

Booster Lessons

Reinforce Effectiveness

Booster Lesson 1

Motivating Resistance to Drugs

Goals

1. To remind students of the costs of drug use as a means of motivating resistance
2. To increase resistance self-efficacy by helping students understand the nature and variety of pressures to use drugs and by providing practice in resisting them
3. To motivate resistance by presenting new information about problems with drugs

“Prevention is an ongoing process; one-shot programs simply aren’t enough,” observes Phyllis Ellickson, Ph.D., a senior behavioral scientist at RAND and project director for the research and design of Project ALERT. “As kids mature, they acquire new friends and ways of perceiving the world, changes that mean they need continued reinforcement for resisting drugs.”

That’s why the Project ALERT booster lessons delivered in year two of the program are critical to continuing the results of the core curriculum.

According to RAND research, the three booster lessons convert positive trends gained from the initial eleven lessons into statistically significant changes. Gains, such as the curbing of current and regular smoking, are strongly enhanced. The prevention of pot initiation and diminishment of current use are also maintained. If teachers neglect these three booster lessons, the positive results of the core curriculum will erode.

Boosters Strengthen Earlier Lessons

The 45-minute booster lessons, delivered over three consecutive weeks, reinforce material learned the previous year. As in the core curriculum, the booster lessons support two main goals:

- to motivate resistance to drugs; and,
- to practice resisting internal and external pressures to use drugs.

While the core and booster lessons share identical goals, new audio visual materials, handouts and activities keep the material fresh. The videos – *Paul’s Fix* and *Resisting Peer Pressure: Teenagers Speak Out* – serve as catalysts for student skits and discussions.

In addition to a review of the gateway drugs covered in the core curriculum, booster lessons caution students about potential next-stage drugs like cocaine and hallucinogens. “By eighth grade, students may start hearing about or feeling pressure to use these harder drugs,” explains Louise Miller, RAND curriculum specialist and Project ALERT trainer.

For the past four years, CASA, The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University, has conducted a Back-to-School survey of teens, teachers and principals to examine attitudes on substance abuse.

This year’s survey reveals for the first time how dramatically the world changes when an American 12-year-old turns 13. The report’s findings are quite clear that in no other year does a child’s access to drugs, and attitude about drugs, shift so abruptly.

Specifically, the report finds that:

A 13-year-old is almost three times likelier to know a teen who uses acid, cocaine or heroin than a 12-year-old is.

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Booster Lesson 2

Practice Resisting External and Internal Pressures

Goals

1. To increase resistance self-efficacy by reviewing external and internal pressures and helping students understand them
2. To provide students with practice resisting external and internal pressures

Booster Lesson 3

Benefits of Resisting Drugs

Goals

1. To increase resistance self-efficacy by providing students with practice resisting pressures
2. To help students understand that resistance is easier if they support each other
3. To increase resistance motivation by discussing the benefits of non-use

Booster Lessons Reinforce Effectiveness (cont'd from p. 1)

A 13-year-old is more than three times likelier to be able to buy pot, and to buy acid, cocaine or heroin. He/she is almost three times likelier to know a student drug seller and more than three times likelier to be unwilling to report a student using drugs.

A 13-year-old is far less likely to be afraid of getting caught using illegal drugs, to rely on parents rather than friends in making important decisions, to find an adult home after school and to tell parents where they go after school.

For teachers who wish to discuss drugs prevalent in their own region, data can be accessed through The National Clearinghouse on Drug and Alcohol Information, state health departments, or surveys conducted by local school districts.

The interactive booster lessons address the students' greater maturity, exposure to new situations and potential for more pressure. The lessons start out by asking kids to talk about how they are different this year and how pressures may have increased. Skits, such as internal pressure scenarios, reflect how their "self-talk" may have changed between seventh and eighth grades.

"Interactivity really is a fail-safe plan to ensure the curriculum meets kids where they are in time, maturity and experience," notes Ellickson. "You are always building on what the students bring to the classroom."

New activities add an extra dimension to the previous learning experience. For instance, Booster Lesson 3 asks students to discuss how friends can help each other say "no." "We felt kids giving positive reinforcement to each other strengthened the whole process of learning resistance skills," explains Ellickson.

Bridge to ALERT Plus

The eighth-grade booster lessons serve as a natural segue to ALERT Plus, which will maintain the benefits of Project ALERT as students progress through high school. Currently under development by RAND, ALERT Plus addresses the needs of high school students who often experience greater exposure to unsupervised settings, easier access to hard drugs, and vulnerability to becoming dependent. ALERT Plus will emphasize continued resistance training

and parent involvement as well as longer, more focused discussions, techniques for quitting, and community involvement.

Importance of Fidelity

Miller encourages teachers to follow the validated format:

- Implement all three booster lessons;
- Adhere to the 45-minute class length;
- Conduct lessons over three consecutive weeks.

