K-12 Prevention Education Initiative

Prevention Foundation and Definitions

Click Here to return to the main page for viewing and printing information, definitions and other links.

Prevention Foundation

Many factors influence a person's chance of developing a mental and/or substance use disorder. Effective prevention focuses on reducing those risk factors, and strengthening protective factors, that are most closely related to the problem being addressed.

Risk and protective factors are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, or cultural level that precede and are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes or that support individuals in effectively dealing with stressful events.

• **Risk factors** are characteristics within the individual or conditions in the family, school or community that increase the likelihood someone will engage in unhealthy behavior such as: the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs, violence, suicide, or early sexual activity.

• **Protective factors** are conditions or attributes (skills, strengths, resources, supports or coping strategies) in individuals, families, communities or the larger society that help people deal more effectively with stressful events and mitigate or eliminate risk in families and communities.

All people have biological and psychological characteristics and cultural practices that make them vulnerable to, or resilient in the face of, potential behavioral health issues. Because people have relationships within their communities and larger society, each person's biological and psychological characteristics and cultural practices exist in multiple contexts. Prevention efforts targeting a set of risk or protective factors have the potential to produce positive effects in multiple areas.

Resilience is the ability of individuals to remain healthy even in the presence of **risk factors**. Prevention – for groups and individuals alike – is largely a matter of decreasing risks and increasing **protective factors** (that is, creating **resilience**) in the lives, families, and environments of those at risk.

Definitions

Comprehensive School Mental Health and Substance Misuse Prevention Systems — Comprehensive school mental health and substance misuse prevention systems include the systems, community, partnerships, and processes through which every member of the school community receives a full continuum of appropriate mental health and substance misuse prevention services (see definition for mental health and substance misuse services).

Data Protocol — Best practice data protocol may include implementing processes for data collection, tracking information, objectively analyzing and sharing data. Data protocol may also include aligning data definitions.

Meeting Protocol Best Practice — Meeting protocol best practices include the establishing action items, using an agenda, a regular meeting schedule, and ensuring consistent member attendance. Practices may also include the establishment of group agreements related to respect for group members, group member conduct, confidentiality, and inclusive, culturally competent decision-making.

Mental Health Literacy — Mental health literacy includes the information and resources needed to help individuals identify strategies to promote mental well-being, the signs and symptoms of mental illness, strategies to help prevent mental disorders, and strategies to deal with the signs and symptoms of mental illness in themselves and others.

Mental Health and Substance Misuse Prevention Services — Activities, services, and supports that promote the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental well-being of individuals and those that prevent substance misuse and mental illness (including social emotional learning, trauma-informed practices, and other prevention measures — e.g. suicide prevention/postvention, bullying, violence, alcohol, tobacco (including vaping), and other drugs, and/or problem gaming and screen disorder prevention). Additionally, mental health and substance misuse prevention services include problem-identification and appropriate referral to treatment. It does not include treatment, clinical, or any other service that requires a therapeutic relationship between a clinician and a patient.

Policies — Model school policies related to student mental health and substance misuse prevention are evaluated for components that may cause unintentional distress or trauma for students, are evaluated for implicit bias, are evaluated for their cultural competence, ensure supportive school and classroom environments and discipline practices, promote the social, emotional, behavioral, and mental well-being of students, and are designed to prevent substance misuse and mental illness in students.

Postvention policies and procedures — These policies and procedures refer to those used after a mental health crisis in the community. These crises include but are not limited to a death, suicide, natural disasters, or acts of violence. These policies and procedures outline the steps to be taken and the resources needed to reduce the effects of trauma the event had on the community. These policies are important to provide targeted interventions to individuals that were traumatized by the crisis and to prevent further incidences of mental illness as well as substance misuse in a community.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) — The process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.

Supportive/restorative discipline practices — Supportive and restorative discipline practices involve restoring the relationship between the offender, the victim, and the community. These practices focus on the root of the behavior, encourage students to see the effect of their actions on others, and promote a culture of mutual respect.

Tier I Interventions — Create a safe, supportive learning environment for all students and includes practices impacting everyone across all settings. They establish the foundation for delivering regular, proactive support and preventing unwanted behaviors. Tier I emphasizes prosocial skills and expectations by teaching and acknowledging appropriate student behavor.

Tier II Interventions — Typically occur after an identified concern generates a referral from the parent(s), teacher(s), or counselor(s) or when a universal screening measure identifies a student or group of students at potential risk.

Tier III Interventions — Intensive, individualized interventions for students exhibiting severe or persistent behavioral challenges who have not responded to prior supports at the Tier I or Tier II levels.