

For adults who work with children

Preparing young children for a healthy, drug-free future



Kids watch. Kids listen. Kids learn.

Massachusetts Department of Public Health
Bureau of Substance Abuse Services

After-school workers

Youth workers

Prevention specialists

Mentors or volunteers

Faith-based program leaders

Coaches

Social service providers

... can all help protect children from substance use!

Every day you work with children is a reminder of an important fact: you are a significant role model for them. The role you play, and the work you do, can help put 3rd to 5th graders on a substance-free path for life.

Young people get messages about substances — especially alcohol — coming at them from all angles. Ads, movies, TV shows, and music commonly portray alcohol use, and almost never show the negative consequences. Parents, other adults, and the larger community send messages about alcohol and other substances as well. All of these messages can influence children, who are forming beliefs and attitudes about alcohol and other substances in their late elementary years.

As an influential adult, you can have an important impact on the choices that children make. You overhear conversations among children; they come to you with questions and seek your opinions. This is an ideal time to prevent substance use.

Your work contributes to substance use prevention in many ways — even if you're not doing specific prevention programming. By helping children get needed assistance with school, or involving children in positive activities and building their confidence, you are already helping to protect them against substance use. By taking a few additional steps, you can have an even more powerful influence over their future decisions. This guide can help you with information and resources related to:

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Your work protects children.

While the children you work with respect you as an adult, your relationship with them is unique. You relate to children in different ways than other adults in their lives, and, in some cases, you may fill a big role due to the demands or challenges their parents face.

The role you play contributes to children’s protective factors, which can help to prevent them from engaging in the use of alcohol, or other drugs. Protective factors are influences that reduce the likelihood of substance use or misuse. Positive relationships with adults — like the relationships you have with the children you work with — are protective factors. Your work and program also foster other protective factors such as:

- Involvement in extracurricular activities and/or volunteer work
- Positive feedback for healthy activities and school achievements
- Bonding with organizations that promote social involvement, such as schools, after-school programs, or places of faith
- Communication and coping skills
- Healthy beliefs and standards, and a faith in a bright future

MORE RESOURCES:

**Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents:
A Research-Based Guide**

www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/preventingdruguse_2_1.pdf

Substances young children are most at risk of using

Alcohol and inhalants tend to be the substances used at the youngest ages. These substances can be very harmful to young people. This is why shaping 3rd to 5th graders' beliefs and behaviors related to these substances is so important.

Alcohol

Alcohol is especially harmful to children and teens. Alcohol can damage the brain and cause learning problems, and is linked to behavior problems, violence, and death, including suicide. The younger people are when they start to use alcohol, the higher their chances of developing alcohol dependence later in life.

Alcohol is common and considered acceptable by many people. It's legal for adults over 21, and many families keep alcohol in their homes. Alcohol is frequently portrayed in the media, and often in inaccurate ways. For all these reasons, it's important for adults to make healthy choices about the use of alcohol.

Youth who use alcohol at a young age are more likely to become dependent on it.

Few elementary-aged children are using alcohol. Now is your opportunity to build on children's healthy values and decision-making. During early elementary years, children believe alcohol is harmful, and they feel it's NOT all right for children their age to drink. You can support this perception. In the late elementary years, children may start to see alcohol as more attractive. You can be an influential voice that reminds them that alcohol can hurt their developing brain. Don't let alcohol get in their way. Encourage them to be the best they can be at their favorite activities.

MORE RESOURCES:

Initiative on Underage Drinking/National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism. http://pubs.niaaa.nih.gov/publications/UnderageDrinking/Underage_Fact.pdf

Inhalants

Misusing inhalants means breathing gas or vapors on purpose to get intoxicated or alter one's mood. It is illegal to use inhalants in this way. Inhalants are found in over 1,000 common household, school, and industrial products. Inhalants can include fuels, paint thinners, nitrites, some cleaners, glues and markers and anything in an aerosol can.

A major challenge in inhalant prevention is that these products can be found in households, schools, after-school programs, and other places accessible to children. In order to help protect the children you serve, it's important that you and other adults understand the risks.

