

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/out-of-school time 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 your children is a reminder of an important fact: you are a significant role model to 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 have 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 its negative consequences. Parents, other adults, and the larger community are sending 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.

Soon, as children enter middle school, their peers may start to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, and other substances. Children will be more exposed

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to substance use, put more importance on what their friends think and do, and start to form opinions about whether using substances like alcohol is “cool.”

You may witness this frequently in your work or volunteer activities. 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 involving children in positive activities and building their skills and confidence, you are already helping to protect them from future substance use. By taking a few new steps, you can have an even more powerful influence on children’s future decisions about substance use. This guide can help you with information and resources related to:

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Your work protects children

The position you hold in a child's life is important. While the children you work with respect you as an adult, your relationship with them may be 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 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, tobacco, or other drugs. Protective factors are influences that reduce the likelihood of substance use or abuse. Positive relationships with adults – like the relationships you have with the children you work with – are protective factors. Your work or program also fosters protective factors such as:

- Involvement in extracurricular activities
- Bonding with institutions that promote social involvement, such as schools, after-school programs, or places of faith
- Social competence, such as communication and coping skills
- Healthy beliefs and standards, and a belief in a bright future

MORE RESOURCES:

Preventing Drug Use among Children and Adolescents: A Research-Based Guide. www.nida.nih.gov/Prevention/Prevopen.html

Information Sheets, Massachusetts Department of Public Health: Information about specific drugs and their effects.
www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/publications/familyguide/infosheets/intro.htm

**More than 4 in 10
people who start
drinking before
age 15 later
become dependent
on alcohol.**

Substances young children are most at risk of using

Alcohol and inhalants are the substances used at the youngest ages in Massachusetts, and many people think of them as common and legal. Yet these substances can be very harmful to young people. This is why shaping 3rd to 5th graders' beliefs and behaviors about these substances is so important.

Alcohol is the most commonly used substance by middle school students, while the substances children use at the youngest ages are inhalants. Inhalant abuse is the intentional breathing of gas or vapors to get intoxicated, or alter one's mood. Inhalants are found in over 1000 common household, school, and industrial products. In Massachusetts, the average age of first using inhalants is 11.3 years, followed by alcohol at 12.1 years.

Alcohol: The facts

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

Alcohol is considered very common and accepted 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 glamorous or humorous ways. For all these reasons, it's important for adults to demonstrate healthy and responsible alcohol-related behaviors.

In the late elementary years, children start to see alcohol as more attractive.

Few elementary-aged children are using alcohol. For example, 6% of 4th graders said they drank beer in the last year. However, children of this age are heading into a time of change. While only 17% of 4th to 6th graders say they have friends who drink beer, 44% of 6th to 8th graders have friends who drink beer. As they age, fewer and fewer children believe they'll stay away from alcohol. And children's beliefs about alcohol are changing at this time, too.

Now is your opportunity to build on healthy habits and beliefs children of this age hold. During these years, children believe alcohol is harmful, and they feel it's not alright for children their age to drink. However, beginning in 6th grade, children start believing alcohol is less harmful to their health.

MORE RESOURCES:

Initiative on Underage Drinking/National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism: Information and resources.
www.niaaa.nih.gov/about/underage.htm

Protecting children from inhalants

Like alcohol, a major challenge in inhalant prevention is the false belief that using inhalants is innocent and legal, because the substances are often found in common household products. It's important that you and other adults understand the risks and dangers of inhalant use. Some children start using inhalants as early as age 9 or 10, and children who use at a

young age are more likely to become dependent on inhalants and other drugs. In Massachusetts, 4.8% of 6th graders, 5.3% of 7th graders, and 9.4% of 8th graders have used inhalants. Inhalants are found in over 1000 common household, school, or industrial products, including some glues and markers, cleaners, paint thinners, and anything in an aerosol can.

Inhalants can cause serious short-term and long-term harm to children, including:

- 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



Right now is your opportunity to reinforce the dangers of inhalants with the children you serve.

- Supervise the use of any products that could be used as inhalants, and use water-based alternative products when possible.
- 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" 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.
- Teach by example. Demonstrate how to use potentially poisonous products in well-ventilated areas only.

