Helping Peer Mentors Address Substance Use

Many youth want to learn about drugs (and sex, money and other adult-oriented things). They usually want honest and practical information. And peers are often their "go to" source. Schools can help youth get good information by training peer mentors in how to talk about drugs and drug use in honest, practical ways.

Start with the Basics

One step in the honest-and-practical direction involves knowing some basic facts about humans and drugs.

Drug use is part of the human experience. From caffeine and alcohol to cannabis and opiates, drugs have to ou(ua)5EToatty siETET(a) bgirni6(ulEToe)4(s)-4(r)7(hi6(ul)-4(a)an)113(ou(ua).TBT1 0 0 1 69.984 648}1 Tm(be)3(e)4(nBT

– a web-based collection of resources developed by the Centre for Addictions Research of BC at the University of Victoria.

Here to Help - a web-based collection of fact sheets, self-help materials and other resources developed by the BC Partners for Mental Health and Addictions Information.

A Quick Summary of the Evidence on Peer Mentoring

The importance of peer mentoring was highlighted by youth in consultations conducted by the BC government in preparing *Healthy Minds, Healthy People: A Ten-Year Plan to Address Mental Health and Substance Use in British Columbia* (Ministry of Health Services & Ministry of Children and Family Development, 2010). This fits with the idea that a community's wellness is enhanced by mobilizing its assets, and that peer influence should be seen as a positive asset and not regarded simply in negative terms like "peer-pressure" (Kretzmann, McKnight, Dobrowolski, & Puntenney, 2005). Furthermore, formal studies have identified peer leadership and mentoring among best practices for addressing youth substance use (Cheon, 2008; Cuijpers, 2002). Very little research has examined how to maximize the positive impact of peer mentorship, but evidence related to adult mentoring of youth points to the importance of attention to sound theory (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine, 2011). Building on social influence theory, mentors should be supported to provide a positive influence within their normal social networks and not just within specialized programs.

References

Cheon, J. W. (2008). Best practices in community