Inhalants can cause serious short-term and long-term harm to children, some of which include:

- Sores on the nose and face
- Accidental injuries
- Addiction
- Weight loss
- Damage to the liver, kidneys, and central nervous system
- Problems with judgment, reasoning, and long-term memory
- Even death, which can occur after the first or many uses

"Kids are watching every single thing that we're doing whether we know it or not." – Boston area youth worker



Take Action

Right now is your opportunity to reinforce the safer use of products with the children you serve.

- Supervise the use of any materials that could be used as inhalants, and use water-based rather than solvent-based alternative products when possible.
- Teach by example. Demonstrate how to use potentially poisonous products correctly and in well-ventilated areas only.
- Model the proper use of art supplies (such as paint and paint thinner) and household products, and emphasize the harm caused by using them inappropriately.
- Don't talk about the "high" that inhalants may cause, and do not point out particular products or how they can be inhaled.
- Keep art, cleaning, and industrial products in a locked storage space, and monitor them regularly to ensure children haven't used them.

MORE RESOURCES:

Youth-Serving Professionals Can Help Prevent Inhalant Abuse

packet: List of products that can be used as inhalants; substitute products; information and resources for youth workers and families. Order at toll-free: 1-800-952-6637 | TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370 | Mass.gov/maclearinghouse.

National Institute of Drug Abuse: Information and resources. www.drugabuse.gov/drugs-abuse/inhalants

Prescriptions and over-the-counter medications

Some of the youth in your program may be on different types of medication. You can help foster a healthy respect for prescriptions and over-the-counter medications.

- Never allow youth to bring their medication to your program. If there are medications they need during the program, speak with your supervisor.
- Convey the idea that prescriptions and over-the-counter medications are not to be taken lightly.
- Children imitate adults who they like — if you have to take medication, do it out of sight of the children.
- If your program has to keep medicine on hand, keep it locked up.

Integrating substance use prevention into your programming

There are a wide variety of ways you can enhance your ability to prevent substance use among children, from building upon your current programming and activities to integration of a substance use prevention curriculum.

Here are some suggestions and resources, ranging from comprehensive programs and curricula to simple activities and messages, to use in your day-to-day programming.

Schools may be using these or other curricula. Your program or agency may want to integrate prevention in a systematic, ongoing way. One source that identifies programs to consider is the National Registry of Evidence-based Programs and Practices of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Visit www.nrepp.samhsa.gov to begin a search. You can look at the outcomes to see which ones are strongest in meeting your goals. The website provides descriptions and contact information for all programs and curricula.

One substance use prevention program that may be appropriate to consider for the elementary school age group is:

- *LifeSkills Training*. This is a program with a distinct elementary-aged curriculum. The components of LifeSkills Training help youth develop drug resistance skills, personal self-management, and general social skills. It has been used in rural, suburban, and urban areas.



One DVD-based program is also available at no cost to use with families, or can be given to families to use at home:

- *Strengthening Families Program*. A family skills training program for children and their parents to increase resilience and reduce risk factors by improving family relationships, improving parenting skills, and increasing children's social and life skills. The Strengthening Families Program has been used in diverse settings, such as community centers and schools. See resources on page 16 for information on ordering this free resource.

MORE RESOURCES:

To support your efforts, you can learn more about prevention activities in your school or community. Many cities and towns have coalitions comprised of organized community members and organizations that have an interest in helping their community prevent substance misuse. Learn more at <http://masstapp.edc.org>.

Anti-substance messages

You can also help to reinforce anti-substance messages in your everyday work as you interact with the children you serve.

Here are some basic messages:

- Most children don't use substances.
- Using substances will lead to negative consequences (provide examples that are meaningful to the children you serve).
- Staying drug-free will likely lead to positive outcomes (provide examples).
- This organization has no-use rules and expectations about substance use.
- Parents are disappointed when their children use substances.

