



Dr Richard MacKenzie, member of Mentor's Scientific Advisory Network speaks at a professional seminar organised by Mentor Lithuania to educate Prevention Practitioners

Mentor Principles

for Effective Prevention Planning and Implementation

These principles represent a set of concepts believed to be important in the development, implementation and long-term sustainability of effective prevention programmes. The 13 principles were primarily identified through a consensus process among the Mentor Foundation's Scientific Advisory Network.



Involving young people



Food for thought



Listening to the young



Planning together



Dubai: Working together

Mentor Principles

The principles are intended to reflect the scientific-based literature regarding best practices in drug abuse prevention. They should be viewed as a set of desirable elements of effective prevention planning and implementation. There are no assumptions as to which elements are more or less important. Also, no individual principle is a necessary or sufficient condition of effective prevention. We believe that the success of a prevention programme is maximized to the extent that it can adhere to and incorporate these principles.

- 1. Goals and objectives of the programme are clearly described.** A solid foundation for an effective programme begins with identifying clear and attainable goals. Programme goals may include implementation (e.g., conduct several trainings for parents) and outcome (e.g., to reduce the use drugs among teenagers).
- 2. Programme is relevant to the drug or drugs being targeted.** Many programmes target all drugs. But for those that are target specific drugs, it is important that the curriculum and activities be relevant to that particular drug. For example, a tobacco prevention project for youth would highlight different short-term and long-term consequences than consequences associated with other drugs, such as alcohol.
- 3. Programme is relevant to the age of those targeted for the prevention project.** The content of a prevention programme needs to be developmentally appropriate. Such adjustments may include reading and comprehension level, teaching style or approach and programme goals. Regarding the latter, programmes for younger youth will want to provide skills aimed at preventing the onset of drug use, whereas programmes aimed at older youth will want to include skills associated with how to stop its use if it has started.
- 4. Programme is sensitive to the culture and community norms of those targeted for the prevention project.** The prevention programme also needs to take into account the norms and standards of the local community. Such factors may include language, cultural views of drugs, and political considerations.
- 5. Targets for change to promote prevention are consistent with known or perceived psychosocial risk and protective factors.** A hallmark of effective prevention is to organize the curriculum and activities on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors associated with the onset and maintenance of drug use. Thus, programme goals may include reducing aggression, delinquency, and influences from delinquent peers; or include enhancing parent relationships, relationships with other adult role models, self-esteem, school affiliation, and pro-social recreational activities.
- 6. Programme content and delivery is informed by a needs assessment.** Needs assessment refers to assessing the local community's needs for prevention services as well as the scope of the drug problem. The results of this needs assessment should inform the nature of the prevention programme's content (e.g., which risk and protective factors to address), as well as the programme's delivery strategy in order to maximize the programmes' potential for positive impact.
- 7. The programme consists of strategies that promote participation and retention.** Effective programmes place a high priority on implementing strategies that promote youth and family engagement. Engagement by participants is enhanced when the programme is perceived as accessible, relevant, challenging and entertaining. Specific engagement strategies may include

use of group- and peer-lead activities, homework assignments involving active participation by both the child and parents, personalizing the programme when possible (e.g., holding anniversary events to celebrate and reward accomplishments), and reducing "external" barriers to involvement (e.g., providing transportation; scheduling activities to accommodate the availability of participants).

- 8. Planning, maintenance and future directions of the programme involve ongoing participation and input from key stakeholders, agencies, organizations and target groups in a collaborative process.** It is common for successful programmes to have a centralized, broad-based decision-making team consisting of administrative staff of the programme, affiliated community service providers (e.g., mental health providers, school officials, law enforcement), and an advisory board of funders and youth and parents from the community. All key members of the programme should have a voice in programme design and implementation. Thus, the administrative management team should not be at the centre of the organizational structure. Rather, a bottom-up, consensus-oriented decision making process needs to be in place that involves all major staff and officials of the programme.
- 9. Skills and knowledge are provided that are relevant to those targeted for the prevention project and that are consistent with programme goals.** Effective programmes that target youth usually include social skills training, which may include skills to increase positive and pro-social experiences in social settings; building coping skills to address peer pressures to use drugs; and socializing the young person to engage in social activities not involving drug use and related delinquent activities. With respect to programmes that target parents, it is common to focus on building skills toward effective parenting, such as strengthening parental involvement and appropriate monitoring and supervision, and promoting family togetherness and solidarity.
- 10. The overall project has a plan and budget for the specific activity or strategy to be delivered.** Programme activities need to be shaped within an overall prevention programme plan and in the context of the available budget.
- 11. A sustainability plan exists.** The overall programme plan should include how the programme can be sustained. This may include a strategic plan related to funding and how a programme can be integrated into a long-standing stable organization (e.g., another NGO; YMCA or YWCA).
- 12. An evaluation and dissemination plan exists.** The evaluation of a programme is an important tool for providing internal feedback to the programme staff to gauge where the programme is successful and where it may need to be adjusted. Also, evaluation results can provide important accountability information to stakeholders. Formal evaluations of outcome may be relatively expensive to conduct. Many programmes can only conduct a process evaluation, where the focus is on describing the nature and extent of the programme's activities (e.g., how many youth and parents were served; types of community outreach activities). Also, the programme should have a plan for disseminating the evaluation results, with considerations of distributing the finding to internal staff, stakeholders and other community groups of interest.
- 13. The organization is run by skilled staff.** An efficient and effective programme needs to consist of staff that is properly educated and trained. In-service trainings to regularly update the skills of staff are also important.