

Planning Prevention Services in Schools

Best Practices & Key Considerations

Safe and Supportive Learning Environments



Creating a safe and supportive learning environment requires schools to implement comprehensive prevention services that promote the health and well-being of all students.

Prevention efforts can address a wide range of issues, including but not limited to: substance use (such as alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, prescription drug misuse, and fentanyl), mental health issues, bullying, violence, social isolation and sexual risk behaviors.

Implementing evidence-based prevention services helps reduce risk factors, enhance protective factors, and support students' academic and personal growth. Evidence-based prevention services can improve school climate for both students and teachers.

Key Goals of a Comprehensive Approach to Prevention

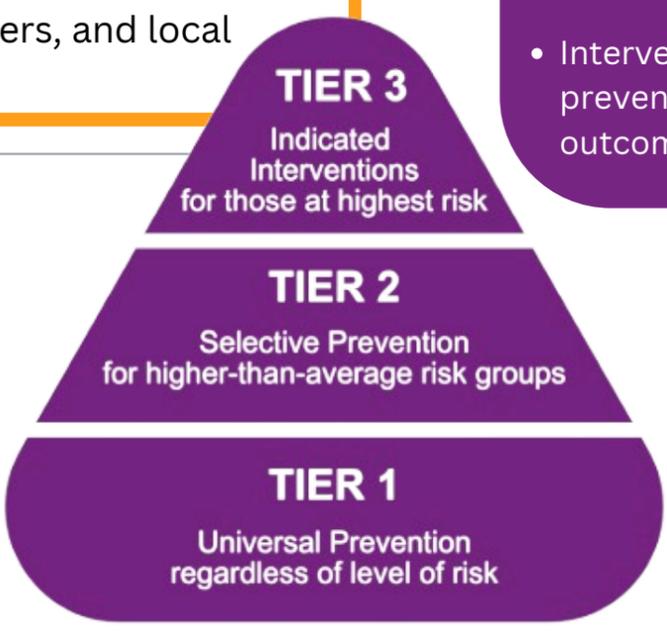
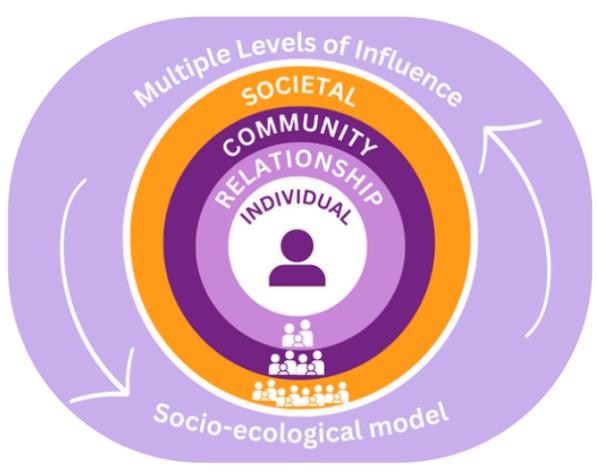
- ✓ Change cultural norms around youth substance use.
- ✓ Empower the public to take action.
- ✓ Delay onset of risky behaviors for as long as possible.
- ✓ Reduce the risk factors that increase the odds of risky behaviors.
- ✓ Reduce the prevalence and consequences to break intergenerational cycles.

Core Principles of Effective Prevention

-  Focus on individual, relationship, community, and societal factors using a socio-ecological model.
-  Implement tiered services: universal, selective, and indicated prevention strategies.
-  Select Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs) supported by research to ensure effectiveness and good use of limited financial and human resources.
-  Address factors that increase or mitigate the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors.
-  Involve parents, caregivers, and local organizations in efforts.

Core Elements of a Comprehensive Approach

- Educate/inform about risky/unhealthy behaviors
- Reduce exposure, access, and appeal to risky/unhealthy behaviors
- Increase appeal of alternative activities
- Screen for and identify signs of risk
- Intervene early to prevent negative outcomes



Planning Prevention Services

A Step-by-Step Guide



Assess Needs and Resources

Conduct needs assessments utilizing surveys, focus groups, and school data (e.g., attendance, mental health issues, disciplinary records) to identify priority areas.

Identify risk and protective factors like peer influence, family support, school connectedness, student mental health, and community safety.

Use resource mapping to identify existing programs, services, and community partnerships that can be leveraged.

Set Clear Goals & Objectives



Develop SMART goals to provide clear direction (e.g., “Reduce incidents of vaping by 20% over the next school year”).

