

ALAMO HEIGHTS ISD STRATEGY 2: AGGRESSIVELY CONFRONT THE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL ISSUES OF OUR COMMUNITY.

Develop a coordinated K-12 program designed to address drugs and alcohol.

AHISD GUIDING TRUTHS

Breaking the Silence

In order to confront drugs and alcohol, we must be committed to an ongoing and meaningful dialog about the issues that underpin drug and alcohol abuse. Most communities have a code of silence when it comes to addiction; we believe that in order to confront this issue we have to break that silence. Silence breeds shame and disconnection. Shame and disconnection are the catalysts for addiction.

Zero Tolerance

The use of illegal substances creates a state of mind that is incompatible with our district's mission and vision. A student under the influence of illegal drugs or alcohol is not prepared to attend to academic, artistic, athletic or extra-curricular activities. We believe that student involvement with drugs or alcohol at any level is life threatening and, when brought to campus, poses a serious risk to the safety of all students.

Prevention Paradigm

Relationships prevent drug and alcohol abuse. Drug education alone is not enough to prevent young people from experimenting with drugs. Just Say No and shock/scare campaigns are proven to be ineffective and may even be counterproductive¹. Prevention campaigns can impact drug-using patterns for young people if they go beyond Just Say No and include the exploration of attitudes and values and the development of relationships. The building of healthy relationships is proven to be most effective with regard to all high-risk childhood behaviors².

We believe that prevention must occur at every level of a student's life: home, school and community. As such, it is our job to educate and inspire parents, school personnel and community members in order for them to play an active role in prevention and intervention efforts. Community reinforced approaches are among the intervention and prevention strategies with the strongest scientific evidence. The Community Reinforcement Approach to drug and alcohol prevention and recovery is based on the belief that environmental contingencies play a powerful role in encouraging or discouraging drinking or drug use. Consequently, it utilizes social, recreational, familial, and vocational reinforcements to assist teens in the recovery process.

Parent involvement in prevention is critical. Research shows that teenagers are less likely to experiment with drugs and alcohol when parents openly

communicate expectations and consequences to their children. Research also demonstrates that teens who experiment with drugs and alcohol are less likely to have ongoing dependence-related problems when parents consistently enforce consequences, regularly maintain dialog and engage in focused activities that encourage family bonding³.

Intervention Paradigm

Discipline and consequences are a natural and essential part of dealing with students engaged in drinking or drug use. However, in addition to discipline, we will make treatment options available to any student who is known to be involved with drugs or alcohol and those treatment options will include help for the entire family system.

Recovery Paradigm

Students who attend inpatient or outpatient rehabilitation centers for the treatment of alcohol and drug dependence have a significantly higher chance of remaining sober. Still, national statistics report that the relapse rate for teens is upwards of 65%³. Research suggests that the failure of treatment has less to do with the treatment itself and more to do with the environment to which the teens returns post-treatment. AHISD believes that it is our duty to receive students returning from treatment with compassion and offer them a multi-layered support system that incorporates AHISD staff and community involvement.

Based on the aforementioned guiding truths, our program marries four levels of intervention:

- (1) Student education and intervention
- (2) Parent education and consultation
- (3) Staff training and empowerment
- (4) Community reinforcement through education and fellowship

STUDENT EDUCATION AND INTERVENTION

Our educational approach for students focuses on providing accurate and balanced information via Health, Science and other courses. It accepts that there are different views about drug use and encourages young people to explore these views and develop their own opinions. In addition to educating students about the dangers associated with drug and alcohol use, we are also making efforts to engage them in relevant discussions about all life choices.

Student Counseling, Consultation and Referral

Students who are known to or believed to be involved with drugs or alcohol can be referred to the Wellness Program. By and large, referrals are made by fellow students, parents and AHISD staff. Through this program they receive:

- Individual and Family Counseling
- Access to Peer Support Groups

- Inpatient and Outpatient Rehabilitation Referral and Placement Assistance

Peer Support Group at AHHS, AHJS, DAEP and Robbins Academy

Our peer support groups are directed at helping students develop a range of relevant personal and social skills so they can make their own, informed decisions about drug use and other life issues. AHISD has an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding with The Palmer Drug Abuse Program (PDAP). PDAP staff assists in the facilitation of weekly, on campus support groups and ongoing support for parents.