MORE RESOURCES:

Youth-Serving Professionals: Massachusetts Inhalant Abuse Task Force Packet: List of products that can be used as inhalants; substitute products; information and resources for youth and families. Order at 1-800-952-6637 (toll free) or www.maclearinghouse.com

National Institute of Drug Abuse: Information and resources. www.inhalants.drugabuse.gov

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 integrating a substance use prevention curriculum.



This booklet highlights suggestions and resources, from comprehensive programs and curricula to simple activities and messages to use in your day-to-day programming.

Programs and curricula

Your program or agency may want to integrate prevention in a systematic, ongoing way. Many programs and curricula appropriate to this age group are available. In fact, hundreds of programs and curricula have been developed, and you may wonder where to start. Programs shown to be most powerful in preventing substance abuse are called *science-based model programs*. One source that identifies such programs is the Model Programs Initiative of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This site allows you to search and compare programs by content, age, gender, ethnicity, setting, and more. Go to www.modelprograms.samhsa.gov to begin a search. The site provides descriptions and contact information for all programs and curricula.

Many of SAMHSA's model programs have been used in community settings, and all have been used with a wide variety of ethnic/racial audiences. Some substance use prevention programs and curricula appropriate for the 3rd to 5th grade age group include:

- ***Keepin' It Real***. A video-enhanced intervention incorporating traditional ethnic values and practices and used in urban school settings. Using a culturally based framework, ***Keepin' It Real*** enhances anti-drug norms and attitudes, and facilitates the development of risk assessment, decision-making, and resistance skills.

Now is the time to build the healthy habits and beliefs of late elementary-aged children.

- **LifeSkills Training.** A school-based program with distinct elementary-aged curricula. The 3 components of **LifeSkills Training** focus on drug resistance skills, personal self-management skills, and general social skills. It has been used in rural, suburban, and urban areas.
- **Protecting You/Protecting Me.** A 5-year, classroom-based curriculum that has been used across geographical settings. **Protecting You/Protecting Me** is designed to reduce alcohol-related injury and death among youth, focusing on the immediate risks of underage alcohol use and incorporating parental involvement activities.

Some programs are also available for use with families and may require training:

- **Families That Care: Guiding Good Choices.** A multi-media program for parents and children in schools and communities. The program aims to strengthen family expectations, enhance family bonding, and teach drug resistance skills. **Guiding Good Choices** has been used with a variety of ethnic and racial audiences in many geographical settings.
- **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. **Strengthening Families** has been used in geographically diverse settings, including community centers and schools.

Some programs and curricula may have fees and require schools or agencies to be trained to use them. Look into these resources to support your efforts:

MORE RESOURCES:

MA Regional Centers for Healthy Communities: Curricula and resources for loan; information about local substance use prevention activities. 1-800-327-5050 (toll free) to learn the location nearest you or www.mass.gov/dph/ohc/reghealthcenters.htm

MA Regional Centers for Healthy Communities Web Library: Search for curricula and resources available for loan. rchc.andornot.com/catalog_search.aspx

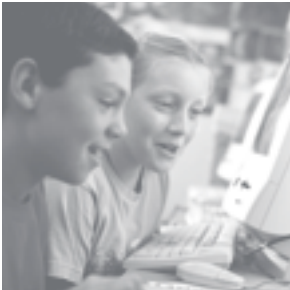
Learn more about prevention activities in your school or community that your program could be involved in.



Learning activities

Many resources are available to help teach children the risks and dangers of substance use, and some make use of interactive websites. Some activity resources include:

- **Brain Smarts:** Activity guide for 3rd to 5th grade students. www.madd.org/under21/0,1056,5421,00.html
- **Mind Over Matter: The Effects of Drug Abuse on Your Body and Brain** (grades 5-9): Background information and lesson plans. www.nida.nih.gov/MOM/MOMIndex.html
- **Brain Power! The NIDA Junior Scientist Program** (grades 2 to 3): 6-module curriculum. www.nida.nih.gov/JSP/JSP.html



Media literacy

Late elementary-aged children are highly exposed to media, and have already started processing media messages and forming opinions about them. Children ages 8 to 13, for example, spend nearly 7 hours a day involved with some type of media such as television, movies, the Internet, and music. Many media messages about substances glamorize their use and focus on people's desire to be popular and attractive – exactly the issues children of this age are starting to face.

