



UNITED NATIONS  
*Office on Drugs and Crime*  
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# An Introduction to Key Concepts

***Prevention That Works!***  
A comprehensive approach for anti-drug programmes



**Prevention  
that WORKS**  
[www.apalc.org/prevention](http://www.apalc.org/prevention)

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## Prevention That Makes a Difference

*Prevention That Works!* is a set of 'how-to' publications for service providers that offers empowering guidance on keeping at-risk youth from using illicit drugs.

These publications give an overview of proven methods, provide practical planning skills and highlight the value of research and evaluation. Essentially, they touch on the principles that could be applied in different spheres of influence, from schools and early interventions to alternative activities, social marketing and partnerships.

This introductory publication briefly explains the two main concepts used throughout the publications: 1) using risk and protective factors to identify young people at risk and 2) using proven strategies and approaches in prevention programmes. It also touches on the value of programme planning that includes monitoring and evaluation components.

This series is based on the belief that, first and foremost, programme planners need to understand – as best as possible – what makes some people more likely to experiment with or repeatedly use illicit drugs than others. Documented experiences on prevention programmes offer several approaches for improving this understanding. One of the better models uses analysis of risk and protective factors.

When it comes to young people's lives and the dangerous impact of illicit-drug use on their well-being and development as well as on their families and society, prevention efforts can't take chances. To maximize opportunity and resources, programme planners should seek out activities or interventions that have worked successfully elsewhere. Using documented experiences and replicating or adapting tried-and-true models into local situations makes a world of difference in the outcomes of prevention programmes.

# Risk and Protective Factors

## What triggers a person's vulnerability to illicit-drug use?

There are various models in practice that try to identify people at risk. The ones applied in this *Prevention That Works!* series regard a person's vulnerability to engage in a risky behaviour, such as illicit-drug use, as related to a combination of negative (risk) factors and positive (protective) factors in his or her personality and local environment.

A **risk factor** is a condition in someone's life that may make it difficult for that person to engage in healthy behaviour. For example, a history of drug dependence in an individual's family or living in a community where illicit-drug use is widespread are considered to be powerful influences (risk factors) that increase the likelihood that he or she would turn to illicit-drug use.

A **protective factor** is a condition in someone's life that may support healthy behaviour. For example, having life goals is considered a powerful influence (protective factor) keeping an individual from engaging in illicit drug activity.

*One of the most useful models for programme planners is the perspective on risk and protective factors.*

These risk and protective factors are present in both individuals and communities. In an individual, they are aspects of the personality, cognitive skills and social competence. In the community, they are found in families, peer groups, schools, the immediate environment (be it an urban setting or a village) and the society.

The influence of risk and protective factors is unique to different groups. Thus, prevention must be based on assessments of people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviour regarding various substances as well as on a clear understanding of their environmental setting.

Once the risk and protective factors are understood, programme planners and service providers can develop strategies and activities that will have a stronger, positive impact on young people. This *Prevention That Works!* series aims to help people better understand those risk and protective factors.



# R RISK FACTORS

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## **Risk factors – Individual**

- Rebelliousness to society
- Favourable attitudes toward illicit-drug use
- Early use of other harmful substances
- Biological and physiological factors
- Poor social and interpersonal skills

## **Risk factors – Peers**

- Friends who are rebellious to society
- Friends with favourable attitudes toward illicit drugs
- Friends who engage in illicit drugs

## **Risk factors – Family**

- Family history of dependence
- Family management problems
- Family conflict
- Favourable parental attitudes toward illicit-drug use
- Parents or older siblings engaged in illicit-drug use

## **Risk factors – School**

- Inability to get along with peers
- Academic failure beginning in early grades
- Lack of commitment to school

## **Risk factors – City and village**

- Availability of alcohol and illicit drugs
- Community attitudes that favour illicit-drug use
- Low attachment to neighbourhood

## **Risk factors – Society**

- Social norms that are tolerant of substance use, including illicit drugs
- Weak policies to limit access to alcohol or illicit drugs
- Weak enforcement of laws designed to prevent substance or illicit-drug use

**IMPORTANT:** Initiation to the use of illicit drugs is sometimes linked to the use of other substances, such as tobacco, alcohol or glue sniffing. The abuse of any substance can cause harm. While this publication addresses illicit drugs, it is in the interest of service providers to also include other substances in their prevention efforts.

