

Chapter 7: Curriculum Implementation

“The keys to success in implementation... are experience, sensitivity to people’s needs, flexibility in the face of changing circumstances, keeping an eye on long-term goals, and a sense of humor (Green & Kreuter, 1999).”

After reading this chapter, the reader will be able to:

- ▶ Apply the knowledge gained about the target group to the implementation of interactive activities.
- ▶ Abstract information from the needs assessment for direct use by the target group while implementing the curriculum.
- ▶ Implement the substance abuse prevention curriculum in a safe and controlled environment and in such a way as to engage all learners.

Overview

This chapter provides examples of how to use the knowledge gained about the target group to make the activities in the curriculum more meaningful to the specific audience. It also walks the reader through the process of selecting and implementing activities using a mock target group. The chapter concludes with some general guidelines and tips on how best to implement the activities selected to achieve maximum results.

Applying the Knowledge Gained About the Target Group to the Implementation of Interactive Activities

After conducting the needs assessment of the target group and reading relevant sections of Chapters 4, 5, and 6 that relate to the characteristics of the group, the prevention leader will be in a unique position to better connect with youth.

Information regarding the substance(s) being used and/or abused; knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors regarding substance abuse; and environmental risk factors surrounding the members of the target group, as well as the risk factors associated with school bonding and academic performance, are all summarized in the Curriculum Report and can be used in the implementation

of the activities selected. Information collected through interviews or existing reports on the prevalence and trends of substance use in the target group’s community and school and the incidence of drug-related hospitalizations/treatments and crime in the community, as well as other information at the community level, can also be used to center the discussion portion of some activities on issues that hit closer to home rather than using national or state data, which could be less meaningful to the youth. Similarly, information collected through surveys and/or focus groups with members of the target group will provide more detailed information on youths’ knowledge, attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs regarding substance use. This information can serve as a guide to the issues that should be openly discussed during some interactive activities.

Information about the problems surrounding target group members has been collected and/or reviewed in other chapters of the *Handbook*. In addition, information on how to enhance protective factors and facts particular to age and developmental stage, environmental setting, and culture/ethnicity has been reviewed. Thus, interactive activity sessions can be better guided, moderated, and concluded. This knowledge can be used to better communicate with members of the target group—to know how to approach them and what (or what not) to expect from them. Age and/or grade-level information can be used to weigh the depth of the discussions, present the messages, and reach youth. An effort should also be made to incorporate cultural values and traditions into the implementation of the activity. The “Practical Points” listed in the Curriculum Report are a good source of tips on particular issues that should be stressed with youth exhibiting particular demographic characteristics. Some of these points might have already been used in the selection of interactive activities and/or prevention materials; there are, however, many others that can be used during the implementation of activities, and it is recommended that these points be reviewed again.

Following are some examples of how some of the information in the reference chapters (4, 5, and 6) might be used in implementing activities.

Gender

The chapter on risk factors, age, and geographic considerations (Chapter 4) indicates that: “Girls and young women report using alcohol or other drugs to enhance mood, boost confidence, relieve tension, cope with problems, lessen inhibitions, enhance sex, or lose weight. Boys and young men are more likely to use substances to enhance their social status or for sensation seeking (CASA, 2003).” Included as Practical Points are suggestions to try to address and, perhaps, provide alternative outlets to the reported underlying motivations for substance abuse among both female and male adolescents. These recommendations can be followed on a continuous basis, regardless of the type of interactive activity to be implemented. However, in those instances in which the formation of small groups may work for an activity, separating the sexes and weaving these themes into the discussions may be helpful.

Age

The list of facts for the grade level that corresponds to the target group can help in understanding what should be expected from youth of that age group. For instance, “children in grades 4 to 6 are able to handle complex ideas and will not be satisfied with a simple answer.” One Practical Point for this age group is to “encourage open and frank discussions of concerns about drugs and substance abuse.” Thus, these two pieces of information should be kept in mind while conducting a group discussion that is part of an interactive activity. Providing more elaborate answers to questions raised by members of the target group is preferable to giving a “yes” or “no” answer. Likewise, information regarding surveys (i.e., “Drug Use Trends and Attitudes of Children in Grades 4 to 6”) conducted with youth of the same grade level as the target group can be used to prompt discussions among group members. For instance, surveys with children in grades 4 to 6 indicate that the most important reasons for using alcohol and marijuana are to “fit in with others” and “feel older.” Children in the target group can discuss whether they agree or disagree with that statement and why. The same statistical data can be used to show the target group that most youth of the same age do not use drugs.