Media literacy is one method many schools, programs, and parents are using to help counter these media messages. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and produce communication in a variety of forms. A “media literate” person can think critically about what he or she sees, hears, and reads in a wide variety of media.

Imagine the messages children are exposed to:

- TV portrayals of alcohol use are more positive than negative, and often do not demonstrate the negative consequences of alcohol use.
- A review of the most popular TV shows among adolescents found that alcohol was mentioned in 73% of them, and was consumed in more than half of the shows.
- A review of the 1000 most popular songs over 2 years found that 15% referred to alcohol, particularly in hip-hop music. Almost all references portrayed alcohol in a positive way; 34% of those songs associated alcohol with sexual activity.

- In the top-grossing films of 2000, there was an average of 10 instances of smoking per hour. Studies find that the more children are exposed to smoking in films, the more likely they are to smoke.

Some research finds that the media literacy approach is effective in increasing children's understanding of media and has an influence on decision making related to alcohol, for example.



Take Action

You can use activities and lesson plans to teach media literacy, and even encourage children to think about these key questions when discussing media:

- Who created this message and why are they sending it? Who owns and profits from it?
- What are they doing to get people's attention and keep them interested?
- What lifestyles, values, and points of view are represented in this message?
- What was left out of this message? Why was it left out?
- How might different people take or interpret this message?

(Adapted from *Key Facts: Media Literacy*, Kaiser Family Foundation)

"You know they're trying to find out if it's really cool to smoke....You can tell they're curious about it even though they don't come out and say it directly." – Boston area youth worker



Anti-substance messages

You can also help to reinforce anti-substance messages in your everyday work just by talking and interacting with your children.

Here are some basic messages:

- Most children don't use substances. In fact, of 6th graders in Massachusetts, only 7 out of 100 report that they currently use alcohol.
- 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).
- The agency 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 committed to their schoolwork are less likely to experiment with alcohol and other drugs. Encourage children to seek after-school tutoring from your program or other sources such as teachers and volunteers.

Peer pressure resistance skills

Peer pressure related to substance use is subtle – it's more than "just saying no." The peer pressure young people feel is more 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

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

children. 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 start experimenting. 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 even turn peer pressure around and use it positively to encourage their friends to stop using.



Take Action

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

- Educate children about what peer pressure is, different kinds of peer pressure, how it works, and how it can be positive.
- Prepare children for the changes they'll be facing as they enter middle school. Talk about the possibility that they will become more exposed to substance use, including among their friends.
- Support positive friendships the children have, and ask questions about their friends.
- Reinforce the fact that most young people, including middle schoolers, are not drinking or using drugs.
- Help children learn and practice resistance skills. Role playing can be useful. Children can express that they'd disappoint their parents, you, or another adult by using substances – or risk being able to participate in activities like after-school programs or sports.
- Help build decision-making and leadership skills.

MORE RESOURCES:

Peer pressure activities are part of many effective curricula (See “Programs and curricula,” page 7). Here are some additional resources:

- **The Cool Spot:** Interactive website for young teens, including information on the risks of underage drinking and resisting peer pressure. www.thecoolspot.gov
- **How Can I Say No?** (National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information): Alternatives to using substances. www.health.org/features/kidsarea/sayno/default.aspx

“Reversing” peer pressure

Encourage children not only to resist pressure to use substances, but to also take a stand against substance 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 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 and how it’s caused a problem or affected others. I’d like to help you, and this is how. It’s important to me that my friends not use alcohol or other drugs.”
- Let your children know you can be trusted and that they can talk with you about their efforts.

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, and they may even see you in the community from time to time, so honesty is the best solution to maintain trust and credibility with the children you serve. However, it's not appropriate to share history of more serious substance use, particularly with this age group.

