

●● What are the main approaches to drug-use-prevention in schools?

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The two main approaches to overall drug-use-prevention are demand reduction and supply reduction. There are many approaches under each of these headings. As this document is specifically for the school setting and deals with younger age groups, the interventions discussed below fall almost exclusively under demand reduction strategies.

There are two main approaches to demand reduction for drugs in the school setting.

- a. Programmes incorporating a “child development” approach in which a child’s characteristics, conditions and processes observed at one stage in life might attempted to be modified, in order to achieve healthier behaviour later in life. Such programmes are generally referred to as “developmentally inspired” programmes.
- b. Programmes containing drug-specific content: These programmes deal more specifically with the drug use initiation age and consist of interventions designed to prevent and delay the commencement of drug use.

Developmentally inspired programmes

The theory and conceptual models to support early developmentally inspired preventive intervention have been evolving over several decades. This approach has showed promise, especially for younger children, in reducing youth drug consumption (Gottfredson and Wilson, 2003).

Components of developmentally inspired programmes

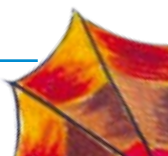
Such programmes incorporate classroom-based interventions and improving family relationships.

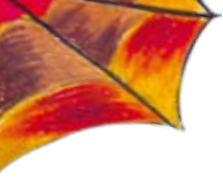
Classroom-based interventions are aimed at improving critical thinking, listening and comprehension skills and improving management of classroom behaviour, by teachers. It should be noted that critical thinking, listening and comprehension skills are different from enhancing self-esteem and responsible decision-making programmes (discussed later) which have been found to be ineffective. Further, these skills programmes were implemented with a wider perspective of behaviour and development. The programmes on self-esteem that were found to be ineffective have been tried in a drug-specific context and therefore not comparable with the developmentally inspired context discussed here.

Interventions aimed at improving family relationships consist of parent-school communication, partnership building, and providing parents with effective teaching and child behaviour management practices. It has been shown that brief, family-focused interventions for the general population can positively change specific parenting behaviour that can reduce later risks of drug use (Spath, 2002).

Interventions aimed at improving the relationship between parents and children include – spending more time with each other, listening to each other, participation in each others work, etc. In addition, such interventions also consist of improving relations between the parents and schools, and sharing of responsibility for the children's progress. Parents are also given inputs on child management practices such as how to handle diverse and difficult situations at home, and how children should be positively or negatively rewarded.

Spending more time with each other will help to improve the relationship between parents and children.





It should be noted that these programmes are aimed at the over-all well-being of children and at reducing not only the use of drugs, but also crime and the number of school dropouts etc.

Relevance to the South-East Asia Region

It has been noted by experts that the research on underlying theories of developmentally inspired programmes has taken place mainly in urban communities of the USA. These are very resource intensive. They are also difficult to evaluate due to the long lag-time for the impact, related to drug use, to be seen. Since the socio-cultural context in the USA is very different from that of the Region, the widespread applicability of these programmes may not be appropriate.

In the context of the SEAR, the findings of studies on improving family relationships are important from the viewpoint that family ties are considered to be stronger here than in Western countries. This can serve as a reminder of the importance of a culture that values close relationships within families.

Programmes containing drug-specific content

Programmes implemented in this Region deal with the effects of drugs, as well as the attitudes and behaviours related to drug use.

These programmes are most often implemented in this Region. Such interventions deal with the effects of drugs, as well as the attitudes and behaviours related to drug use. Changing drug-using behaviour by modifying and reversing specific proximal factors that promote initiation and maintenance of drug use, such as the glamour attached to the use and users of substances, are addressed by these programmes. These factors are dealt with, in greater detail, later.

This drug-specific approach is more appropriate in the context of this Region because there is more evidence for their effectiveness, they are less resource-intensive, require less training and evaluation, and the impact can be seen in the short and medium term.

●● What are the strategies that do not work?

Some approaches have been shown to have minimal impact on changing drug-using behaviour but remain popular and are considered effective. In some cases, these approaches may even result in increasing drug use (Hawthorne, 1995).

Some programmes which are not effective:

- One-off programmes (e.g. lectures to large audiences)
- Didactic, or one-way lectures
- Providing factual information on the harm caused by drugs
- Extolling non-use, and seeking commitment for non-use
- Resistance skills programmes preparing students to face peer-pressure and to “Just say no” to drugs

Unfortunately, the evidence for transferring research knowledge to practice about school-based substance-use-prevention programmes is limited (Gorman, 2003). Thus many myths related to the structure and content of “effective” drug prevention programmes continue to be perpetuated.

A drug-specific approach is more appropriate in the context of this Region, since it has a more visible impact, both in the short and medium term.