Geographic Location

One demographic characteristic that is more common in rural areas than elsewhere is the lack of job opportunities. This makes it harder for rural youth to see any financial benefit to attendance at or success in school. One practical point to exercise with rural youth is expressing the value of education, stressing the financial benefit to attendance at and success in school, and stimulating youth to increase their educational aspirations. These concepts can be discussed, for example, during the implementation of an interactive activity that deals with goals for the future.

Race/Ethnicity

In the chapter on race, ethnicity, and culture (Chapter 5) there is information regarding the language to be used when preparing materials for interactive activities aimed at new immigrants. For instance, certain colloquialisms can make verbal messages in an activity more realistic and, thus, more credible. Also, since immigrants are likely to identify more strongly with their native cultural values than with those of the United States, when the target group comprises members of other cultures, actions should be framed in the styles, norms, and behaviors of those cultures. For instance, while implementing an activity that deals with the importance of the family, the discussion should be geared to the preferred family structure (e.g., nuclear or extended, one generation or multigenerational) of the majority of the members of the target group. Other attitudes and values shared among the members of the target group should be incorporated into group discussions and other activities.

Another example of using the information on a specific race/ethnicity relates to the American Indian culture, in which elders hold a high position in most tribes, and their wisdom, knowledge, and beliefs are honored. For example, an older tribal leader could be asked to participate in an activity by giving a talk to the group.

Selecting and Implementing Interactive Activities Using a Mock Target Group

The following section describes a mock target group and institutional resources for the purpose of demonstrating how to use the information gathered in the needs assessment to select and implement interactive activities.

Mock Target Group Information

The target group profile information was collected through existing sources and interviews with community leaders and school officials.

Mock Target Group Profile

The target group consists of 30 adolescents in 7th grade attending a middle school in an inner-city community. The group gender distribution is 55 percent male and 45 percent female. The youth are 12 and 13 years old. The racial/ethnic makeup of the group is predominantly African American (73 percent). The rest are Hispanic/Latino (17 percent), Asian American/Pacific Islander (7 percent), and non-Hispanic white (3 percent). The setting for this group is a regular public school classroom.

The school is situated in an urban location characterized by a high prevalence of crime and illegal substance abuse, ready availability and easy access to drugs, an abundance of alcoholic beverage outlets and alcohol sales to minors, high exposure to alcohol and tobacco advertising, and unclear community and cultural norms regarding substance abuse. The predominant substance use problems in the community involve alcohol, tobacco, marijuana, cocaine, crack, PCP, and morphine. The inhabitants of the area face racial discrimination and feel that their culture is devalued in American society.

Institutional Information

Background

The school, while situated in a neighborhood that has many environmental risk factors for substance abuse, has established substance abuse policies that are clear and generally enforced; however, the school has no formal substance abuse prevention program. In the past, the school has included substance abuse

prevention as a short unit within the health education curriculum. The unit includes 2 hours of instruction using a didactic approach and a single activity related to the effects of substance abuse on different systems of the body using a video followed by class discussion. The teachers indicated that the students were more engaged with the activity than with the lecture, and they recommended using the activity. The school has recently encountered a few incidents of substance abuse on school property, particularly tobacco and marijuana use among 8th graders, and officials are aware of alcohol use by students at parties. The school now wishes to address the problem through increased substance abuse prevention instruction in the classroom.

Resources Available

The school has decided to allot 16 hours of class time for implementing new substance abuse prevention efforts. It has a budget of \$120 for each teacher to use in obtaining substance abuse prevention materials. The school has available the following facilities for use during drug prevention activities: all-purpose room, gymnasium, classroom, computer lab, media center/library, and playground. The following equipment is also available: overhead projector, VCR/TV, tape recorder, and computers. In this scenario, the teacher has a school counselor and a room parent available to assist with substance abuse prevention efforts, when needed.

The survey and focus group data were analyzed and organized according to their relevance to each substance abuse prevention content area. In addition, information taken from interviews with community leaders and school officials was incorporated into this analysis. The results are described in the following paragraphs.

Normative Education

Based on survey and focus group data, members of the target group believe that levels of alcohol and substance abuse are much greater than they actually are. For instance, 40, 33, and 10 percent of the adolescents have used alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana in the past year, respectively; however, 45 percent of those surveyed believe that these numbers are much higher. One focus group comment

was: “Just about everyone I know does some kind of drug.”

