

# Prevention Foundations and Why Scare Tactics Don't Work

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Prevention  
Action Alliance

Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

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# Welcome!



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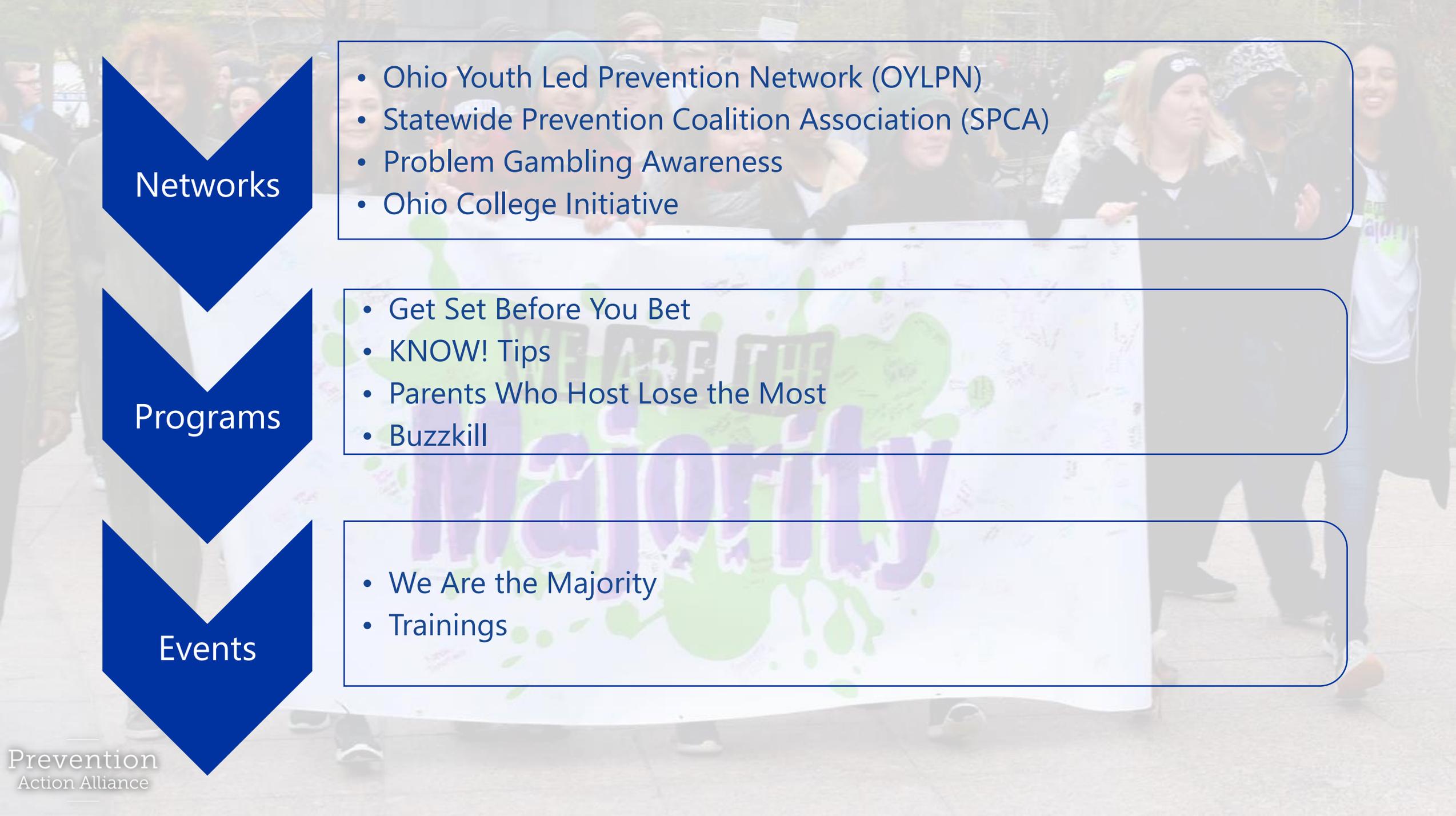
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# Prevention Action Alliance

Lifetime Prevention | Lifetime Wellness

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*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.





