module is designed to build a mindset, as well as knowledge that supports it. The mindset is that youth substance use should be treated as a health and wellness issue rather than a discipline issue.

In terms of knowledge, you’re going to learn about the origins of zero-tolerance as well as some viable alternatives to punitive discipline.

Our focus is not on classroom interventions per se, but rather developing an awareness of different supports that may benefit some of your most vulnerable students. And, if these supports don’t exist at your school, how to initiate dialogue about creating them.

After you finish this experience, you may want to visit a linked module called *Youth Substance Abuse: Building Resilience and Reducing Harm*. That module features a deeper dive into risk factors for adolescent substance abuse and addiction, and what educators can do to enhance protective factors against them.

Let’s begin. Here is an overview of how the remainder of this module is structured.

**A Look Back (4:00)**

**History**

![Key Dates in the “War on Drugs”](image)

Transcript:

Why do public schools tend to treat student substance use as a discipline problem rather than a student health and wellness issue?

To answer that question, you need to take a look back into history.

Drag the slider to learn about some key dates in the War on Drugs, then click “Proceed” when you’re ready to continue.
1914

Harrison Narcotics Act bans the sale of cocaine, opium, and heroin (Drug Policy Alliance, n.d.; Hari, 2015). Prior to this date, nearly all drugs were legal.

1971

President Nixon declares a national “War on Drugs” (National Public Radio, 2007).
1986


Early 90’s

1994

The Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities Act gives responsibility for youth drug prevention to the U.S. Department of Education (Improving America’s Schools Act, 1994).

1994

Social Underpinnings

Transcript:

If you would like to hear a professor and author delve more deeply into the social underpinnings of the War on Drugs, click the video. If you are ready to move on, click “Proceed”.

Video Transcript:

It began to be realized that there were some political opportunities her… And that’s when drugs became associated with racism and fear of racial others. The Chinese and their opium dens - which were not just messing with the Chinese, but white women were attracted to these opium dens and who knew what was happening there. And the Mexicans who were farm workers who were smoking marijuana and becoming disorderly and dangerous. And especially Blacks on cocaine in the South…These reports were in places like the New York Times, the Good Housekeeping journal - not far out publications - that a Black on cocaine could withstand bullets that would normally fell another person. So the combination of drugs, race, and fear of those racial groups being disorderly and dangerous and sucking in innocent white people - especially youth - became part of the argot of drugs. And that’s when criminalization began.

It’s a nexus of fear, criminalization, and race - which kind of modifies and amplifies the fear - that has really been embedded in our society now for probably about 75, 85 years.

The larger context of prohibition and fear and rejection that’s all in its own way made its way into the school systems. And unfortunately, zero-tolerance seems to have had the effect of not just in the area of drugs, but in anything that might appear to be a weapon or even disorderly behavior - to be the policy of the hour.
Federal and School Policies

Transcript:

School-level zero-tolerance policies mirror a federal drug policy centered on punishment and deterrence, and they’ve created similar social consequences.

To illustrate this idea, here are some facts about federal drug policy and their counterparts in public schools. Read each pair, then scroll down to reveal the next set of facts.

Text 1

In 2014, National Drug Control Strategy allocated 60% of budget for law enforcement, 40% for treatment. (Anthony et al., 2016).

90% of U.S. schools have zero-tolerance policies for substances, but fewer than 10% of youth with substance problems receive treatment (Brown & Clarey, 2012; Levy & Schizer, 2015).
People of all races use and sell drugs at roughly equal rates, but 80% of people in federal prison for drug crimes are Black or Latino (Alexander, 2010; Drug Policy Alliance, 2016).

Black students are 3.5 times more likely to be suspended or expelled from school than white students, despite no evidence showing these students exhibit higher rates of drug use or violence (APA, 2006; Smith, 2015).

The number of people in prison or jail for drug violations has increased by a factor of 10 since 1980 (Drug Policy Alliance, 2016).