Perceived Harm

The survey results indicate that 35 percent of the youth do not perceive using drugs, particularly alcohol and tobacco, as harmful. Focus group findings also show that the adolescents do not think it is harmful to try drugs once and believe that marijuana makes people more creative. Focus group comments include: “I heard marijuana makes people more creative,” and “It’s okay to try things once.”

Refusal Skills

According to focus groups, several of the youth mentioned that it is not difficult for them to say no to an offer of drugs or alcohol, particularly when the offer is coming from a friend. Survey results indicate that 90 percent of the youth would feel comfortable refusing to do something they didn’t want to do when asked by a peer. However, one focus group comment included: “It’s hard to say no to a friend.”

Protective Factors

Existing data and interviews with community leaders suggest that the neighborhood is plagued with crime, illicit substance abuse, and alcohol and tobacco sales to minors. The attitude of the community toward substance abuse is one of indifference. Another risk factor noted in interviews is racial discrimination in the form of lack of police protection and poor public health care facilities. Interviews with school officials indicate a strong antidrug policy with somewhat strict enforcement. There have been a few incidents of substance abuse on the school grounds, particularly tobacco and marijuana use among 8th graders. Survey results indicate that adult supervision is lacking at parties. A high proportion of surveyed adolescents indicate that they often feel unsafe in their neighborhood and that they spend most of their afterschool time hanging out with friends socially. Very few report being involved in non-school-related activities. Overall, a vast majority of surveyed adolescents report not having strong bonds with school and feeling that schoolwork is not relevant to their future goals. Similar findings were obtained from focus groups, which reiterate the lack of safety around the neighborhood, high exposure and easy access to

drugs, and lack of interest in school and future goal setting. Focus groups also indicate that the youth are exposed to multiple family problems, including physical and psychological abuse and a high level of stress due to financial strains. Comments from focus groups include: “Hanging out on the street drinking is just something grownups do around here,” and “Man, I always see dudes doing drugs.”

Social Influences

Focus group findings indicate that these youth watch a lot of television at night, including music videos by their favorite artists that promote the use of drugs and alcohol. These videos relate the use of drugs and alcohol to increased sex appeal. Findings also indicate that the youth are exposed to multiple family problems, including drug and alcohol use by parents. The youth indicate that their role models are rap stars such as Sean “Puff Daddy” Combs, TLC, and Will Smith. Data from interviews, focus groups, and surveys all indicate that these youth are exposed to excessive amounts of tobacco and alcohol advertising through billboards and bus signs. Survey data indicate that they spend a lot of time hanging out with their friends and that their friends tend to be involved in undesirable activities (skipping school, drinking, going out without parental permission). Focus group comments include: “The most popular kids do drugs.”

Social Skills

Survey and focus group data suggest that these youth have difficulty communicating and tend to act impulsively. There are also indications of a lack of self-esteem and of trust toward peers and adults. The focus group discussion reflected a lack of decision-making and problem-solving skills. When asked about the scenario of getting a ride home with a friend’s father who has had too much to drink, a common response of focus group participants was: “I wouldn’t know what to say to my friend’s dad. I would just sit in the back of the car and pray I get home safely.”

When the hypothetical information described above was entered into the Curriculum Builder, it automatically identified activities that matched the demographic characteristics of the target group, its drug abuse problem, and the available resources.

Selecting Activities for the Mock Target Group

In selecting appropriate activities for the mock target group, the first consideration is the comprehensiveness of the curriculum: ensuring that all prevention content areas and as many learning styles as possible are covered. The following activities are selected: *Drug Danger: In the Body* video; *Mara's Breathtaking Story* video; *Refusal Skills* CD; *Goals for the Future* lesson plan, and *Most People Don't Use Drugs* lesson plan. Based on their descriptions, these activities cover all six content areas and engage visual, auditory, and tactile/kinesthetic learning styles.

Next, content areas that need more emphasis in the curriculum (based on the needs assessment) are addressed. It is important to focus on finding activities related to social skills, perceived harm, and protective factors, because it is in these content areas that the analysis shows the greatest need. The following activities are selected: *Stress and Exercise* lesson plan, *Assessing Messages* lesson plan, *Science Role Plays*, and *Stamps on Black History—Speech*.

While selecting activities from the list generated of “Best Matches,” the Practical Points relating to the following demographic characteristics are reviewed and considered: gender (“Practical Points: Gender Differences”); age (“Grade 7 and 8”); geographic distribution (“Inner-City/Urban Communities”); and culture/ethnicity (“Reaching Youth of Different Racial/Ethnic/Cultural Backgrounds,” “African-American Youth,” and “Multicultural Youth”). For example, the activity *Stress and Exercise* is selected because it fills a need for activities that engage the kinesthetic learning style, but it is also selected because of the Practical Point related to youth living in an inner-city/urban community that states “encourage healthful leisure activities as a way to cope with stress, such as sports, music, art, clubs, and volunteering.” There may be other activities that engage the kinesthetic learning style but do not stress the Practical Point.

