Prevention Foundations and Why Scare Tactics Don’t Work

Rachael Kenter, MPH, OCPC, CHES
Director of Community Engagement Programs

Harim C. Ellis, OCPSA
Director Of Youth-Led Programs
Welcome!

Rachael Kenter
Director of Community Engagement Programs

Harim C. Ellis
Director of Youth-Led Prevention
Prevention
Action Alliance
Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

Leading healthy communities in preventing substance misuse and promoting mental health wellness.
Networks
- Ohio Youth Led Prevention Network (OYLPN)
- Statewide Prevention Coalition Association (SPCA)
- Problem Gambling Awareness
- Ohio College Initiative

Programs
- Get Set Before You Bet
- KNOW! Tips
- Parents Who Host Lose the Most
- Buzzkill

Events
- We Are the Majority
- Trainings
Learning Objectives

- Define the basic principles of the science of prevention
- Explain the context of where prevention strategies occur
- Describe why scare tactics do not work
Defining Prevention
The River

Trying to fix the problem before it grows.
Prevention Definition

• Promotes the health and safety of
  • Individuals
  • Communities

• Reduces the likelihood of or delays the onset of behavioral health problems
Continuum of Care
**Definitions**

**Risk Factors**
A characteristic at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precedes and is associated with a higher likelihood of problem outcomes.

**Protective Factors**
A characteristic at the individual, family, or community level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes.
Examples

Risk Factors

- Early Aggressive Behavior
- Availability
- Lack of Supervision
- Violence

Protective Factors

- Policies Limiting Access
- Resources Available
- Parental Involvement
- Limiting Access
Context

Societal
• Social and Cultural Norms, Health, Education, Social Policies

Community
• Schools, Neighborhoods, Workplaces

Relationship
• Social Circle, Partners, Family

Individual
• Biology, Personal History
• Prevention is ongoing

• Prevention should continue throughout the lifespan
  • Early childhood to adulthood
  • Strategies need to match development
Strategic Prevention Framework

Assessment

Evaluation

Sustainability and Cultural Competence

Implementation

Planning

Capacity
Outlines a process for communities and organizations to:

- Assess community needs
- Develop a model of change
- Enhance cultural competence
- Develop strategic plans
- Implement interventions
- Evaluate & sustain initiatives

Who has heard of the SPF before?
Categories of strategies

• Information Dissemination
• Community Based Process
• Problem Identification and Referral
• Alternative
• Education
• Environmental
It Doesn’t Have To Be Scary

At your table...

What comes to mind when you hear “Scare Tactics?”
Scare Tactics Defined

• Emphasizing the worst dangers of drug use in order to create fear and anxiety, in hopes that the **FEAR ALONE** will prevent or stop risky behaviors.
• Can you think of any examples of things that might be considered scare tactics?

• More importantly...why might people think that they are effective?
Scare Tactics

- Fear Based
- Seems Powerful
- “It Worked For Me”
- Gut Tells Us It Makes Sense
- Others Have Done It
Scare Tactics
Scare Tactics

Beware! Young and Old—People in All Walks of Life!

This may be handed you by the friendly stranger. It contains the Killer Drug "Marihuana"—a powerful narcotic in which lurks Murder! Insanity! Death!

WARNING!
Dope peddlers are shrewd! They may put some of this drug in the coffee or in the tobacco cigarette. Write for detailed information, enclosing 12 cents in postage—making cost.

Address: THE INTER-STATE NARCOTIC ASSOCIATION
53 W. Jackson Blvd. Chicago, Illinois, U.S.A.
• Montana Meth Project
  • A campaign to address the meth crisis impacting communities across Montana.
  • Television, radio, billboards graphically illustrated the worst consequences of meth use.

• But did it work?
• Nope.

• Perception of risky meth use decreased among youth
• Percentage of teens reporting they strongly approved of regular meth use increased four-fold.
• Teens reporting they strongly disapproved of meth use decreased each year of the campaign.
• 40% - 50% of teens indicated that many of the ads exaggerated the risks of meth use.
Scare Tactics Can Backfire

• People are defensive
• The youth filter
• Attractive to high risk groups
• Sending unintended messages
• People are Naturally Hardwired to Defend Against Negative Messaging
  • **Denial** – “It won’t happen to me”
  • **Avoidance** – “This is just too scary to think about”
  • **Countering with Skepticism** – “They’re trying to manipulate me” “I know people that use and they are fine”
  • **Message Mocking** – “This is your brain on drugs...with a side of bacon.”

• Sometimes the message is just too simple and provides no action.
Reason #2

- Young People Filter Information Differently Than Adults
  - Young People vs. Adults – decision making, impulsivity
  - Sensation seeking – don’t put on the brakes
  - Teens live in the moment
    - Emotions built from scare tactics don’t correspond to later decision making in reality
High Risk Groups can be More Attracted to Risky Behaviors

- Some youth are hard wired for more sensation-seeking behaviors/more impulsive
  - Their connection to “scare tactics”
  - Triggers defense mechanisms
  - Danger = Thrilling
- The more favorable the attitude toward a drug/behavior, the less the warnings will be believed
• Strong warnings can send unintended messages
  • Must be a widespread problem
  • Must be something that EVERYONE is doing
    • And now thinking they’re not “normal”
  • For youth already using, it validates their use
Alternative Options

• Focus on Positive Prevention Strategies
  • Avoid the natural instinct of what you’ve seen in the past
  • Engage in positive prevention programs that are evidence-based and ongoing
  • Rely on research; fear won’t help youth
  • Focus on building decision making, coping, and resistance skills with young people
People are Naturally Hardwired to Defend Against Negative Messaging

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Alternative Option

Don’t use “Don’t”

Teach youth what TO do instead

Practice building skills
Reason #2

Understand that teens brains are still underdeveloped.

It’s difficult for teens to make decisions during “sensation-seeking” opportunities.

Prepare them for important decision making.
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Their connection to "scare tactics"

Triggers defense mechanisms

Danger = Thrilling

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Reason #3

Teach preventative behaviors and positive alternatives

Avoid "preachy" messaging
Reason #4

Remember that young people are typically looking for social acceptance/wanting to fit in.

Don’t exaggerate the truth/sensationalize to make a point – be truthful.

Offer positive, educational messages and opportunities for behavioral change.
You are working with a school as a prevention specialist. The school wants to address drinking and driving by hosting a mock car crash and have a parent who has lost her child to a drunk driving accident. They ask your opinion, but you can tell they aren’t willing to change what they’re doing.

What do you do?
Interested in learning more?

• To purchase, please visit our online store at:

www.PreventionActionAlliance.org
Sources

• OhioMHAS Prevention Services Guidance Document Office of Prevention & Wellness August, 2016 (https://mha.ohio.gov/Portals/0/assets/Prevention/MHA-Prevention-Services-Guidance.pdf)


• Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.samhsa.gov/