In 2013, 30% of U.S. schools issued 5+ day suspensions or expulsions for alcohol or drug violations. Out-of-school suspensions have doubled since the 1970’s (Nelson & Lind, 2015; Roberts et al., 2014).
Check for Understanding

Transcript:

Here are some facts and myths about drugs and young people. Decide whether you believe each statement is a fact or a myth, then click “Submit.”
FACT.
Accidents that involve alcohol are a leading cause of death and disability among teens (Gore et al., 2011). Adolescent alcohol use is also a risk factor for: academic problems, unwanted or unsafe sexual activity, sexual or physical assault, and suicide (Centers for Disease Control, 2015).

MYTH.
There is no cause-and-effect relationship between marijuana use and the use of “harder” illicit drugs like cocaine or heroin (Van Gundy & Rebellon, 2010). “The vast majority of people who use marijuana do not progress to more dangerous drugs” (Rosenbaum, 2014, p. 15; SAMHSA, 2014).
Explanation 3

**FACT.** Some studies have found that heavy marijuana use in adolescence may predict lower IQ in adulthood (Hall & Degenhardt, 2014; Meier et al., 2012).

Explanation 4

**FACT.** A person who begins using substances in early adolescence is more likely to develop a substance abuse disorder in later adolescence or adulthood (Colder et al., 2013). It is worth noting that factors that contributed to a youth’s decision to use substances at an early age (e.g. depression) may also be contributing factors to the development of a substance use disorder later in life (Anthony et al., 2016; Benavie, 2009; Sullum, 2003).
Explanation 5

**MYTH.** Over 50% of students will try alcohol or drugs by the time they graduate high school (SAMHSA, 2014). However, only about 10% of students engage in regular drug use, and only 5% have substance use disorders (SAMHSA, 2015).

Explanation 6

**MYTH.** Most experts believe that a substance use disorder develops over time, and is influenced by the characteristics of the individual user as well as his or her social context (Benavie, 2009; DeGrandpre, 2007; Sullum, 2003). For example, heroin is a highly addictive drug but only about 23% of people who try it become addicted to it (NIDA, 2013). This is still a high number, but it is not consistent with the "try it once and you're hooked" hypothesis.
Zero Tolerance and Deterrence (2:45)

Effectiveness

Transcript:

Even though there are some myths surrounding youth substance use, nearly everyone would agree that it’s safer for young people not to use at all. The rationale for zero-tolerance policies is that they act as a deterrent against drug use and other problematic behaviors in school (American Psychological Association, 2008). But do they work? Let’s examine some evidence…

In 2005 the American Psychological Association assembled a task force to examine research on zero-tolerance policies in schools. A meta-analysis found no evidence that these policies had a deterrent effect on any forms of misbehavior - including substance use (APA, 2008).

A 2014 study found that students attending schools with zero-tolerance policies were neither more nor less likely to drink or use drugs than students who attended schools with less punitive discipline (Sacks et al., 2014).

Finally, a longitudinal study found that students attending schools with strict suspension or expulsion policies for drug use were 1.6 times more likely to be marijuana users one year later than students who attended schools without such policies (Evans-Whipp et al., 2016).
Transcript:

There’s little evidence that zero-tolerance policies deter or mitigate youth substance use. However, there’s quite a bit of evidence that punitive discipline policies have damaging effects on students, schools, and communities.

Click on each option to see what research says about some consequences of zero-tolerance policies, then “Proceed” when you are ready to continue.
Transcript:

If you’d like to hear a student activist share her perspective on the consequences of using zero-tolerance policies to address substance use, click the video. Otherwise, click “Proceed.”

**Video Transcript:**

It’s really degraded the trust between students and institutions of authority. You know, how would you feel if someone told you, “You’re sixteen years old, you’re still learning how to go through life, you’re dealing with all the things that come with adolescence, and now you made a mistake, and now you don’t have the right to go to school anymore.” You’re not worth it to our system to try and talk with you and figure out what’s going on in your life. And it also alienates students who may actually need help.