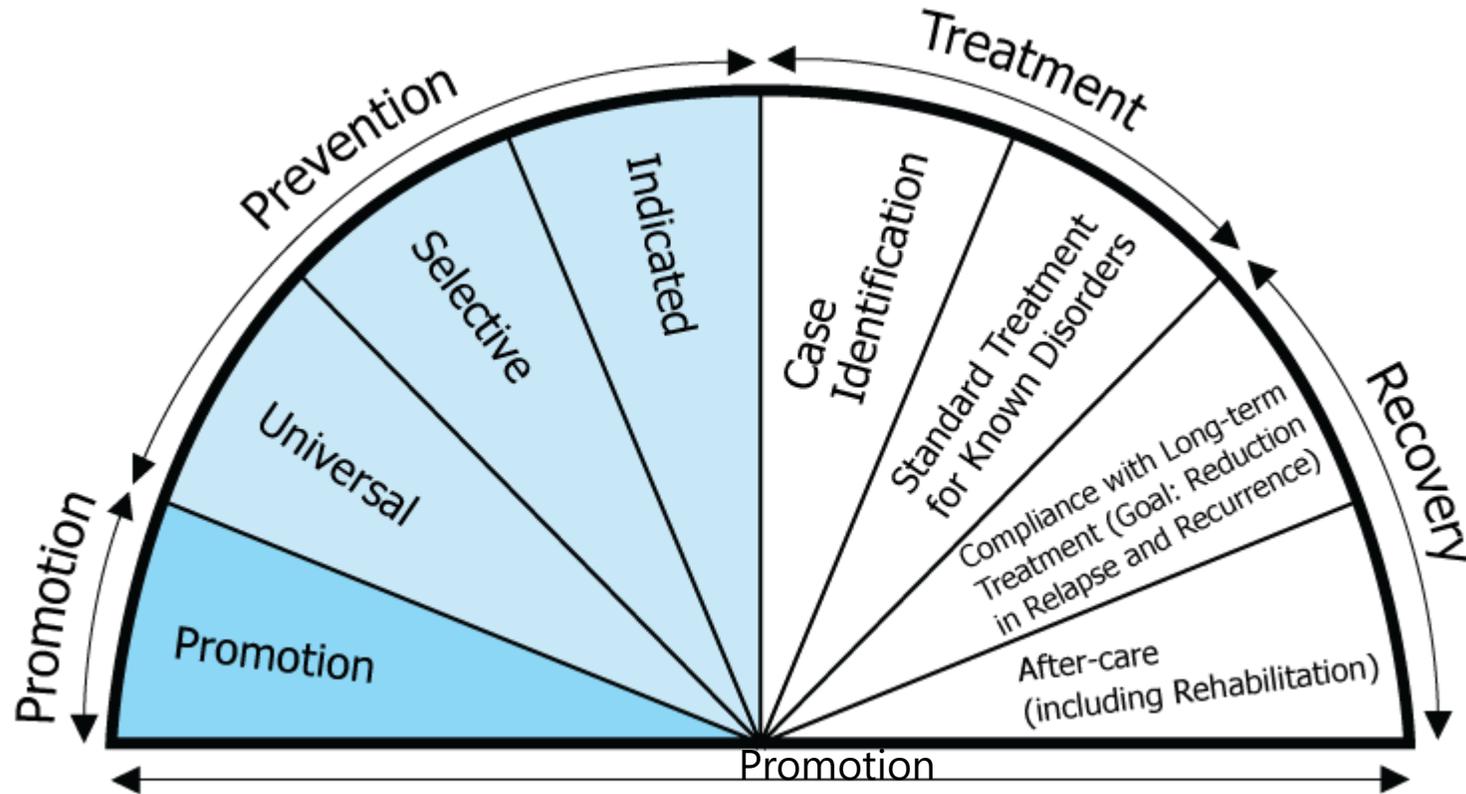
# Prevention Definition

- Promotes the health and safety of
  - Individuals
  - Communities
- Reduces the likelihood of or delays the onset of behavioral health problems





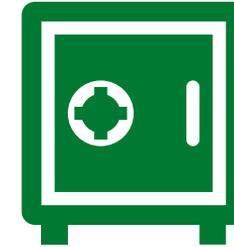
# Continuum of Care





## 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

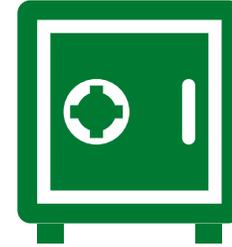
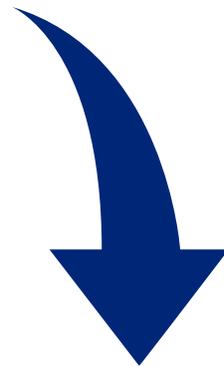


