

Drug Education is Critical

By Karen Perry



When it comes to fighting prescription drug abuse, education is critical.

Of course, law enforcement crackdowns, strong government oversight, and effective anti-drug laws are essential in stopping the proliferation of illegal drugs and the unlawful distribution of powerful pharmaceuticals.

For us at NOPE (Narcotics Overdose Prevention & Education) Task Force, we believe that well-organized educational campaigns about the dangers of drugs can go even further in turning people, especially youth, away from experimenting with legal and illegal narcotics and driving down our nation's skyrocketing drug overdose rates.

Young people today are faced with many influences to use and abuse drugs. Engaging students in drug education can help them make healthy and safe choices, identify risky situations, and develop strategies to prepare them for peer and adult pressures.

Consider the statistics:

-- Every day 2,500 teens in the U.S. try prescription drugs to get high for the first time. (*Source: Partnership at Drugfree.org*)

-- 60 percent of teens who have abused prescription painkillers did so before age 15. (*Source: Partnership at Drugfree.org*)

-- And 44 percent of those who use prior to the age of 15 will later develop an addiction. (*Source: Misuse of Prescription Drugs. national Surveys on Drug Use and Health, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 2006*)

That last number is particularly troubling. Just think how many of these children could be spared a lifetime of pain and suffering that comes with drug addiction if only they were better educated about trying drugs in the first place.



We believe anti-drug education is successful when the messaging is purposefully blunt and evokes powerful emotions. The teaching needs to come from those within a community, from people living and working there and most impacted by illegal prescription drugs and narcotics. People like police officers and drug counselors who deal regularly with drug addicts, and people like grieving parents who lost a son or daughter to drugs.

Drug prevention is a community issue. Each year, new studies indicate the vastness of drug use in schools. That's why a major part of NOPE's mission is to conduct drug awareness presentations at schools and colleges for students and at community forums for parents.

We provide information that deals with the realities our nation faces regarding substance abuse and overdose death, along with suggestions and parenting strategies to combat those issues. Our talks often end with students coming forward to open up about drug use in their homes, and parents taking steps to seek treatment for their drug-dependent children. Based on letters, comments and pre/post test surveys that we have collected from participants, researchers at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida have collected empirical evidence showing that our prevention

messages are changing the knowledge and attitudes of students and their parents.

The reality is, it's hard to change attitudes toward drugs. America's been involved in the drug war for decades, and despite various victories, we're still a nation plagued by drug abuse and its related violence, social costs and other problems.

Many experts have long said that we can't arrest our way out of this epidemic. Our best hope to winning the battle against drugs will come from teaching the truth and from changing the attitudes toward drugs.

Education is the key.

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