



Healthy Missoula Youth
Coalition

BEST PRACTICES IN PREVENTION

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BEST PRACTICES IN PREVENTION

Purpose of the Section

- Create a basis of knowledge for prevention best practices
- Establish how prevention has evolved
- Provide recommendations for program topic of focus

What Educators Can Do

- Assess current programs
- Stop using scare tactics
- Positively impact health behaviors

Why is this important?

Utilizing best practice interventions will increase the effectiveness of programs. Students will have more engagement and retain information better.

Various methods can be used to achieve an educational prevention best practice. Effective programs focus on the development of skills that enable the participants to avoid problem behaviors. Skills that have been associated with effective prevention include helping participants develop their cognitive (thinking) skills, their ability to communicate assertively, and the ability to negotiate resisting the problem behavior. These may provide a hands-on experience for participants, rather than only depending on sharing information and discussion, and will allow participants to develop and practice their new skills.⁵

BEST PRACTICES IN PREVENTION

What Does & Doesn't Work in Prevention

A brief history of the evolution of prevention.

Effective Prevention Strategies for Families & Programs

How to positively impact health behaviors when working with families and choosing programs.

Effective Prevention Strategies for Children & Adolescents

How to positively impact health behaviors when working with children and adolescents.

Ineffective Prevention Strategies You Should Avoid

The most common strategies that are still used, but should actually be avoided.

INTRODUCTION

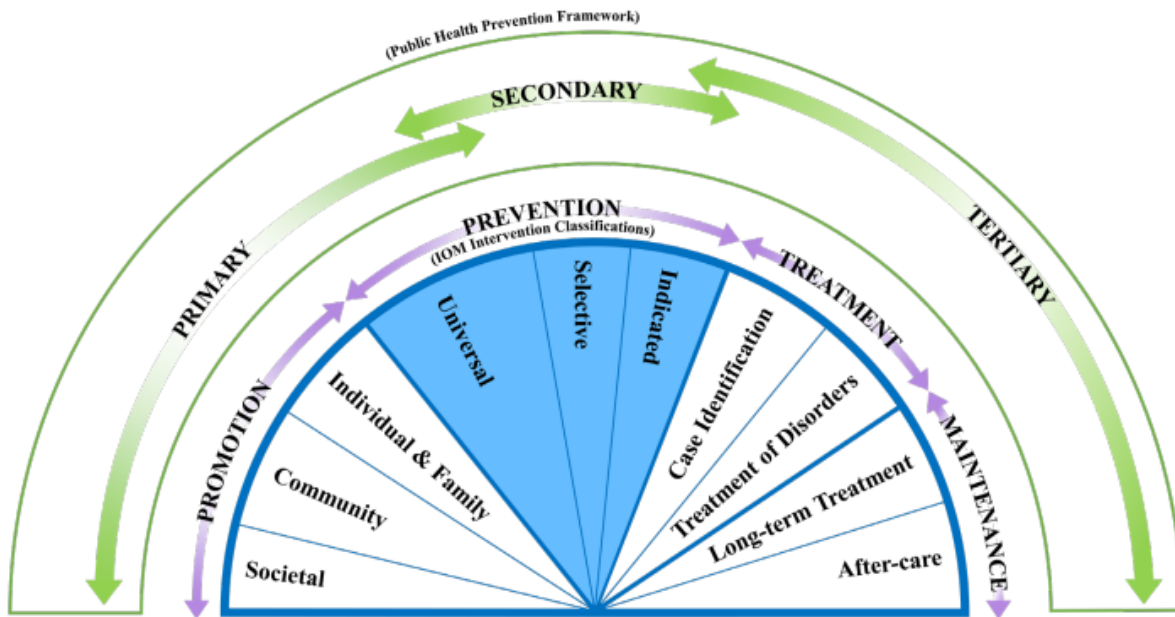
The field of prevention is a science that is constantly evolving. As societal norms and communities change over time, prevention must grow with it. This includes policy development and decision-making practices, family-based prevention, ethics from a multicultural and social justice perspective, as well as a wide variety of other factors, all of which has culminated in the development of the International Standards on Drug Use Prevention¹. The Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition has broken this down into more digestible pieces of information that will highlight some prevention best practices and the most effective interventions for school-based and family-based settings.