When you remove them from the social environment, is it any wonder that they would seek out things that make them feel better, or maybe things that are a little rebellious and say, “You know what, you weren’t there for me. Maybe this group of people will be there for me.” And we see that’s true for young people who use drugs, young people who join gangs…they’re looking for connection.
Risk Factors (3:30)

Common Factors

Transcript:

Why don’t punitive discipline policies serve as an effective deterrent to student drug and alcohol use? One reason is that they tend to ignore - or exacerbate - the risk factors for abuse and addiction.

While most young people do not develop substance use disorders, those that do tend to have some things in common. Click the tabs to learn about factors that place students at greater risk of developing a substance problem.

Trauma

Risk factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TRAUMA</th>
<th>Children who have been physically or sexually abused are twice as likely to develop an alcohol dependence (Kirkpatrick et al., 2000).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MENTAL HEALTH</td>
<td>For each adverse experience in childhood, a person is 2-4 times more likely to develop a substance use disorder (Dube et al., 2003).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ISOLATION</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STRESS</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a complete list of references, refer to the On-Demand Module 'Drug Use in Schools: A New Look at an Old Problem.'
### Mental Health

**Risk factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>MENTAL HEALTH</th>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Substance use disorders frequently co-occur with other mental health disorders (Conway et al., 2016).

Adolescent drug and alcohol abuse is closely associated with depression (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Anthony et al., 2016).

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### Isolation

**Risk factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trauma</th>
<th>MENTAL HEALTH</th>
<th>Isolation</th>
<th>Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Students are more likely to abuse alcohol or drugs if they:

- Have had negative or alienating experiences in school.
- Have low levels of connection to school.
- Have been rejected by family or socially-conforming peers.

(Bond et al., 2007; Conner, Mason, & Mennis, 2012)
Stress

Risk factors

Life stressors related to housing, poverty, or family problems increase a child's likelihood to use alcohol or drugs (Anthony et al., 2016; Charles et al., 2015).

LGBT youth are twice as likely to use alcohol or drugs; this is linked to stress associated with social stigmatization and coming out (Duncan et al., 2014; Marshal et al., 2008).

Licensed Counselor Interview

Click the video if you'd like to hear a licensed substance abuse counselor delve deeper into the risk factors for addiction. Otherwise, click “Proceed.”

Transcript:

Click here to see the video.

Mike Speakman, LISAC

Video Transcript:

For a complete list of references, refer to the On-Demand Module ‘Drug Use in Schools: A New Look at an Old Problem.’
As far as the people who are attracted to use the substances and continue to use them, they will be…one of the characteristics is that they will have these gifts that I have mentioned. And that is, the three that I have noticed is, extreme creative imagination. The other one, they’ll be tremendously gifted…intellectual intelligence. And then the third will be emotional sensitivity.

Those three together will predispose a person to have more anxiety - more worry than the average - because we use those gifts to worry. And therefore, a person with those gifts, coming across a drug - whether the first drug is pot or it’s alcohol, or whatever it is - they will feel some relief, in general.

When there’s abuse issues in childhood that is a very significant factor for a person. You can see where that would increase their anxiety level, of course. Numbers are extremely high for people who have severe substance abuse problems - so severe that they need to go to inpatient treatment, for instance - the percentage estimated is very high. Somewhere around 90% of men and women, both.

**Cycle**

Transcript:

For young people at risk for substance abuse and addiction, punitive discipline can create the following cycle (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003):

Some students drink or use drugs to manage the emotional pain of trauma, loneliness, or anxiety.

Forced exclusion through suspension or expulsion weakens their bonds with school and adult authority figures, and makes them feel isolated and uncared-for.

It also places them in unsupervised environments where substances are easily accessible, and the temptation to use is high.