Another example is the activity *Stamps on Black History—Speech*, which is chosen to further emphasize the content areas of social skills and protective factors. There are other activities that also relate to those two content areas; however, a practical point in the section on working with African-American youth reads, “Praise and use as positive role models contemporary and historical figures who have specific

significance for African-American youth.” This leads to the selection of this activity because it involves Dr. Martin Luther King, a well-known and beloved African American.

Additional activities are selected until the available resources are depleted. All activities selected are checked for compliance with the school's substance abuse policies.

Implementing Selected Activities for the Mock Target Group

The previous section showed how to select activities in a manner that ensures that the curriculum is comprehensive, engages a variety of learning styles, and is customized as much as possible to the target group (in this case, the mock target group). Much of the information gathered during the needs assessment may not immediately seem useful, but it will lead to a better understanding of the target group. Implementation of the activities will be better for having that knowledge.

In this section, examples are provided that demonstrate how the collected information on the mock target group can be used to assist in the implementation of an activity to make it more meaningful to this group.

Activity: Music video

Description: The purpose of this activity is to have the youth develop music videos with antidrug themes.

Materials: No educational materials are required for this activity; however, the youth can bring in CDs or tapes containing their favorite music. They can write their own lyrics to the music or use the music as background in their videos.

Customizing: The activity itself is not customized toward any specific demographic characteristic or substance abuse problem; however, it can be customized somewhat to the group's specific needs by guiding the subject matter to the substance use problems most relevant to the mock target group: tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana.

Implementation: To implement this activity in a manner that is meaningful to the mock target group, it is important to use as much of the information that has been gathered as possible. This includes information

collected from existing sources, interviews, the survey, focus groups, and from reading the reference chapters (4, 5, and 6). In looking for existing information on the target population, the police department sent a report on the rise in arrests for marijuana possession among youth (including 7th graders) in the area. The report was given to three of the groups so they could include the data in the development of the music videos.

In this community, the local church is a center of much activity, especially with respect to youth. The youth minister was interviewed to obtain his thoughts regarding local youth and their involvement with drugs. He provided information, including that the majority of the drug activity is confined to a small area, which is the turf of a local gang, near the school. Other neighborhoods are relatively safe and drug free. Most of the youth are unmotivated at school and many face hardships at home, such as lack of parental supervision, abuse (physical and emotional), and parents who abuse drugs. Using this information in the classroom, one group of adolescents was asked to incorporate the negative influence of gangs into their video, and another group was asked to incorporate the positive influence of a close-knit family on young African Americans.

From the classroom survey, it was learned that the majority of the youth believe that the level of substance abuse is much higher than it actually is. In response, it was reiterated to the class that most adolescents do not use drugs, and the youth were asked to include this fact in their videos.

The focus groups revealed that these youth regard many myths about alcohol and drugs as true. In implementing this activity, an effort was made to dispel many of the myths about alcohol and marijuana as the class was actively writing the music and lyrics for the videos. This was done through impromptu leader comments and suggestions. Based on reading pertinent sections of the reference chapters and scanning the Practical Points that pertained to the target group, the following points were highlighted:

- ▶ High-risk youth: Celebrity ex-addicts and recovering individuals should not be used to promote prevention in general, but they are particularly contraindicated for high-risk youth because these youngsters have a tendency toward negative identification. That

is, they may forget the problem message and perceive instead the idea that the celebrity was great even when he or she was on drugs.

- ▶ Grades 7 and 8: Substance abuse prevention activities for youth in grades 7 and 8 should not glamorize substance abuse through the acceptance of drug-using behavior by some folk heroes such as musicians, actors, and athletes.
- ▶ Inner-city/urban youth: Substance abuse prevention activities for youth living in inner-city/urban communities should use positive role models and involve youth in creating videotape documentaries and music videos.
- ▶ African-American youth: Important messages to be considered in the implementation of interactive activities for African-American youth include incorporating African-American art forms and culture-specific curriculum materials into substance abuse prevention efforts.

Each of these points was helpful in responding to student questions and comments and in making this activity successful in the classroom.