## Protective Factors

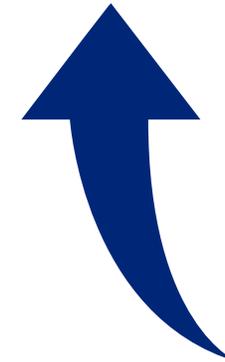
A characteristic at the individual, family, or community level that is associated with a lower likelihood of problem outcomes

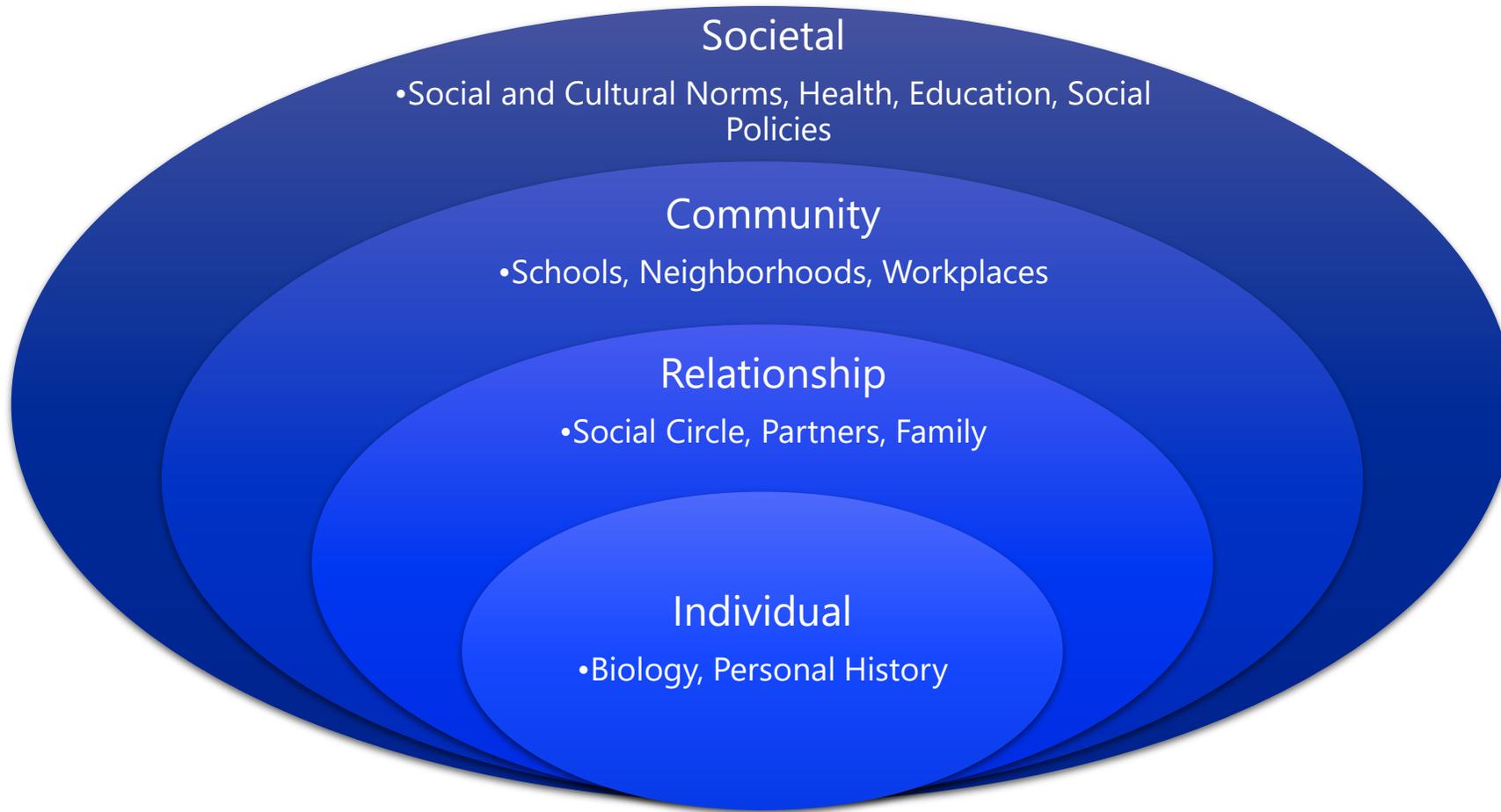


**Risk Factors**



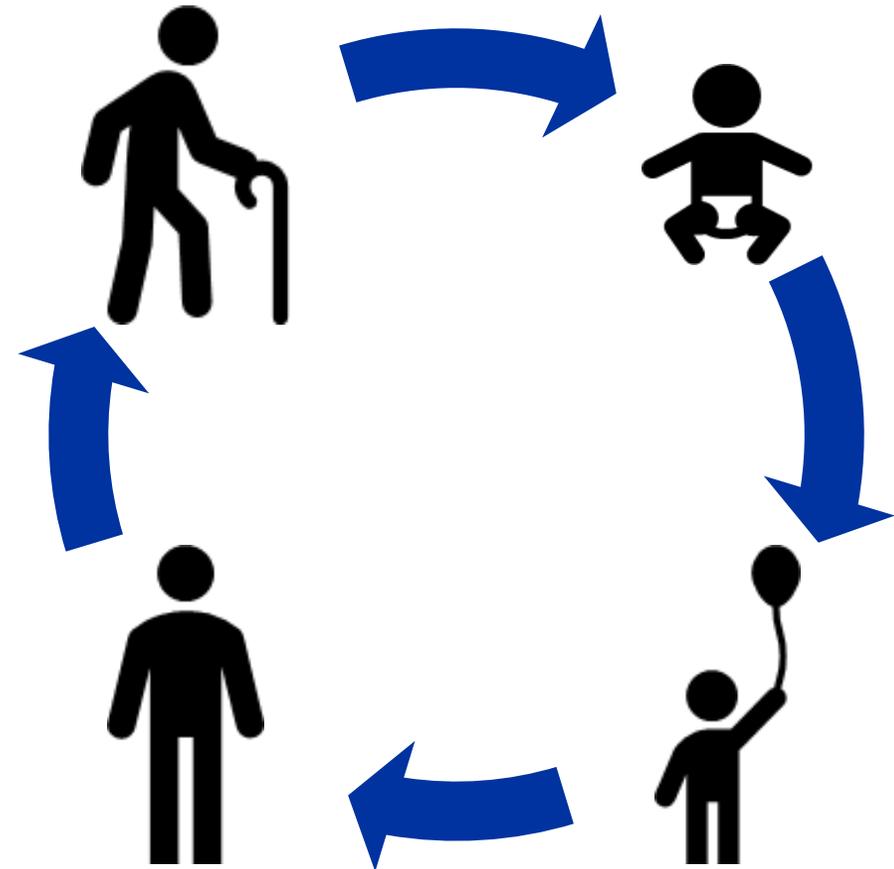
**Protective Factors**







- Prevention is ongoing
- Prevention should continue throughout the lifespan
  - Early childhood to adulthood
  - Strategies need to match development



# Strategic Prevention Framework



# Strategic Prevention Framework



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?

# Types of Strategies



## 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

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- 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.

# Examples

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- Can you think of any examples of things that might be considered scare tactics?
- More importantly...why might people think that they are effective?

**\*Trigger Warning\***

A solid blue horizontal bar at the bottom of the slide, with a solid green horizontal bar directly below it.