WHAT DOES & DOESN'T WORK IN PREVENTION

Up until the late 1980s, early prevention approaches were primarily focused on information dissemination and fear arousal, a prime example of which is the “Reefer Madness” campaigns from 1936². While prevention now knows this is an ineffective approach to societal change, throughout the 1980s and 1990s a vast majority of the population still continued down the track of social resistance as prevention. Nancy Reagan’s “Just Say No” advertising campaign as part of the US’s war on drugs is perhaps the most memorable of these campaigns. While this campaign did garner a lot of attention, there are several issues with the approach used here. For example, it exaggerated the prevalence of drug use and overemphasized the influence of peer pressure. It also failed to make the distinction between “casual” use and addiction, which caused the campaign to not only lose credibility but also fed into stereotypes and the development of prejudice.

It wasn’t until the mid-90s to early 2000’s that prevention took on a public health approach and began using elements of the public health prevention model². The Public Health Prevention Framework works in three tiers: Primary Prevention, which focuses on risk and protective factors on an environmental level and intervenes prior to the initiation of substance use; Secondary Prevention, which focuses on early identification of high-risk populations with the goal of slowing down or stopping the progression of substance use; and Tertiary Prevention, which refers to treatment or rehabilitation after the onset of use or diagnosis of a substance use disorder³.