# P PROTECTIVE FACTORS

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## **Protective factors – Individual**

- Resilient personality
- Positive feelings toward society
- Positive relationships with others
- Healthy beliefs and a clear sense of what is right

## **Protective factors – Peers**

- Friends who have positive feelings toward society
- Friends with negative attitudes toward illicit drugs
- Friends who do not engage in illicit-drug use

## **Protective factors – Family**

- Positive relationships among family members
- Parents who communicate a sense of warmth, trust and high expectations

## **Protective factors – School**

- Caring and supportive teachers
- High expectations from adults
- Clear standards of behaviour
- Youth participation in prevention programmes
- Positive school climate

## **Protective factors – City and village**

- High expectations of youth
- Community norms and laws unfavourable to illicit-drug use
- Low accessibility of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs

## **Protective factors – Society**

- Social norms that discourage use of various substances
- Policies that reduce the availability of alcohol and illicit drugs
- Strict enforcement of laws designed to prevent illicit-drug use

**IMPORTANT:** The risk-and-protective-factors model does not imply that the presence of any one factor can predict with certainty the use or non-use of illicit drugs. It is the collective influence of a combination of risk and protective factors that either increases or decreases the *likelihood* that someone may use illicit drugs.

# Evidence-Based Strategies

Evidence-based strategies take into consideration available research or documented experiences to support the value of planned activities or interventions. This evidence usually entails academic studies or data. While an evidence-based approach may have varied results, service providers are encouraged to use such strategies to maximize their efforts.

According to documented experiences, there are three major factors critical to the success of most interventions:

- Developing strategic plans to guide programme implementation and evaluation;
- The use of strategies that blend individual and environmental approaches;
- Applying multiple strategies in multiple settings (or areas of influence).

Using multiple strategies that are evidence-based in multiple settings (or areas of influence) give prevention programmes the best chance to be effective when they work in tandem. These areas typically are:

- 1) Policy
- 2) Education
- 3) Communications
- 4) Early intervention
- 5) Collaboration
- 6) Youth participation
- 7) Alternatives.

**1) Policy** refers to standards for behaviour that become formalized laws, rules, regulations and procedures. For example, a policy can see strong penalties for the trade in illicit drugs or require court-supervised treatment for young people. Policies can mandate that penalties for selling drugs will be doubled if the violation occurs near a school. Policies are often thought of as attempts by authorities to control the actions of individuals. Thus, it is crucial that members of a society or community regard any policy that ultimately aims to protect public health as a social contract that has been developed to protect the common good.

***Public health policies work best when members of a society or community regard them as a social contract.***

**2) Education** refers to all programmes that attempt to educate individuals about the dangers of illicit-drug use. It also can include teaching specific skills to help people protect themselves and their communities from the dangers of illicit-drug activity and its harmful consequences. This type of education typically occurs in school settings as part of the health curriculum. But it can also take place in community settings that and target adults as well as young people.

For example, parents can learn about the critical role they can play in discouraging their children from using harmful substances. Likewise, professionals such as doctors, police officers and business owners can be educated on the ways in which they can support a community-wide prevention programme.

**Information alone typically does not affect individual behaviour change.**

Whatever age group is targeted, it is always important to remember that information alone typically does not affect individual behaviour change. Combining information with skills development – including critical thinking, refusal proficiency, decision making and social interaction – can significantly improve the chances for healthy behaviour.

**3) Communications** addresses the ways in which media can be used to promote prevention. Communications includes media advocacy, media literacy, civic awareness and social marketing.

**Media advocacy** attempts to engage the media in a constructive relationship that serves to influence the way in which journalists report illicit drug issues. It seeks to have the media play a more involved and responsible role in addressing this issue by providing accurate information as well as suggestions on how individuals can contribute to reducing illicit drug activity in a society.