# Scare Tactics

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**Fear Based**

**Gut Tells Us It  
Makes Sense**

**Seems Powerful**

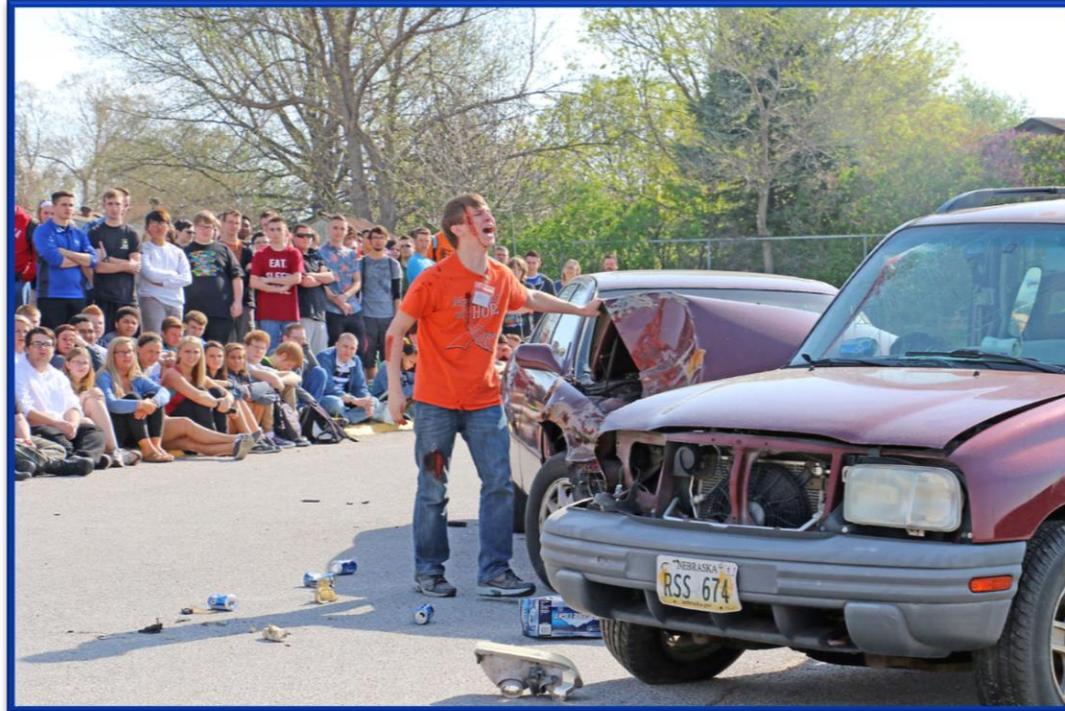
**“It Worked  
For Me”**

**Others Have  
Done It**

# Scare Tactics



# Scare Tactics



# 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  or  
in the  or in the tobacco cigarette.

WRITE FOR DETAILED INFORMATION, ENCLOSED 12 CENTS IN POSTAGE—MAILING COST

**Address: THE INTER-STATE NARCOTIC ASSOCIATION**  
(Incorporated not for profit)  
**53 W. Jackson Blvd. Chicago, Illinois, U. S. A.**

INTERNATIONAL FORCE is proud to have been recognized by the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps as a leading force in the fight against narcotics. The Force of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs is the only organization in the world that has been so honored. Write for more information today. U.S. POSTAGE 12c PER COPY

# Scare Tactics



# Example



- 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



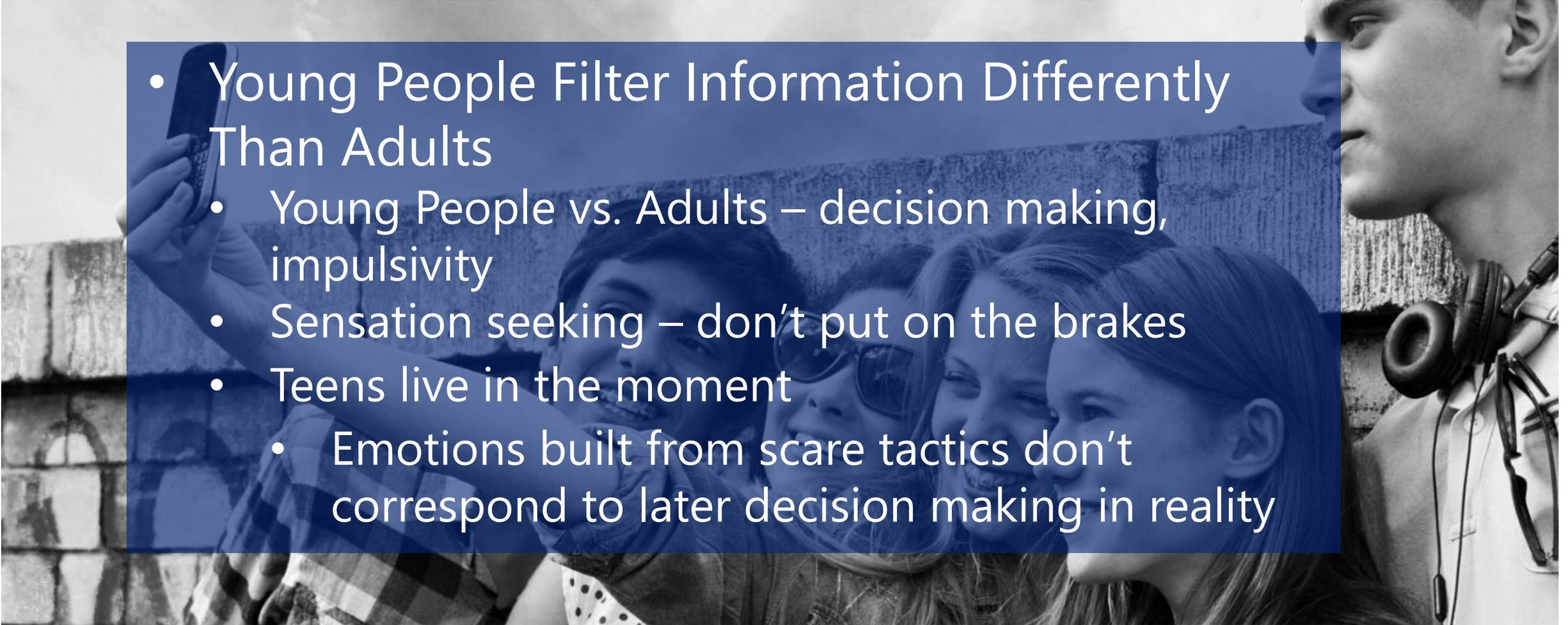
- People are Naturally Hardwired to Defend Against Negative Messaging
  - **Denial** – “It won’t happen to me”
  - **Avoidance** – “This is just too scary to think about”
  - **Countering with Skepticism** – “They’re trying to manipulate me” “I know people that use and they are fine”
  - **Message Mocking** – “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