Then, the cycle repeats itself.
New Approach

Transcript:

To break this cycle, schools must approach the problem from a public health perspective rather than from the perspective of punishment and deterrence. 

One way to do this is by focusing on prevention - providing students with training and information that can help delay the initiation of substance use (Colder et al., 2013; NIDA, 2003).
Prevention Program Characteristics

Transcript:

Let’s take a moment to tap into your background knowledge. Place a check next to all of the statements that you think describe characteristics of effective prevention programs.

D.A.R.E.

Drug-Education Programs

• Ineffective program

(Ennett et al., 1994; Lynam et al., 1999; Pan & Bai, 2009; West & O’Neal, 2004)

Transcript:

For many years, Drug and Alcohol Resistance Education - or DARE - was the most widely used drug-education program in the United States. It was also pretty ineffective. Multiple studies showed that it had little long-term effect on students’ attitudes toward drugs or decision to use drugs (Ennett et al., 1994; Lynam et al., 1999; Pan & Bai, 2009; West & O’Neal, 2004). Click the video if you’d like to hear a student activist and former...
Sarah Saucedo: 

As far as what would make drug education ineffective, I think we could start with what we’re already doing. So, being condescending, masking the truth about the realities of drug use and the seriousness of drug use, overly punitive policies, abstinence only…These are things we’re currently doing that aren’t working.

Nick Dial: 

When you make something taboo, and it’s “No, no, no, no,” obviously for a lot of people the natural reaction is to push back. I think the biggest issue with DARE and these punitive actions is this whole time, it’s this scare tactic. And they take this approach that, “If you take marijuana, it’s a schedule one. The most dangerous drug,” and all these horrible things are gonna happen. And, I mean, look at the propaganda through the years - “the devil’s garden”, and all of these over the top things. What happens? They get a friend, or somebody tries it. Oh. They didn’t die. They didn’t go crazy. Huh. Then they try it. So then what they find out, all of a sudden they find out that they were lied to. It’s not true. It’s not as horrible and extreme as they’re making it out to be.
What are Characteristics of Effective Programs?

Transcript:

Drug and alcohol education programs can be effective in helping young people abstain from use, delay use, or use in moderation (Anthony et al., 2016; Botvin & Griffin, 2014; Rhew et al., 2016). And in fact, some of the most impactful modern programs were built upon lessons learned from the weaknesses of earlier efforts. Take a moment to watch a drug and alcohol education curriculum developer discuss some of the characteristics of effective programs.

Video Transcript:

We help kids in this particular curriculum think about their values. What the values are of their family, of their community, and then talk about their norms. What do they actually do? Do those norms fit their values? If what they’re doing isn’t really what they believe they ought to be doing, then what kinds of changes can they make in their lives? We don’t hammer kids with, you know, “This is really gonna hurt you.” We’re just going to give them some strategies, give them the language that they may be able to use in situations.

We set up the activities in the curriculum so the kids are having an opportunity to talk to each other, to interact with each other all the time to solve problems, to make decisions, so they’re learning from each other.

In the classrooms where the teachers are letting the kids have their voice in talking about their experiences, and where teachers are being very honest - and some of them are very honest about some of their own experiences - I think that makes a difference.

And if you let the kids talk about it, too. Most of the kids in the classroom are gonna say, “I’m not interested. I’m not gonna do that. I want to wait. This is why I want to wait.” And if kids hear those stories, I think that’s going to be really helpful to them.
Alternatives

Student Assistance Programs

Transcript:

Prevention education is proactive, and intended to stop substance use before it starts. But what if it doesn’t work for some students, and they still use? When that happens, what are some alternatives to zero-tolerance?

The first is student assistance programs: school-based teams that identify and provide services for young people experiencing problems with drug or alcohol use (Biddle et al., 2014; Loneck et al., 2010; Torres-Rodriguez et al., 2010).

Click the buttons to see how these programs work.
Features

Transcript:
Click the buttons to see how these programs work.