**Media literacy** focuses on educating individuals, especially young people, about the ways in which the media functions. It also provides both the information and the skills people need to be critical consumers of information the media produces regarding illicit drug activity. This is particularly important to identify the many ways in which the media promotes the use of illicit substances and creates a general impression that the use of any substance to alter moods is acceptable behaviour. These messages are most often based on misinformation that does not present an accurate representation of the consequences of substance abuse.

**Civic awareness** is the technique of using media channels and outlets to provide information to large numbers of individuals. Typically, these efforts involve the development of a communications message that is used on billboards or in television and radio public service announcements. These campaigns are highly visible and serve to quickly provide basic information to large groups of people. They are a good way to raise community awareness about a particular issue. However, when used as a single strategy, they are more likely *not* to result in a significant change of behaviours.

***Social marketing seeks to influence behaviour by constructing messages that appeal to specific target audiences.***

**Social marketing** is a strategy that is similar to public education but differs in one very important aspect: While public education provides broad information to the general population, social marketing seeks to influence behaviour by constructing messages that appeal to specific target audiences. These messages move beyond simply providing information and instead use highly sophisticated techniques that professional advertisers deploy to sell products. This technique has been used successfully to address a range of health and social issues around the world, including those related to illicit-drug-demand reduction.

**4) Early intervention** is an approach for reducing illicit-drug demand that targets individuals and groups at risk of developing substance-abuse problems. It focuses on youth who, because of their family situation, individual characteristics or environment, have risk factors known to be associated with illicit-drug use. Early interventions to reduce the demand for substances include those that:

- Work with children at risk of using illicit drugs or substances in the future, either because of family risk factors, environmental risk factors, individual risk factors or early childhood behavioural indicators;
- Work with young people who have just begun to experiment with or use substances but before the use becomes frequent; or
- Work with families whose home environment or parental behaviour increases the likelihood of substance abuse among youth.

**5) Collaboration** refers to a process of participation through which people, groups and organizations come together in a mutually beneficial relationship to work toward results that they are more likely to achieve collectively rather than by working alone. In many settings, such as business, collaboration is viewed as a preferred approach. Certainly by coordinating efforts, agencies and organizations can pool and maximize their human and financial resources. In the field of prevention, collaboration is also regarded as crucial; by collaborating, partners – formal or informal – bring together different skills and strengths to confront the illicit-drug use problem and to bring about change.

*By collaborating, partners bring together different skills and strengths to bring about change.*

**6) Youth participation** means facilitating the involvement of young people in the development and implementation of activities that affect them. Youth participation in the development of programmes is important for many reasons: Young people have ideas and solutions to propose. If they are given the chance to be heard and to work, their contribution can be extremely significant on changing their own behaviour and influencing their peers. Participation provides young people with a sense of purpose and direction, giving them the feeling of being more connected to the activities and the mission of the programme. Young people are usually much more effective than adults in communicating prevention messages to other young people because they share similar experiences, use similar language and their interactions are often more authentic than those of adults.

*Young people are often more effective than adults in communicating prevention messages to other young people.*

**7) Alternatives** are strategies that incorporate recreational, character-building and leisure activities for prevention. Drop-in recreation centres, after-school and weekend programmes, dance, music and other traditional cultural activities, community service activities, tutoring, mentoring and other events are offered as alternatives to dangerous activities such as illicit-drug use. While many alternative approaches have not been evaluated with rigor, researchers have learned valuable lessons from them regarding elements that increase the likelihood of success of drug-use prevention programmes.

***Alternatives incorporate recreational, character-building and leisure activities into prevention.***

Analysis of these lessons shows that alternative strategies are most likely to be effective if they:

- Target youth at high risk who may not have adequate supervision or access to a variety of activities;
- Target the particular needs of individuals;
- Provide intensive approaches that combine access to related services.

Each publication within the *Prevention That Works!* series looks at one of these settings, or areas of influence, highlighting proven principles, practical planning skills and the value of research and evaluation.

# P Planning for Prevention

The objective of the *Prevention That Works!* series is to guide the planning of programmes and activities that aim to prevent the use of illicit drugs among targeted groups. Documented experiences, particularly good-practice analysis, illustrate the power of combining prevention strategies from different spheres of influence. As well, documented experiences emphasize that well-defined outcomes, which are identified in the planning phase, create drug-abuse prevention programmes that truly make a difference.