Additional information that was learned while reading the reference chapters and was useful in implementing this activity includes:

- ▶ Facts about the immediate, unpleasant effects of alcohol and other substance abuse (e.g., bad breath, stained teeth and fingers, and burned clothing) are more likely to make an impression on adolescents ages 13 to 14 than are facts about getting lung cancer or heart disease in several decades.
- ▶ Liquor stores are the most common form of small business in African-American inner-city communities. Visible advertisements (billboards) proclaiming the message that drinking is fashionable inundate the streets of urban central-city communities. In addition, the use of athletic heroes as marketing representatives in commercials for alcohol strongly affects the susceptibilities of African-American adolescents, particularly males.

- ▶ Substance abuse prevention programs and, hence, interactive activities, for African Americans will be most effective when they take into consideration the particular needs of this minority group and reflect the culture, values, and norms of African Americans. These youth respond to different media and in some cases have created totally new means of communication—for instance, rap music. To reach African-American youth with effective messages and materials, including interactive activities, it is essential to get inside their culture and listen to their personal stories of struggle, survival, and success.

General Guidelines and Tips for Implementing Activities

Prevention leaders have varied experience working with youth in structured environments. While youth leaders and teachers may have ample education, training, and experience in the management and guidance of their target groups—which is essential for the implementation of prevention activities—other leaders may find themselves with a daunting task and little experience to guide them. Because there are a few distinctions between prevention activities and more traditional educational activities, both more and less experienced prevention leaders may benefit from the following guidelines.

Ground Rules

Those who regularly work with children and adolescents know that clear boundaries can help render the learning environment more productive and efficient. Setting rules before conducting an interactive activity, including rules for appropriate behavior and the consequences of violations, is important. The act of establishing ground rules can be incorporated into the lesson as an exercise in team building and group process. Possible rules might be:

- ▶ No “put-downs” will be tolerated.
- ▶ Everyone should participate.
- ▶ Everyone has the right to “pass.”
- ▶ All information is confidential (nothing leaves the room).
- ▶ There should be no inappropriate self-disclosure.
- ▶ Interrupting is not allowed.
- ▶ Talking while others are talking is not allowed.

Possible consequences might be:

- ▶ A warning on first offense.
- ▶ Sitting out one session.
- ▶ Separation from the class.
- ▶ Removal from the class.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality should be stressed to the entire group; however, participants must be warned about making inappropriate self-disclosures and that it is the leader’s duty to report dangerous or illegal activity to the police. All members of the group should be reminded to keep what is said in the class private.

Facilitating

Prevention leaders play several roles during interactive activities, and these can vary depending on the activity. As managers, they are responsible for the administration of the activity and adherence to the ground rules; as teachers, they are responsible for conveying accurate information to the group; as facilitators, they provide direction and support for the group or activity and evaluation, if needed; and as advocates, they support the children or adolescents, help solve problems, and help unruly youth become productive contributors to the group. Finally, they are models of healthy, responsible behaviors.

Controlling Students

Active learning can sometimes get loud and/or overly energetic. To keep youth in check, it is important to listen actively and be alert to all members of the group. Invoke ground rules, including consequences for breaking the rules, and be prepared to enforce them. Praise good behavior and ignore poor behavior, if possible. Using good-natured humor is another way to keep youth from misbehaving, but it must not be sarcastic or negative. Connect with the members of the group on a personal level; making such connections can lead to fewer behavior problems.

Conclusions

This *Handbook* and the accompanying Web-based *Curriculum Guide* are complementary tools designed to help prevention leaders plan for and assemble their own substance abuse prevention curricula. The *Handbook* describes the substance abuse problem in the United States; provides the scientific foundations of substance abuse prevention, including the importance of using interactive activities; and shows how to conduct a needs assessment of a target group and apply the findings to the assembly of a substance abuse prevention curriculum.

In addition, to further enrich the knowledge and understanding of their target groups, prevention leaders have been provided with in-depth information about risk and protective factors for substance abuse. The specific ways in which gender, age, geographic location, and race/ethnicity characteristics can relate to substance abuse risk have also been described in great detail. By understanding the potential interrelationship between these characteristics and substance abuse risk, prevention leaders can apply the appropriate information to their situations and to the selection and implementation of prevention activities.

By following the steps in this *Handbook*, prevention leaders become more knowledgeable about and invested in the process of prevention and, thus, better prepared for success. When used in combination with the Web-based Curriculum Builder, the otherwise time-consuming process of identifying and selecting activities becomes a practical reality. The result of this hands-on process is a curriculum—not one taken off a shelf and forced to fit, but one that is designed to the specific needs of a target group—something unique in the field of substance abuse prevention.

References

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