



What Does NOT Work in Prevention Webinar Participant Workbook – January 22, 2026

What is your greatest fear or hope when you hear, "What does NOT work in prevention?"

A Timeline of Prevention

Time	Strategy	Activities
1950s and 1960s	Scare tactics	Films and speakers
Early 1970s	Drug education	Curricula based on factual information
Mid-/Late-1970s	Affective education and alternatives to drug use	Curricula based on communication, decision-making, values clarification, and self-esteem
Late-1970s to early 1980s	Affective education, alternatives to drug use and training	Social skills curricula, refusal skills training, parenting education
Late-1980s to mid-1990s	Parent, school, and community partnerships	Research-based curricula, peer programs
Mid-1990s to 2010	Replication of research-based models and application of research-based approaches	Environmental approaches, comprehensive programs targeting many domains and strategies, evaluation of prevention programs, media campaigns
2010s to today	Expansion of research base-models with a focus on more diverse audiences through continued evaluation and research	Cross sector prevention efforts, public health focus, community-based strategies for greater impact, focus across the lifespan and on diverse population groups

This workbook was adapted, with permission, from the Great Lakes PTTC webinar, "Uncovering What Does NOT Work in Substance Misuse Prevention," and accompanying workbook. We gratefully acknowledge the Great Lakes PTTC for allowing the use of their content.

Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness

Well Supported Supported		Promising Direction / Emerging / Undetermined More Research Needed			Unsupported Harmful	
Effect	Found to be effective	Some evidence of effectiveness	Expected preventive effect	Effect is undetermined	Ineffective	Practice constitutes risk of harm
Internal validity	True experimental design	Quasi experimental design	Non-experimental design	Sound theory only	No research No sound theory	True or quasi experimental design
Type of evidence/research design	Randomized control trials and meta-analysis / systematic review	Quasi experimental design	Single group design	Exploratory study	Anecdotal / Needs assessment	Randomized control trials or quasi experimental design
Independent replication	Program replication with evaluation replication	Program replication without evaluation replication	Partial program replication without evaluation replication			Program replication with evaluation replication
Implementation guidance	Comprehensive	Partial	None			Comprehensive
External and ecological validity	Applied studies—different settings (2+)	Applied studies—similar settings (2+)	Real-world Informed	Somewhat real-world informed	Not real-world informed	Applied studies—same/different settings

The various areas and dimensions of the Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness are explained in the accompanying guidance document, *Understanding Evidence Part 1: Best Available Research Evidence. A Guide to the Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness*, which can be downloaded from www.VETOviolence.org or ordered in hardcopy from www.cdc.gov/injury/publications/Index.html.

National Center for Injury Prevention and Control
Division of Violence Prevention



<https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/continuum-chart-a.pdf>

Reflection #1

How does your community/organization typically make decisions about strategies to implement? Does the loudest voice in the room "win"? Is it hard to break "traditions" in terms of what is implemented year to year? Does data drive your decisions?

Ineffective and Effective Strategies for Substance Misuse Prevention

	Ineffective	Effective
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-time events• Assemblies• Personal testimony from people in recovery• Mock car crashes• Drunk goggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social emotional learning curricula in school• Parenting programs focused on talking to and supporting youth• Curricula proven to address risk and protective factors• Age-appropriate information delivered over time• Long-term education campaigns with a focused goal and audience
Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Fear-based campaigns• Grotesque images• Long-term consequences• Exaggerated dangers• Moralistic appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Normative messages regarding peer use and actions• Short-term impacts of use• Positive effects of no use
Information Sharing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Knowledge-based interventions<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Drug fact sheets◦ Effects of drugs• Myth busting	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Education related to risk and protective factors• Action-focused information

Reflection #2

List one strategy that has been or is being done in your community that is known to be ineffective:

What are the reasons why my community (or an individual) is invested in this strategy?

Reflection #3

Brainstorm some benefits for folks invested in the ineffective strategy you wrote in Reflection #2 they would see if they were to shift to an effective, evidence-based strategy instead.

Moving Forward

Video: *Navigate and Embrace Change with Simon Sinek*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pUmTQ-86-YI>

*How can you move your community **incrementally** toward more effective strategies?*

How can you apply the Law of Diffusion of Innovations to moving your community toward more effective strategies? Who might your early adopters be? How can you build demand?

Prime the Pump

- Review your strategic plan, including the priority problems, risk/protective factors
- Provide training on logic models
- Identify evidence-based strategies that are a good fit for your community

Steps Toward Implementing More Effective Strategies

- **Identify** WHY your community (or a certain individual) is invested in the ineffective strategy
- **Find** evidence-based, effective strategies that can be implemented instead
- **Brainstorm** how the change in strategy could benefit those invested in the ineffective strategy
- **Create** a message to persuade people to embrace replacing the ineffective strategy
- **Meet** with those invested in the ineffective strategy

Reminders

- Understand what is appealing about the ineffective strategies
- Anticipate and prepare for resistance
- Use strategic plan to ensure strategies selected are a good fit
- Craft messages that provide:
 - ✓ Compelling reason to quit using the ineffective strategy
 - ✓ How the new strategy will be advantageous
 - ✓ A clear call to action
- Practice, practice, practice!

Additional Resources

Prevention Tools: What Works, What Doesn't

Washington State Health Care Authority

<https://theathenaforum.org/best-practices-toolkit-prevention-tools-what-works-what-doesnt>

Guide to Online Registries for Substance Misuse Prevention

Pacific Southwest Prevention Technology Transfer Center

<https://ptcnetwork.org/centers/pacific-southwest-pttc/product/guide-online-registries-substance-misuse-prevention-evidence>

A Guide to SAMHSA's Strategic Prevention Framework

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/20190620-samhsa-strategic-prevention-framework-guide.pdf>

Not Your Mother's Scare Tactics – Brief

Prevention Solutions@EDC

https://preventionsolutions.edc.org/sites/default/files/attachments/Not-Your-Mothers-Scare-Tactics-Brief-The-Changing-Landscape-of-Fear-based-Messaging_0.pdf

Ineffectiveness of Fear Appeals in Youth Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Prevention

Prevention First

<https://www.prevention.org/Resources/348ad797-5165-4695-885f-1e958b8f5591/IneffectivenessofFearAppealsinYouthATODPrevention-FINAL.pdf>

The Athena Forum

Washington State Health Care Authority – evidence-based substance misuse prevention strategies and practices

<https://theathenaforum.org/home>

The Surgeon General's Report on Alcohol, Drugs, and Health

2016 National Surgeon General's Report which includes effective prevention strategies

<https://addiction.surgeongeneral.gov/sites/default/files/surgeon-generals-report.pdf>

CDC Community Guide, Preventing Excessive Alcohol Consumption

Guide to effective community-based strategies to prevent and reduce alcohol-related harms

<https://www.thecommunityguide.org/topic/excessive-alcohol-consumption>