In addition, emphasize the value of school and schoolwork. Youth who are successful with their schoolwork are less likely to use substances. If they need help, encourage them to seek after-school tutoring from your program or other sources, such as teachers and other programs.

You can also help the children you serve to set goals for the future. If college seems out of reach for financial reasons, help them learn about the many scholarship monies available at www.fastweb.com. Talking about financial aid for college can help children to set goals for getting good grades.



Peer pressure resistance skills

Dealing with peer pressure related to substance use is subtle — it's more than just saying "No." The peer pressure young people feel is often related to their wanting to be accepted, to belong, and to be noticed. Late elementary-aged children are heading into a major time of change — moving from elementary school to middle school — and these changes can be risky and stressful times for children.

Building children's skills can help protect them from peer pressure now and later.

In elementary school, very few children are using substances. But as children enter middle school, they become more exposed to substances and substance use, and most importantly, some of their peers may try substances. Because young people want to be accepted and liked, they may be faced with the decision to join in using substances, or to leave the group and seek new friends. Children can sometimes turn peer pressure around and use it positively to encourage their friends to stop using.



Take Action

Now is an important time to help build children's skills to resist this pressure — and maybe even turn it around:

- Help build children's decision-making and leadership skills.
- Educate children about what peer pressure is and how it can be made into a positive force.

- Prepare children for the changes they'll be facing as they enter middle school. Talk about the possibility that they could become more exposed to substance use, and how they can deal with it in a good way.
- Support positive friendships the children have, and ask questions about their friends.
- Reinforce the fact that most young people, including middle school youth, are not drinking or using drugs.
- Help children learn and practice resistance skills. Role playing can be useful. Children can act out different ways to express their disapproval and offer healthier alternatives.

"Reversing" peer pressure

Encourage children not only to resist pressure to use substances, but also to take a stand against use among their friends. This is an ideal opportunity to "turn the tables" on peer pressure and influence their friends' substance use before it becomes a serious pattern.

- Help the children you serve to understand when it is best to turn to you, or another trusted adult, for help.
- Children can say, "You're my friend and I care for you. I'm worried about you using substances. I'd like to help you, and this is how. Let's talk to (an adult they trust). It's important to me that my friends don't use alcohol or other drugs."
- Remind children that most elementary and middle school youth don't use substances and that they can talk with you about any questions that they have.

MORE RESOURCES:

Peer pressure activities are part of many curricula (See page 7). Here is an additional resource:

- **The Cool Spot:** Interactive website for young people with information on the risks of underage drinking and how to resist peer pressure. www.thecoolspot.gov

What if the children ask if I use substances?

The children you work with look up to you and may be curious about your opinions and behaviors related to substances. They are aware that some adults drink or smoke. They may see you in the community from time to time, so it is important to be someone they can look up to. However, it's not appropriate to share your history of substance use, particularly with this age group.

- Keep the focus on them and your interest in their health and safety.
- Reinforce the concept of responsible alcohol use among adults 21 years old and over, and the fact that some adults choose NOT to use alcohol.
- Keep the conversation focused at the children's developmental level.
- Use the opportunity to restate the rules of your program, and your expectations of the children you work with.
- Take the opportunity to remind children of their strengths and goals and the benefits of staying away from substance use.

Communicating with children's parents

You may have few opportunities to talk with the parents of children you serve. For some youth workers, interaction with parents may be limited to drop-off and pick-up time. Given the significant role you play in their children's lives, communication is important — especially if a problem exists or a child might be at risk.

A companion booklet for parents, available free of charge, can help you in talking with parents. *Preparing Your Young Children for a Healthy, Drug-Free Future* covers many of these same topics as this booklet, but from a parent's point of view. It may help you in communicating with parents about their roles and opportunities for prevention. It may also be a helpful "communication starter" if there is a problem at home.

Here are some suggestions for sharing the booklet and communicating with parents:



Take Action

- Order copies of the parent brochure above at no cost from the Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse: Mass.gov/maclearinghouse. Other substance use prevention resources for parents and youth of different ages are also available.
- Display the parent brochure in an area that is accessible to parents, but not to children.
- Let parents know that you have a new resource you're sharing with ALL parents, and offer them the brochure as they pick up their children or come to events.
- If you plan to integrate prevention curriculum, share information as suggested by the program.

