Substance Abuse Prevention Programs: A Life Skills Approach

Inter-American Drug Abuse Control Commission
Organization of American States
Washington, DC

Gilbert J. Botvin, Ph.D.

Professor and Director
Institute for Prevention Research
Department of Public Health
Weill Medical College
Cornell University
Outline

- Background
- Description of Life Skills Training
- Evidence of Effectiveness
- Who Can Teach It
- Challenges of Teaching Prevention
- Next Steps

Background
Advances in Prevention Science

- What are the Causes
- What Prevention Approaches Work
- How Long Do Effects Last
- What Substances Can Be Prevented
- Who Does it Work for
- Why Do Effective Programs Work
- What are the Obstacles to Effective Prevention

Evidence-Based Approaches

- Extensively Tested
- Using Rigorous Research Methods
- Proven Effective
- Published in Peer-Reviewed Journal
Why Conduct Tobacco Prevention in Schools?

- Easy Access
- Large Numbers
- Structured Setting
- Mandated Health Education
- Related to Educational Objectives

Prevention Approaches

- Health Information
- Scare Tactics
- Social Influences
- Competence Enhancement (Personal and Social Skills)
Description of the Program

Figure 1. Hypothesized Etiologic Model of Adolescent Drug Use and Targets of Life Skills Training Program
Life Skills Training
Major Components

- Normative Education
- Refusal/Resistance Skills
- Self-Management Skills
- Social Skills
Drug Resistance Skills

- Awareness of Pro-Drug Social Influences
- Anti-Drug Use Norms
- Prevention-Related Health Knowledge
- Resistance/Refusal Skills

Self-Management Skills

- Problem-Solving and Decision-Making
- Personal Behavior Change Skills (Goalsetting, Self-Monitoring, Self-Reinforcement)
- Stress and Anxiety Management
General Social Skills

- Effective Communication Skills
- Greetings and Brief Social Exchanges
- Meeting New People
- Conversational Skills
- Complimenting Skills
- Assertive Skills

Number of Classes Per Year

- 15 Class Periods (6th or 7th Grade)
- 10 Class Periods (7th or 8th Grade)
- 5 Class Periods (8th or 9th Grade)
Who Can Teach LST

- Health Professionals
- Graduate Students
- Peer Leaders
- Classroom Teachers

Teaching Methods

- Facilitate Group Discussion
- Teach Skills
- Provide Reinforcement
- Provide Opportunities for Practice
How to Teach Skills

Instruction
Demonstration
Behavior Rehearsal
Feedback
Reinforcement
Extended Practice

Evidence of Effectiveness
**Life Skills Training**

*Short-Term Effects*


---

**Life Skills Training**

*Booster Effects*

Source: *Botvin et al. (1983), ** Botvin et al. (1990)*
Life Skills Training

Long-Term Effects: Smoking

- Weekly Smoking* (White Sample): 28% Reduction
- Weekly Smoking** (Minority Sample): 20% Reduction
- Daily Smoking* (White Sample): 29% Reduction
- Daily Smoking** (Minority Sample): 21% Reduction


Life Skills Training

Long-Term Effects: Gateway Polydrug Use & Illicit Drug Use

- Polydrug Use* (Weekly): 50% Reduction
- Narcotics** (Lifetime): 56% Reduction
- Hallucinogens** (Lifetime): 38% Reduction
- Illicit Drug Use** (Lifetime): 25% Reduction

Source: *Botvin et al. (1995), ** Botvin et al. (2000)
Life Skills Training

Binge Drinking (Botvin et al., 2001)

Summary of Evaluation Results

- Reduces Substance Use by 50% to 87%
- Tobacco, Alcohol, Marijuana
- Effects Last for at Least 6 Years
- Inhalants, Narcotics, Hallucinogens
- Reduces Polydrug Use
- White, African-American, Hispanic
- Urban, Suburban, Rural Youth
Challenges of Going to Scale

- Develop Organizational Infrastructure
- Increase Training Capacity
- Refine Training Model
- Control Quality of Training
- Maintain Implementation Fidelity
- Address Planning and Scheduling Issues
- Address Technical Assistance Needs

How Can High Fidelity be Achieved

- Emphasize Importance of Fidelity
- Explain Underlying Theory
- Describe Prevention Approach
- Train Program Providers
- Monitor Implementation
- Provide Support and Technical Assistance
Future Research Directions

- Refine Current Approaches
- Identify Key Components
- Tailor Approaches to Populations
- More Research with Minority Youth
- Develop Multi-Level Approaches (Schools, Family, Community)
- Extend Findings to Related Behaviors
Thank You !
Gilbert J. Botvin, Ph.D.
Professor and Director
Institute for Prevention Research
Weill Medical College of Cornell University
gjbotvin@med.cornell.edu