- If it's not appropriate to share such information or you aren't comfortable doing so, tell the children this.
- Reinforce the concept of responsible alcohol use among adults 21 years old and over, if they choose to use alcohol.
- Keep the conversation focused on the children's developmental level.
- Use the opportunity to reinforce the rules of your program, and your expectations of the children you work with.
- Take the opportunity to remind children of their strengths and reinforce the risks of substance use.

Communicating with your children's parents

You may have few opportunities to talk with your children's parents. 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, though, communication is important – especially if a problem exists or a child might be at risk.

A parent brochure, available free of charge, can help you in talking with parents.

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



Take Action

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

- Order copies of the parent brochure, available at no cost from the MA Health Promotion Clearinghouse: www.maclearinghouse.com. 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 as accessible to children.
- Let parents know that you have a new resource you're sharing with all parents, and offer parents the brochure as they pick up their children or come to events.
- If your program does substance use prevention programming, or you plan to integrate prevention into your program, explain this to parents and share the brochure as well.
- Talk with parents about the positive ways they can increase protective factors and decrease risk factors for their children.
- Seek additional resources or training on communicating with parents.



Handling difficult situations

You work closely with children, sometimes spending hours with them each day – and it’s possible that from time to time a difficult situation involving substance use or abuse 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 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’ve had to report an incident to your supervisor.
- 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 prevention policy, handling crisis situations, and available resources. Make sure that rules and policies include inhalant use. Many products that can be used as inhalants are found in community centers, schools, and other agencies serving youth.
- Current substance abuse by a parent puts children at higher risk of abusing substances themselves, and may put children in an unsafe situation. In cases of abuse or neglect, many professionals are required to report to the Massachusetts Department of Social Services (DSS). Talk with your supervisor about reporting requirements. DSS operates a 24-hour Child-at-Risk Hotline at 1-800-792-5200 (toll free).

MORE RESOURCES:

MA Substance Abuse Information and Education Helpline:

Information and referrals for prevention and treatment. 1-800-327-5050 (toll free; 24 hours; multi-lingual) or www.helpline-online.com

Adolescent Substance Abuse Program, Children's Hospital,

Boston: Information, diagnosis, referrals. 1-617-355-2727 or www.ceasar-boston.org

Quitworks: Advice and resources for trying to stop smoking. 1-800-879-8678 (toll free; multilingual) or www.trytostop.org

Al-Anon: Groups to help friends and families of alcoholics. 1-888-425-2666 (toll free) or www.al-anon.org

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT PREVENTION:

Massachusetts

Massachusetts Health Promotion Clearinghouse: Free publications on many health topics. 1-800-952-6637 (toll free) or www.maclearinghouse.com. Substance abuse prevention materials include:

- *Inhalants Poison Your Body* brochure for middle-school aged youth
- *Choose to Keep Your Freedom* brochure for 10 to 18-year olds
- *Youth-Serving Professionals: Massachusetts Inhalant Abuse Task Force Packet* for adults who work with young people

Massachusetts and Rhode Island Poison Control Center: Information and hotline about inhalants and other poisons. 1-800-222-1222 (toll free; 24 hours) or www.maripoisoncenter.com

Massachusetts Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Abuse Services: Information, statistics, publications, services. www.mass.gov/dph/bsas/bsas.htm

Achieve Boston: Training and professional development opportunities for youth workers primarily in the Boston area. www.achieveboston.org

United Way First Call for Help: Information and referrals for youth, cultural, and family services. 1-800-231-4377 (toll free; 24 hours)

National

Join Together: Information, publications, advocacy. www.jointogether.org

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information: Information, publications, referrals. 1-800-729-6686 (toll free) or www.health.org

SAMHSA (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration): Information, referrals, helpline. 1-800-662-4357 (toll free; English)/1-877-767-8432 (toll free; Spanish) or www.samhsa.gov

Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids: Information, advocacy. 1-202-296-5469 or www.tobaccofreekids.org

Selected information sources for this booklet include:

Join Together Online, www.jointogether.org

Massachusetts Department of Public Health and Massachusetts Department of Education,
"Massachusetts Youth Health Survey," 2004

National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, Columbia University,
www.casacolumbia.org

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