Planning is the process of defining what the programme is designed to do, the resources required and the evaluation measures that will be used to determine whether it is achieving its objectives or not. Prevention initiatives that have no systematic plan too often lead to frustration and wasted effort and money. Whether planning is simple or elaborate, the process generally includes the following nine steps:

- 1) Conduct needs assessment
- 2) Develop goals and objectives
- 3) Develop programme activities
- 4) Identify resources
- 5) Identify funding resources
- 6) Assign leadership tasks
- 7) Implement activities
- 8) Monitor ongoing progress and evaluate findings
- 9) Make any necessary adjustment to achieve goals and objectives.

Monitoring is the routine tracking of priority information about a programme and its intended outcomes. Monitoring focuses on standard numerical information that documents the amount of work that has been done in a programme, such as the number of people contacted, the number of training or counselling sessions provided and the amount of materials distributed to the community. Regular follow up and monitoring of prevention programmes is essential. Monitoring and the continuous assessment of activities and outputs allow for strengths and problematic weaknesses to be identified and thus indicate where adjustments should be made to ensure that the goals and outcomes are achieved.

***The key to effective prevention is to use multiple strategies, in multiple settings, aimed at clearly defined outcomes.***

Evaluation is the collection of activities designed to determine the value or worth of a specific programme, intervention or project. It is the systematic and scientific collection, processing and analysis of data related to the programme's (or project's) implementation in order to assess its real effectiveness and efficiency. Evaluation generally refers to measuring the success in achieving specified objectives.

Although it is not expected that readers will have all the skills required to conduct programme monitoring and evaluation on their own, the important point is that monitoring and evaluation be factored into the planning and development of intervention programmes. Technical assistance from experts can be sought to help develop the specific methods and procedures to be used.

This *Prevention That Works!* series was developed to help service providers at the community level. It is intended as a guide for creating and implementing programmes and activities and for the critical monitoring and evaluating of them. The principles and concepts presented in this series have practical implications that apply to any intervention – be it in a school, in a community centre, in a youth club or in a parent-teacher association.

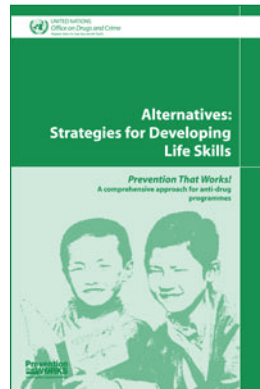
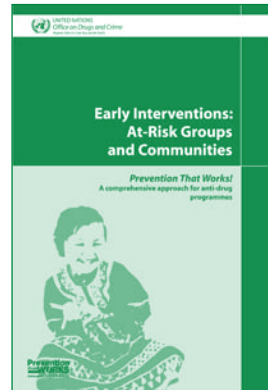
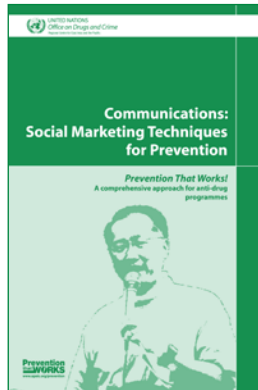
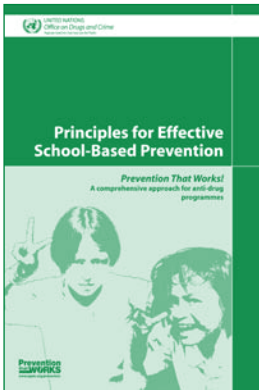
For more resources on prevention, visit [www.unodc.org/youthnet](http://www.unodc.org/youthnet)



For a list of sources and studies used in this publication, go to [www.apaic.org/prevention](http://www.apaic.org/prevention)

**Other titles in the *Prevention That Works!* series:**

- Principles for Effective School-Based Prevention
- Communications: Social Marketing Techniques for Prevention
- Early Interventions: At-Risk Groups and Communities
- Collaboration: Building Partnerships for Prevention Activities
- Alternatives: Strategies for Developing Life Skills



To download publications from the *Prevention That Works!* series, go to [www.unodc.org/prevention](http://www.unodc.org/prevention)

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