Who?

SAPs may be led by a school social worker or psychologist, or a team that also includes counselors, teachers, and students.
What?

Teachers, staff members, parents, and peers can refer a student to the SAP if they have a concern for his or her welfare. Students can also refer themselves.

Why?

The concern could be about substance use, but could also pertain to mental health issues, suicidal ideation, behavior problems, or other risky behaviors.
Next Steps

Transcript:
Click the buttons to see how these programs work.

Jane

The team develops a plan for monitoring and following up with the student and checking in to assess progress.
Effectiveness

Transcript:

Studies comparing middle and high schools with and without student assistance programs found that students in schools with these programs had significantly lower levels of drug and alcohol use and also earned higher grades (Kanu, Hepler, & Labi, 2015; Scott et al., 1999).

In another study, researchers analyzed three years’ worth of data from student assistance programs in an urban school district. They found that students who attended schools with SAPs were linked to mental or behavioral health care more efficiently, and at higher rates. They also found that suspensions decreased across the district after student assistance programs were implemented (Fertman, Tarasevich, & Hepler, 2003).
In this clip, you’ll hear an administrator talk about the benefits of the student assistance program at his school.

**Video Transcript:**

*I think the biggest benefits have been the building of trust and partnership within our community - with our parents and students both - that they know that we care, number one as a school. And number two, not only do we care, we can provide hope. Hope being a strategy for them and their families to overcome the obstacles that they’re facing in terms of substance abuse in their lives, and to partner with them. So yeah, I think the biggest benefit has just been the trust that’s grown out of the student assistance program, and again, having a system in place that people recognize and understand is there for them. A lot of parents are fighting these battles on their own and don’t know that they can reach out for help.*

**Restorative Justice**

Students must problem-solve amends or restitution instead of punishment.

**Transcript:**

The second alternative to zero-tolerance is restorative justice.

Restorative justice is an approach to discipline that is focused on helping students understand the impact of their actions and repair the harm they’ve caused (Ashley & Burke, 2009; Payne & Welch, 2015; Skager, 2013). Students are given responsibility for problem-solving and finding ways to make amends or restitution rather than passively accepting a punishment (Payne & Welch, 2015).

Discipline violations - including but not limited to violations of substance policy - are handled on a case-by-case basis rather than through the use of mandatory punishments (Gonzalez, 2012; Pavelka, 2013; Payne & Welch, 2015).

Studies of schools and districts that adopted restorative justice programs have found high rates of satisfaction among all school community members (Drewery, 2004), and a massive reduction in suspensions and expulsions (Armour, 2013). These schools also had significantly better climate ratings based on survey data from teachers, students and parents (Armour, 2013).
It should be noted that a restorative justice approach can be used to handle *any* type of discipline problem. However, since our current discussion is focused on student substance use, let’s examine it in this context.

*Example*

**Using restorative justice to create support**

You strive to use a restorative approach to discipline in your classroom. Consequences for misbehavior are crafted to help the offending student repair the harm that was caused.

**Using restorative justice to create support**

One day a student of yours named Jeff sneaks off campus during lunch to smoke marijuana. As he attempts to return to his next class (yours) he is caught by security and given a three-day, out-of-school suspension.
Using restorative justice to create support

While Jeff is suspended, you consult with the school social worker. She agrees to meet with Jeff when he returns, conduct a screening for mental health or substance use disorders, and discuss whether on-site counseling might be helpful to him.

Using restorative justice to create support

When Jeff returns to your class, you meet with him to welcome him back and discuss the incident that caused his suspension. Through discussion, he identifies that the main harm caused by his actions was to himself. He is now three days behind in all of his classes.
To repair this harm, Jeff agrees to stay after school each day this week to make up work in the classes he missed. You help him coordinate with his other teachers in order to make sure he gets caught up.

Transcript:

In this example, imagine that you work at a school that does use mandatory punishments for substance use violations, and that this is not something that will change in the short term.