- Talk with parents about the positive ways they can increase protective factors and decrease risk factors for their children.
- If communicating is challenging, seek additional resources or training on communicating with parents.

Handling difficult situations

You work closely with children and it's possible that from time to time a difficult situation involving substance use or misuse will come up. You may observe a change in a child, a child may tell you something that's going on at home, or you may learn from a parent that there is a problem. With this age group, the problem more often is at home rather than with the child. How can you handle this?

- First, talk with your supervisor and explain the situation. He or she will probably have experience handling such a situation and will help you determine how it should be dealt with.
- Be aware of the trust you've developed with the children you serve, and be prepared to deal with trust issues if you have to report an incident to your supervisor. Remind them that you are doing what is best for them.
- Learn about your agency's policies and procedures related to substance use and available resources, including other employees and services. If agency policies are not clear or useful, encourage the development of policies and procedures related to rules of conduct, substance use, handling crisis situations, and the use of available resources. Make sure that rules and policies include inhalants.

- Current substance misuse by a parent puts children at higher risk of misusing substances themselves, and may put children in an unsafe situation. In cases of child abuse or neglect, many professionals are required to report to the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families (DCF). Talk with your supervisor about reporting requirements. DCF operates a 24-hour Child-at-Risk Hotline at toll-free: 1-800-792-5200.

MORE RESOURCES:

Youth Central Intake and Care Coordination (YCICC)

This special state-funded service organization helps Massachusetts parents and families access treatment programs specifically for youth. YCICC is a project of the Institute for Health and Recovery. Toll-free: 1-866-705-2807 or 1-617-661-3991 (Monday-Friday, 9am–5pm, except holidays) | TTY: 1-617-661-9051 | www.healthrecovery.org

The Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline

Free information and referrals for prevention and treatment programs for youth, adults, and families are available. Toll-free: 1-800-327-5050 (7 days a week; multi-lingual) | TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370 | HelplineMA.org

Al-Anon

You can find out about support groups to help friends and families of people with alcohol disorders. Toll-free: 1-888-4AL-ANON or 1-888-425-2666 | www.al-anon.org

Emergency Services Programs (ESP)

These services are available to the uninsured, MassHealth subscribers, and many insured Massachusetts residents of all ages. This service can address emergency issues that involve both substance misuse and mental health issues. Toll-free: 1-877-382-1609 (24 hours a day/7 days a week/365 days a year) | TTY: 1-800-249-9949
www.masspartnership.com/member/esp.aspx

RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PREVENTION:

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse

Free publications on many health topics; substance misuse prevention materials include this booklet and:

- *Choose to Keep Your Freedom*, a brochure for 10- to 18-year olds
- *Youth-Serving Professionals Can Help Prevent Inhalant Abuse*, a packet for adults who work with young people
- *Strengthening Families Program DVD*, and other parent resources
Toll-free: 1-800-952-6637 | TTY: Use MassRelay at 711 or 1-800-439-2370 | Mass.gov/maclearinghouse

Regional Center for Poison Control and Prevention Serving Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons 24 hours
Toll-free: 1-800-222-1222 | TTY: 1-888-244-5313
www.maripoisoncenter.com

**Massachusetts Department of Public Health Bureau of
Substance Abuse Services**

Information, statistics, publications, and services
Mass.gov/dph/bsas

Mass 2-1-1

Information and referrals for youth and family services
Toll-free 211 or 1-877-211-6277 (24 hours) | TTY: 1-508-370-4890
www.mass211help.org

Selected information sources for this booklet include:

Join Together Online

www.drugfree.org/join-together

**National Institute on Drug Abuse, U.S. Department of Health
and Human Services**

www.nida.nih.gov

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration,
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**

www.samhsa.gov

Thank you for helping to keep our kids healthy.