"Each lesson builds on the previous one and each activity reinforces an activity that occurred the year earlier," notes Ellickson. "Research results were based on implementing the curriculum as designed. We don't know what will happen if you leave pieces out or change the activities dramatically. It's important to follow the curriculum if you want to maximize its effect."

Training Encouraged

Miller encourages school districts to send booster lesson teachers to one-day training workshops along with their core curriculum counterparts. "Attending such a workshop will increase their understanding of the booster lesson goals and proper teaching style," says Miller. "Attention to fidelity in the implementation of the booster lessons optimizes results gained from the Project ALERT core curriculum."

"Research shows that kids who start using drugs before age 15 are much more likely to become heavy users - and to have lots of other problems," states Ellickson. "If all we do is delay initiation, or the transition from experimenting to regular use, we will have accomplished a lot."



Enthusiastic trainer Teri McHale shares teaching strategies in a teacher workshop.

The Importance of

Smoking Cessation

The University of Michigan's *Monitoring the Future Survey* found that smoking increased by 30% among 8th graders in a recent 4-year period.

Another study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has determined that more than 3,000 youth under the age of 18 now become regular smokers each day.

And, Join Together, a national resource center for communities working to reduce substance abuse, is reporting that each year merchants illegally sell 947 million packs of cigarettes to minors and 26 million containers of chewing tobacco.

Longitudinal research found that Project ALERT curbed occasional, weekly and daily cigarette smoking among pre-program cigarette experimenters and achieved a 50 - 60% reduction of heavy smoking among experimenters.

Intervention Plays a Role

In contrast to Project ALERT's prevention focus, Core Lesson 10: *Smoking Cessation* is directed at a specific group - regular smokers. It helps motivate them to stop smoking and models successful quitting behavior.

The lesson is included for two key reasons:

- While most young people don't smoke, there are plenty of middle grade students who do. According to the 1998 *Monitoring the Future Survey*, 19.1% of all 8th graders smoked cigarettes in the last month.
- Research shows that we can avoid alienating current users by including a lesson on smoking cessation which acknowledges that some middle schoolers do smoke.

Something for Everyone

Lesson 10 is designed to benefit all students. It drives home the nature of addiction and provides additional motivation not to experiment.

Many middle schoolers are concerned about their friends or family members who smoke. The smoking cessation lesson gives guidance to nonsmokers on how to help others quit.

In addition, it provides everyone with a model of how to go about changing other habits or unhealthy behavior — overeating, biting nails, shoplifting, drinking, eating too much junk food, cheating or fighting with parents.

Short-term Versus Long-term

Project ALERT stresses the immediate and short-term consequences of substance use because research on adolescents indicates that teenagers tend to discount long-term risks. Activities stress how drugs can affect students now in their daily lives and social relationships.

There are numerous immediate benefits, if a smoker quits. Typical lists generated by students include the following good things you get from quitting:

- breathe better
- whiter teeth
- not nervous
- better health
- don't smell
- family happy
- better at sports
- don't lose friends
- save money

Health benefits that follow within minutes and days of quitting, as well as long-term benefits, have been identified by the American Lung Association.

After Quitting For:

20 Minutes

- Blood pressure decreases
- Pulse rate drops
- Body temperature of hands and feet increases

8 Hours

- Carbon monoxide level in blood drops to normal
- Oxygen level in blood increases to normal

24 Hours

- Chance of heart attack decreases

48 Hours

- Nerve endings start regrowing
- Ability to smell and taste is enhanced

2 Weeks to 3 Months

- Circulation improves
- Walking becomes easier
- Lung function increases

1 to 9 Months

- Coughing, sinus congestion, fatigue, shortness of breath decrease

1 Year

- Excess risk of coronary heart disease is decreased to half that of a smoker

5 to 15 Years

- Stroke risk is reduced to that of someone who has never smoked
- Risk of lung cancer drops to as little as half that of a smoker
- Risk of cancer of the mouth, throat, esophagus, bladder, kidney and pancreas decreases
- Risk of ulcer decreases

1998 Prevalence of Use Statistics

More and more young people are using drugs. And when students think everyone is doing it ...using tobacco, marijuana, alcohol or inhalants ...they may feel more pressure to use them, too.

When students overestimate the number of their peers who are involved in drug use, they are less likely to perceive social support for refusing offers to use drugs. Actually, most youth don't use drugs.

As a Project ALERT teacher, you strive to make this point with your students in Core Lesson 4, Activity 3 – *The Prevalence of Use Activity*. To make your point with credibility, you need to be aware of current statistics.

The 1998 National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) *Monitoring the Future Study* reports the following national usage patterns for eighth graders:

- **19.1% smoked cigarettes in the last month**
- **9.7% used marijuana in the last month**
- **23% used alcohol in the last month**

Yes, the numbers are disturbing. But nationally, most young people don't use drugs!