# Reason #3



- 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

# Alternative Option



• People are Naturally Hardwired to Defend Against Negative Messaging

Don't use "Don't"

- **Denial** – "It won't happen to me"
- **Avoidance** – "This is just too scary to think about"

Teach youth what TO do instead

- **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 smile on your face"

Practice building skills

- Sometimes the message is just too simple and provides no action.



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



Teach preventative behaviors and  
positive alternatives

Avoid "preachy" messaging



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

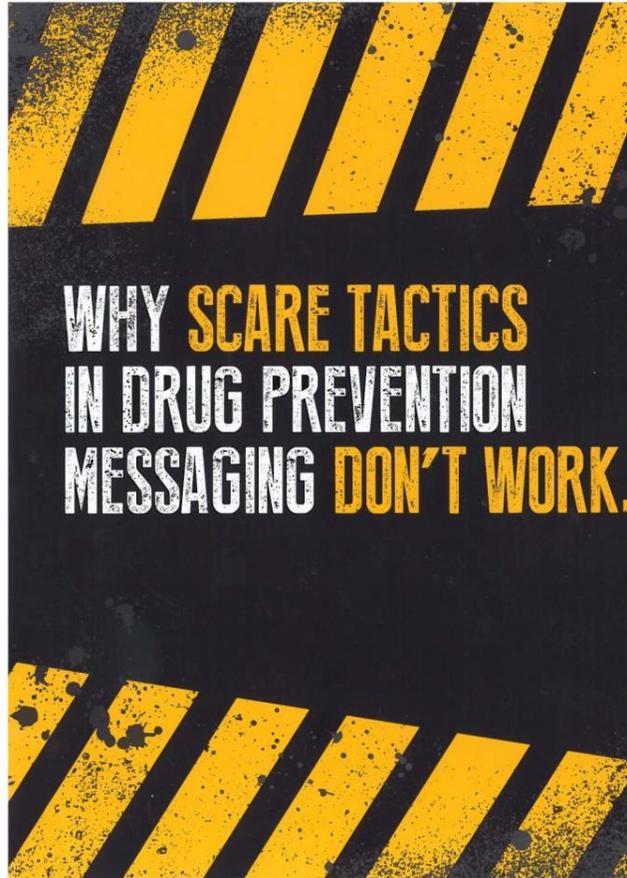
# So what can we do?



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](http://www.PreventionActionAlliance.org)



# Sources



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*Prevention Action Alliance is a 501(c)3 nonprofit based in Ohio dedicated to leading healthy communities in the prevention of substance misuse and the promotion of mental health wellness.*