

Finding Quality, Reality-Based Drug Education and Counseling for California's Teens



The Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) recommends providing youth with honest, comprehensive drug education focused on empowering them to assess risky situations and make choices that reduce potential harm. Research by prevention and drug education experts suggests that the criteria below contribute to program effectiveness. School districts and law enforcement officers should use them to select effective, evidence-based programs that will best meet the needs of the youth they serve. We recommend programs that are:

- ❑ **Scientifically accurate.** Ensure that the scientific information is backed up by valid sources, such as peer-reviewed journal publications. The California Department of Education has noted that some programs, such as the Narconon Drug Abuse Prevention Program, contain scientifically inaccurate information and should not be used.
- ❑ **Realistic.** Some teens will choose to try marijuana, regardless of the risks. For this reason, all youth should receive messages about actions they can take to reduce harm, such as not getting into cars with people who have been using marijuana and being cautious about mixing substances, such as alcohol and marijuana.
- ❑ **Interactive.** Teens should have the opportunity to share their experiences in a non-judgmental environment. They should also be able to practice context-appropriate resistance-skills, such as turning down marijuana or alcohol because they have a test or game the next day.
- ❑ **Compassionate.** Some teens will have used drugs and/or sold drugs or have close friends and family members who do. Language stigmatizing people who use drugs may isolate these youth and cause them to ignore programs.
- ❑ **Honest.** Research has proven that fear-based messaging does not work. Instead, speak openly to youth about why people use drugs (e.g., to self-medicate, to have fun) and the potential physical, social and legal consequences.
- ❑ **Evaluated.** For more information about programs evaluations, consider using program lists provided by government agencies and academic institutions that assesses the evaluations quality.
- ❑ **Of sufficient length.** The Adult Use of Marijuana Act mandates six hours of drug education, four of which must include group discussion or instruction-based science and evidence-based principles.

Of the programs DPA has reviewed, the following most closely meet the above criteria and DPA's own philosophies. Because every school community has different needs, any program considered should address the unique concerns of the community to be served.

Teen Intervene - <http://www.hazelden.org/web/go/teenintervene>

Teen Intervene educates students about alcohol, marijuana and tobacco use. The program is intended for teenagers who display mild or moderate problems with alcohol or other substance use. It engages both teens and their parents over three or four sessions aimed at helping them identify substance use problems. It is proven to reduce the use of both alcohol and marijuana when measured at six and twelve months past intervention. Materials for *Teen Intervene* can be purchased for \$395.00.

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Botvin LifeSkills Training (LST) - <http://www.lifeskillstraining.com/index.php>

The LST program works to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse and violence by targeting the related major social and psychological factors. The program also helps students gain skills for evaluating and reacting to risk,

including resistance-skills. According to the website, this program cuts marijuana use by 75%. LST is available for elementary, middle and high school students. The basic program costs are \$85.00 per Teacher's Manual and \$6.00 per student guide.

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For youth who require more individualized support, DPA recommends the following counseling/psychotherapy organizations:

- Greater Los Angeles Area
Addiction Alternatives - www.addictionalternatives.com
Contact: Kevin Niehaus; kevin@alternativesbh.com
- Oakland
Upfront Project - www.drugpolicy.org/resource/upfront-reality-based-approach-drug-education-dvd
Contact: Chuck Ries; 510-316-4184; cries4life@prodigy.net
- San Francisco and Oakland
Harm Reduction Therapy Center - www.harmreductiontherapy.org
Contact: Patt Denning; 415-863-4282
- San Diego
Practical Recovery - www.practicalrecovery.com
Contact: Tom Horvath; 858-546-1100 x222; tom.horvath@practicalrecovery.com
- Statewide - www.seatainfo.org
Self-empowering Addiction Treatment Directory

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