Drag the slider to see an example of how you could still use restorative practices to create an environment of support for your students.

Introduction (5:00)

How to get Started
Depending on your position, there are probably some things that are out of your direct control. For example, if your district mandates an automatic five-day suspension for marijuana use, you might not be able to change that policy in the short term.

However, you could help establish student assistance and peer support programs as a proactive measure. You could also begin implementing restorative practices whenever possible to address disciplinary situations.

It should be noted that your school may already have support programs designed to assist students with substance or mental health issues, or other problems. Learn what your school already has available, and build relationships with the people who are already engaged in this work.

**Advice from Former Counselor**

Transcript:

Starting a dialogue about change can be hard, and maybe even a little intimidating. Take a moment to listen to a former school counselor - and founder of Teen AA - share some advice on initiating school-level change.

Video Transcript:

*There needs to be that passionate person that is devastated when a child isn’t successful. Or, when a child is going through pain or isolation, and each of us wants to do something more but we really don’t know what that answer is. I have had passionate counselors in schools - and administrators - who have fought to get a program that’s highly relevant (and has a continuum) into their schools. And they have been successful. There wasn’t any obstacle that got in their way that caused them to shut down and lose their momentum, but they had to work really hard. They had to educate their principal, and if the resistance was there, then they would also work with other team members within the school - other counselors, other social workers. Oftentimes you need to get the person who’s behind the organization - like myself - to come out there and to make a formal presentation and explain to them what advantages are available for their school. In terms of the administration, about the time they see the GPAs go up, they see that kids are attending school more, they have far less behavioral referrals, there’s a personal advantage that they will be able to see in terms of the future of their school.*
Transcript:

For this module, we interviewed a range of individuals with different perspectives on policies surrounding youth substance use. These include a professor, a substance abuse counselor, a student activist, a former police officer, a curriculum developer, and a school administrator. Click on any of these topics to hear these individuals elaborate on it in greater detail.

The War on Drugs

Doris Marie Provine:

I think there are a number of consequences that are really sad. For one, is the general fear of addictive drugs and aversion to people with addiction problems. And, our failure to realize that we have to live with a certain amount of disorder in order to include everyone and help them have quality lives. So, I think that’s very unfortunate. Another has been the kind of programming of policing toward drug arrests – mostly in minority neighborhoods. And that isn’t strictly a “racist cop” issue, it’s kind of, again, going back to institutions, it’s a lot easier to make an arrest in an open-air drug market, and that’s much more common in areas that are crowded and urban. For example, there’s plenty of drug use on college campuses, but police can’t patrol in the same way on a college campus as they can in these depressed areas with very little political power and a lot of people on the street. And it kind of creates a syndrome, because let’s say you’re just an average cop who thinks drugs are really bad, and you make your arrests, and you get – let’s say – a lot of Black teenagers…you make successful arrests in those areas. Well, then that reinforces your sense that that’s where the drugs are. You never really are exposed to the pervasiveness of drug use elsewhere. Whereas all of the statistical evidence – surveys that have been done, this is true for 20, 30 years, so it’s nothing new – show that drug use is pretty evenly distributed among all racial and ethnic groups. So, we do have a tendency with policing in this country to say an effective law enforcement officer is the one who makes the most successful stops, busts, arrests. If you want to be successful, you try to concentrate where it’s easy to make your arrests. And so that has been a terrible consequence. It’s one of the reasons that Black Lives Matter has emerged – because the level of tough policing in minority neighborhoods and cities has been really over the top. And the militarization
of police – which the federal government has helped along by allowing surplus military hardware to go to local police departments with very little surveillance. We have the burn program, which allows for the confiscation of people’s goods when drugs are involved. And so, it’s had a lot of terrible consequences that are gonna be really difficult to undo – including in the schools.