Align objectives with identified needs, school improvement plans, and local/state mandates to ensure strategic impact.

Use logic models as visual road maps that present the shared relationship among resources, activities, outputs, outcomes, and impact.



Select Evidence-Based Programs (EBPs)

Select Programs that are Based on Research Evidence

There are two types of prevention programs that are based on research evidence. **Evidence-based programs (EBPs)** undergo rigorous scientific evaluation to prove their effectiveness. **Evidence-informed programs** are grounded in research and theory but may not have undergone a formal evaluation to demonstrate real-world effectiveness. When EBPs are not accessible or affordable, evidence-informed programs are **strong, research-backed alternatives** for use in schools and communities.

Relevance of selected programs to address the school's identified priorities.

Developmentally-appropriate and culturally responsive tailored interventions align to students' age, developmental stage, and cultural backgrounds.

Feasibility ensures the school can realistically implement and sustain the program.

Fidelity and adaptation balance implementing programs as designed while making necessary local adaptations.

For example, if an evidence-based curriculum was originally designed for urban schools with large class sizes, a rural school with smaller classes might need to adapt group activities while still maintaining the core principles and objectives of the program.



Engage Key Stakeholders

Foster engagement by involving students, parents, educators, healthcare providers, and community leaders early in the planning process.

Communicate and collaborate regularly by hosting meetings and communication channels to foster buy-in and ensure diverse perspectives are considered.



Implement, Evaluate, & Sustain Prevention Efforts

Train & Prepare Staff

- Provide professional development on prevention science, principles, and best practices as well as program-specific training.
- Equip staff with tools to create supportive, inclusive environments.



Deliver Effective Programs

- Integrate programs into existing curricula or offer through workshops and after-school activities.
- Ensure consistency in delivery and use engaging, interactive methods.
- Address potential barriers to participation.



Monitor Progress & Outcomes

- Use pre- and post-program surveys, attendance logs, and behavioral outcome data to assess effectiveness.
- Collect qualitative feedback from students, staff, and families to inform improvements.



Long-Term Sustainability

- Integrate prevention into school policies, curricula, and long-term strategic plans.
- Identify ongoing funding sources and cultivate community partnerships to support sustainability.
- Celebrate successes and share outcomes with stakeholders to maintain momentum.



Resources

Examples of Prevention Focus Areas



Substance Use Prevention

Preventing the use and harms of alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, fentanyl, other illegal drugs, and prescription drug misuse.

Mental Health Promotion

Stress management, resilience building, and emotional regulation.

Bullying and Violence Prevention

Programs, policies, and protocols fostering empathy, conflict resolution, and positive peer relationships.

Healthy Decision-Making

Peer leadership and mentorship programs, coping skills education, and safe risk-taking opportunities.

Recommended Prevention Programs, Practices and Resources

Strategic Prevention Framework (SAMHSA)

<https://library.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/strategic-prevention-framework-pep19-01.pdf>

Blueprints for Healthy Youth Development Experimentally Proven Programs

<https://www.blueprintsprograms.org/>

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Evidence-based Programs

<https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/evidence-based-programs>

CASEL's Program Registry (Social and Emotional Learning Programs)

<https://pg.casel.org/review-programs/>

CDC's Violence Prevention Resources

www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Prevention Programs

<https://nida.nih.gov/research-topics/prevention>

Parent and Family Engagement Resources

www.drugfree.org

DEA Education and Prevention Resources

www.dea.gov/what-we-do/education-and-prevention



Resources

Sample Needs Assessment Questions

- What are the most pressing health and safety concerns for students in our school?
- What prevention services are currently in place? Are there gaps?
- How do students, staff, and families perceive the effectiveness of existing programs?

SMART Goals Template

Goal: Reduce vaping incidents

S	M	A	R	T
Specific	Measurable	Attainable	Relevant	Time-Bound
				
Yes, the goal is specific and clear.	Track disciplinary reports	Resources available	High priority	By the end of the semester

Sample Implementation Timeline

Month	Activity
August	Conduct needs assessment & select programs
September	Train staff & plan program schedule
October - May	Implement programs & collect data
June	Evaluate outcomes & plan for next year

Closing Thoughts

Successful prevention efforts are ongoing, collaborative, comprehensive, and responsive to the evolving needs of students and communities.

By following best practices and engaging all stakeholders, schools can foster safer environments where every student has the opportunity to thrive.

