



safety **first**: Real Drug Education for Teens

Background

In response to a lack of accurate, science-based, and compassionate drug education resources, DPA created *Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens*, an innovative new harm reduction-based drug education curriculum for 9th and 10th grade students. Unlike D.A.R.E. and other abstinence-only programs that have been proven to be ineffective, Safety First is based in the philosophy of harm reduction.

A harm reduction approach to drug education discourages young people from using alcohol and other drugs, but offers more than an abstinence-only approach by providing teenagers with information to keep themselves and others safe if and when they encounter these substances.

About the Curriculum

Safety First is designed to be implemented in high school classrooms by health teachers. It consists of 15 lessons that can be completed in a 45 to 50-minute class period. Each lesson is scripted to facilitate teacher use and designed to engage students through interactive activities such as group discussion, research, and role-playing.

The lessons are aligned with the National Health Education Standards and Common Core State Standards so that they may be easily integrated into high school Health classes.

Safety First empowers students to make healthy decisions about alcohol and other drugs by helping them:

- Use critical thinking skills to access and evaluate information about alcohol and other drugs.
- Learn decision-making and goal-setting skills that help them make healthy choices related to substance use.
- Develop personal and social strategies to understand and manage alcohol and other drugs.
- Understand the impact of drug policies on personal and community health.
- Learn how to advocate for health-based drug policies.

Developing the Curriculum

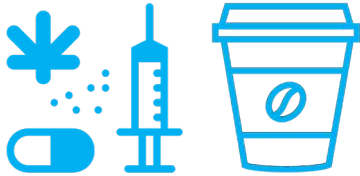
Safety First had its initial pilot in one high school in New York City in the Spring of 2018. In Spring 2019, DPA expanded the pilot to a district-level collaboration in San Francisco, piloting the curriculum in five select San Francisco Unified School District schools.

Led by an external evaluator from the Research Foundation at City University of New York, **both evaluations show significant increases in students' knowledge of harm reduction, abstinence, and how to detect and respond to a drug overdose**, among other indicators of success.

Want Safety First?

Go to www.drugpolicy.org/safetyfirst to download the curriculum free of cost, including lesson plans, student materials and slide sets for all 15 lessons.

safety first: How do we know it works?



After Safety First, students were **more likely to agree** that the definition of a drug includes substances like sugar and caffeine.

Safety First encourages students to consider the health impact of any substance that in small amounts produces changes in the brain, body, or both.



After Safety First, students were **more likely to agree** that if someone drinks too much alcohol, vomits and passes out, they should not just let them sleep it off.

Safety First teaches students how to put someone in the recovery position, which reduces the risk of alcohol-related injuries and deaths.



After Safety First, students were **less likely to agree** that reviewing one online resource about a drug is enough to understand its effects.

Safety First helps students practice their health literacy skills and hone their ability to evaluate online sources of information, a Common Core tested skill.



After Safety First, students were **more likely to agree** that you should call 911 if someone is overdosing.

Safety First teaches students about Good Samaritan laws and the protections they provide to people seeking medical assistance for a drug-related accident.

What Do Teachers Think?

Teachers who piloted Safety First highlighted that one of the biggest benefits of the curriculum was the dialogue it opened up between them and their students. It took away the fear associated with talking about drugs and allowed everyone to have non-judgmental conversations.

One teacher captured the sentiment when they said, **“I saw my students being unafraid to ask questions. They were all engaged the whole time.”**

Teachers said they felt “relief” having a tool that provides students with comprehensive, science-based information about drugs that doesn’t

stigmatize students or their family members who may already be using drugs, helping them more safely and successfully navigate the reality of substance use in the U.S.

As for the harm reduction approach, teachers agreed that it empowers students to not only help themselves but to help their friends, family, and other people in their community. One teacher said, **“It puts them in the position to be a hero. There’s such little empowerment in students’ lives. This gives them that opportunity.”** Another said that the harm reduction approach demonstrates that **“we trust them to help other people.”**

For more information about the evaluation of Safety First and findings, please contact Safety First Program Manager Sasha Simon at ssimon@drugpolicy.org.