Why Zero Tolerance Doesn’t Work

Video Transcript:

Mike Speakman:

The punishment effect won’t work really well for a couple reasons. Number one is they romanticize rebellion. They have to have someone to rebel against. So one of the things that parents are learning is what we call the “child’s game.” And the child’s game is, I’m going to act out so that you get on my case, so that I can rebel against you getting on my case. So the child is in a position to live his whole life from the standpoint of reaction – does not have the power to do action. That's just...where they’re at. So they are highly skilled at these games of getting you to react in certain ways so they can react to your reaction. So what we want to do, then, is give them different things to react to.

Doris Marie Provine:

It’s a very cowardly way of dealing with problems. It rejects the need that I think schools really have to look at a kid’s situation, to hear both sides of a story, to put some context. So it’s this rejection of very young kids, and what are they going to do? There’s not an alternative for them, there’s not another school they’re going to go to. They’re going to stay home and watch TV, hang out, and feel apart from all their friends, and their parents aren’t going to be able to stay home and home-school them.

Consequences of Zero Tolerance

Video Transcript:

Sarah Saucedo:

First and foremost, I would say that zero-tolerance policies – and statistics would support this – are one of the leading causes of the school-to-prison pipeline. If you institute a zero-tolerance policy, you’re making no distinction in the seriousness of the offense. It’s kind of equivalent to how mandatory minimums have proven to be problematic because they take away the discretion of the judge. And it requires a really disproportionately severe consequence for the offense. Like I said, no matter what the circumstances were, or really, what it was. And so, the results of this are that we have skyrocketing rates of youth – especially youth of color and low-income youth – who are introduced to the criminal justice system and who are otherwise disenfranchised from school.

Doris Marie Provine:

The worst thing to do is to push the person farther away, because as you said, then the person is going to search out places where they can be tolerated, and that’s gonna be with other drug users. And I think the only thing that’s sort of left out of that picture is that law enforcement will eventually become involved, and the consequences then become terribly serious and permanent.

Nick Dial:

When you take a punitive approach for a medical problem, we’re kinda throwing out the baby with the bathwater, and then what are we left with? We’re left with somebody going in and out of the system, and they’re not really getting treatment.
**Effective Prevention**

**Video Transcript:**

Sarah Saucedo:

Your drug education needs to be science-based and not based on fear tactics or scare tactics or propaganda. So, if you’re gonna have drug education, you need to tell them, “You can’t overdose on marijuana, but there may be risks involved in smoking it.” When students know they’re being taught the truth, in my opinion as a young person that makes me much more liable to believe it and to want to practice it and follow it for my own safety.

It’s totally reasonable to say, “Look, you’re a young person. It’s against the law. We don’t want you using drugs.” But that decision ultimately is always going to be up to the student when they’re in the moment. So if we can teach them to have a mindframe of, “I don’t want to do this now because I understand it will have negative consequences for me,” I think that’s a little healthier and a little more effective than, “I really kinda want to try this because I’m not sure, but I might get in trouble. So maybe if I find a way to do it without anybody knowing, I can get away with it.”

Mary Harthun:

I think you have to look at the age of the kids too, and what they’re able to handle conceptually as well. So, and…then think about the experiences these kids might be having and find out from them what kinds of experiences they’re involved in at that particular time.

It’s important that the teacher allow the kids to have a voice in the activities. They say how they would do things in their family. So you’re helping kids, again, with this language, with some communication strategies. We listen to stories from different groups of kids, so we’ve incorporated all their stories, all their situations in the curriculum in the scenarios that they see. And I think that’s really important, so kids see themselves in the message – in the prevention message.

**Student Assistance Programs**

**Video Transcript:**

Pat Higgins:

We began the student assistance program looking into ways we could partner and intervene with students who have issues that are traumatic in their lives. Anything from substance abuse…could be divorce, anxiety, depression – but a way for students to seek help before those kinds of incidents got to a disciplinary level.