PUBLIC HEALTH PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

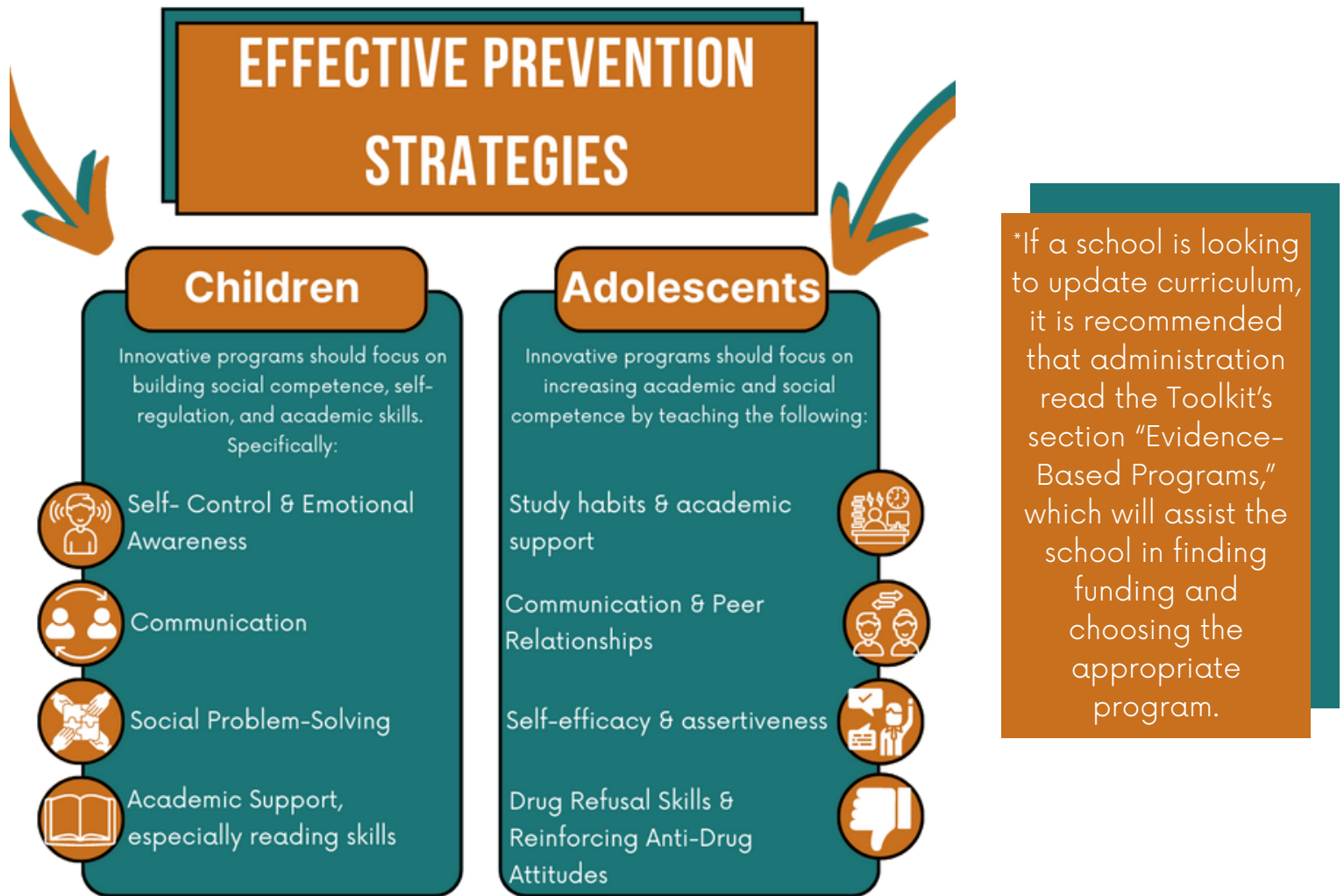


As adults and educators it is best to focus on **Primary & Secondary Prevention** tactics for complete prevention on an environmental level. Within this prevention framework exists the continuum of care, in which health promotion and risk prevention strategies are utilized across a spectrum.

- **Universal** prevention measures address an entire population (national, local, community, school, or neighborhood) with messages and programs aimed at preventing or delaying the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
- **Selective** prevention refers to strategies that are targeted to subpopulations identified as being at an elevated risk for a disorder.
- **Indicated** prevention programs are designed to prevent the onset of substance abuse in individuals who are already exhibiting problem behaviors.

This change comes slowly though, as it is basic human nature to stick with trends that have been done in the past. To break down some of this information in regards to what prevention best practices are in today's society and how to be effective in this approach, the Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition has selected a few key elements to showcase.

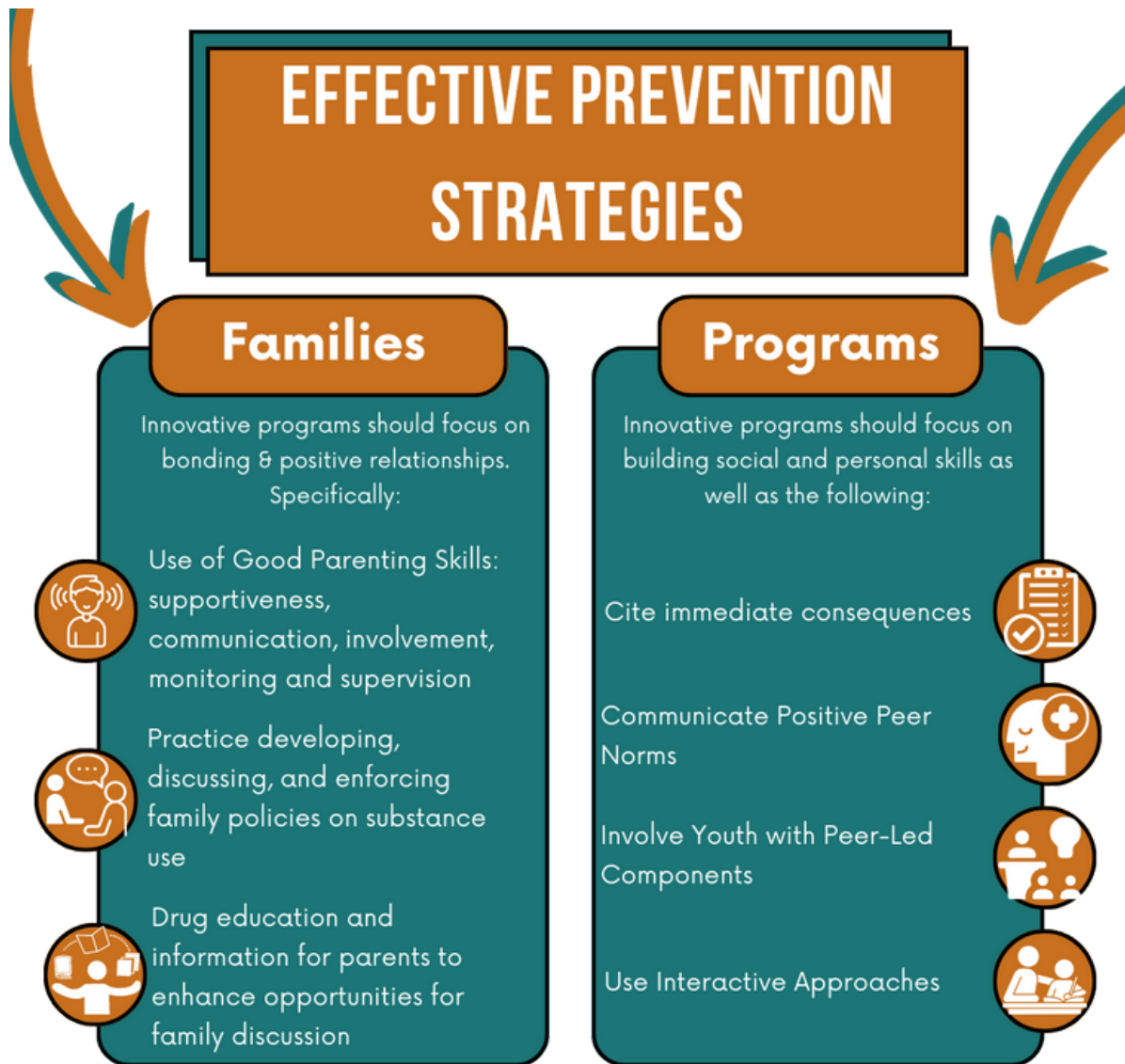
EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES



Source: Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition 2023

These strategies have been confirmed by research to positively impact health behaviors. Some of these skill-building interventions may include information about the negative effects of substance use, but effective programs should not only be age appropriate but should also incorporate a positive cultural framework. This framework presents information in a way that emphasizes the cultural norm that most youth do not use substances and do choose healthy activities. Many of these Effective Prevention Strategies are incorporated into Evidence-Based Programs for families or schools. See the following graphic that contains information on best practices within Evidence-Based Programs.

EFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES



Source: Healthy Missoula Youth Coalition 2023

Take a close look at the prevention interventions being used in schools used within the Missoula community. Are these effective prevention strategies being used? Though often conducted with pure intentions, some ineffective strategies may still be in use. Check out the following summary of common prevention tactics that should be avoided.

INEFFECTIVE PREVENTION STRATEGIES

Some of the strategies highlighted in this section may seem like a good idea on the surface. However, research has actually shown these to be ineffective. Working in prevention and conducting ethical and effective interventions can be challenging as a result of battling these misconceptions. As a rule of thumb when working with youth, remember that resources are best used to teach positive, healthy behavior, rather than trying to stop dangerous behavior through manipulation or strategies that contradict research.



Interventions that “focus on healthy alternatives to use; enhance connections to, and bonding with, prosocial adults, peers and organizations; use structured interactive approaches that include skill practice; and focus on normative education that portrays true use rates and corrects misperceptions” are best practices⁴.

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Conclusion

The field of prevention is a science that is constantly evolving. As societal norms and communities change over time, prevention must grow with it. In order to have effective prevention, schools should use best-practice interventions. Use programs that build positive relationships, social competency, self-regulation skills, and communicate positive peer norms.

Action Items

- **STOP** using ineffective prevention interventions - they may be doing more harm than good.
- **QUESTION** your administration: Does your school use an evidence-based program for substance use or suicide prevention?
- **READ** the "Evidence Based Programs" section of the Toolkit.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [International Standards on Drug Use Prevention](#)
- [Preventing Child and Adolescent Problem Behavior: Evidence-based Strategies in Schools, Families, and Communities](#)
- [Promoting Positive Adolescent Health Behaviors and Outcomes](#)
- [What Works in Prevention - Washington DPHHS](#)

1: [Israelashvili & Romano, 2017](#)

2: [Jenson & Bender, 2014](#)

3: [National Academies of Science, Engineering, & Medicine, 2020](#)

4: [Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, 2022](#)

5: [CDCP & Nation et al., 2003](#)