The protocols for our student assistance program allow for anonymous reporting of any student at any time. That could come from the student him or herself, it could come from a parent, it could come from any community member or teacher, administrator…it could even come from a staff member or another parent within the community. So, anybody who has a concern and comes in goodwill for that student’s health and wellness can refer a student to the student assistance program.

There are different ways we can assess students coming into the student assistance program. Some of those are already build into the protocols of the school where we’re looking at data involving discipline or attendance – sometimes those are good earmarkers. We can occasionally…or regularly get information from teachers as well – teachers who see those students on a daily basis. How they’re acting, what their attitudes are. How they’re dressing, what they look like, what their affect is on a daily basis. So, we can use both qualitative and quantitative data in that discovery of whether this referral is on point.

At that point there becomes, really an invitation into the student assistance program where we have discussions with the family, we have discussions with parents and the student themselves, speaking to them about what the concerns are, what our concerns are, and then follow up. If it were in the case of substance abuse, we may do follow up testing in terms of urinalysis, maybe a hair test to determine if the student was using drugs.
We would also have them meet with our school behavioral therapist, at which time there could be the recommendation of any type of counseling that that student may need. And that typically is a large portion of what the student assistance program is – putting that student in touch with the experts that can really intervene on their behalf and get them unstuck from whatever situation they’re in.

In the case of drug use we do an initial screen, and then we have them do a psychological evaluation with a drug counselor, and they’ll make a recommendation. The least amount of counseling – and we’ll follow the recommendation of that counselor – the least amount of sessions I think I’ve ever seen a student go through was two sessions. It might be a student who’s just mildly experimenting or who has an initial experimentation and has been caught with that initial experimentation with drugs or alcohol. I’ve seen it go up to a hundred hours for students who are just highly embedded in drug use and have found it habitual and addictive. There’s a range of counseling; we follow that counseling protocol. And at the end of the counseling, we do a follow-up governance testing to see if that student is drug free. At that time we partner with the parents and decide if we want to continue governance testing in their time at school to support the family. The family, many times, will take over and want to do their own governance testing and then reach back out to the school if something is awry with the student.

So much of a student’s life is spent on a high school campus in school and the parents don’t have oversight of them, so it really is important to partner, to make sure that that student is not creating a disintegrated existence but one that’s integrated, and they’re acting the same in both settings. And we tend to witness them in different ways. One of the case studies that we’ve had in the past is that parents will come down really hard on their kids over drugs and alcohol, so those students are now afraid to exhibit behaviors at home where they’re caught by their parents. They’re now using before school because they know their parents won’t catch them. If schools aren’t involved with partnering with parents, then that student is not cared for. The student assistance program I think provides hope in the form of a strategy. And that student now knows, “I can look for help – get help to get out of the situation that I’m in.”

Restorative Justice

Video Transcript:

Sarah Saucedo

If we’re looking at alternatives to zero-tolerance policies, the first place we need to start is, sort of, restorative practices over expulsion and suspension. What that means is something that’s interactive, that involves the student themselves, and could also involve making amends. So you go back and you look at the consequences of your action and you become aware of what happens when you do these things, but instead of being afraid of being expelled, you kind of have to face it head-on and approach the teachers and the students and community members who were in a way harmed by your activities, and you make amends and you apologize.

Mike Speakman:

One of the things that I have seen over the years that I think is the most powerful, the most helpful thing you can do is peer support. And I’ve seen programs over the years where they’ll have problematic children sit in front of a peer review with other children (their same age) who have learned some techniques of facilitating, of asking questions, of being good listeners, and the issue there is, Ok, I’ve been hurt by authority – you know, as a child – but I’ll listen to my brothers and sisters. But I won’t listen to moms and dads or other adults who have abused me. So that’s a generalization that can be helpful. So, I’m really big on schools developing peer support and education and help. Because we have healthy children who understand the children who are having the challenges, and they need a venue, they need an opportunity – a structured opportunity – where they can have that interaction.