Relapse Prevention Program

We have initiated a community-wide relapse prevention program wherein AH students and former students who are actively engaged in recovery from drugs and alcohol receive relapse prevention counseling and support. The unique nature of this program is that AH staff and community members agree to take an active role in assisting students in the recovery process. Each student's Relapse Prevention Plan is unique. Together with the Wellness Coordinator, students design a plan that meets their recovery needs and select members of our staff and community to assist in the implementation of that plan. Typically, a team will consist of (1) the Wellness Coordinator, (2) an Academic Counselor, (3) a teacher with whom the student has a relationship, (4) an administrator, (5) a member of the community with whom the student has had previous interactions, such as a youth minister, a family friend and (6) another student in recovery from addiction.

Soul Collage

Soul Collage is an art therapy project for students recovering from difficult life situations, including drug and alcohol abuse. Students create narratives about their experiences and share with others in the form of art. This reinforces their ability to connect with others and assists them in creating healthy relationships.

DARE

All AHISD fifth grade students participate in the law enforcement-driven DARE program. DARE posits a decision making model that has applications to drugs, alcohol and other high-risk behaviors.

Kitchen Table Talks

The purpose of these sessions is to facilitate in-home discussions with students and, when appropriate, their parents, around drugs, alcohol, peer pressure, and other social/emotional issues.

Student Assembly

Based on the assertion that students respond more positively to personal testimony than to didactic lesson plans, we are engaging student in educational assemblies that showcase real stories by speakers with whom our students can closely relate.

In recent years we have spotlighted the personal stories of 7 former students and have funded appearances by nationally recognized drug and alcohol prevention speakers.

PARENT EDUCATION AND CONSULTATION

Our educational approach for parents focuses on providing accurate and balanced information as a means of empowering them and encouraging them to have open, honest conversations with their children and with other parents. A secondary aim of the program is to unite parents who have common struggles so that they can support one another. These are the tenants of our parent education program:

1. You are not alone.
2. Prevention begins with you. If you are not talking with your children about drugs and alcohol abuse, you are not helping to prevent it.
3. Make your family values and expectations known. The school is your resource; the school cannot communicate your family's values to your children.
4. Be a positive role model with respect to drugs and alcohol.
5. If you think your child might have a problem with drugs or alcohol, ask for help. Early intervention matters.

Wholehearted Parenting Groups

The Wellness Coordinator, together with a campus counselor, hosts Parenting Groups at each campus. These support groups are designed to help parents sink more deeply into vulnerability and courage. Together we explore these concepts:

1. Parenting without pretending, pleasing or perfecting
2. Acknowledging and releasing the shame that sometimes underlies our parenting struggles.
3. Creating a legacy of wholeheartedness for our children.

Parent-Led Speaking Events

In addition to the aforementioned Kitchen Table Talks, it is our programmatic commitment to accept any and all reasonable requests to speak at parent-led events such as PTO meetings, Mom's Groups and other civic organizations.

Parent Counseling, Consultation and Referral

Parents can consult with staff confidentially regarding their child's drug or alcohol involvement. They receive referrals to outside agencies, directions for addressing drug and alcohol abuse and individual or family counseling.

Alamo Heights Alanon Group for Parents

Alanon is a 12-Step program geared toward helping family members of alcoholics and addicts. In 2011, Alamo Heights' parents started their own unique Alanon meeting specifically geared toward supporting parents of alcoholics/addicts.

DARE for Parents

DARE for Parents coincides with the 5th grade DARE program. It teaches parents about the DARE decision-making model and helps generate family dialog about drugs, alcohol and other high-risk behaviors.

STAFF TRAINING AND EMPOWERMENT

Our training and empowerment approach for staff is rooted in the assertion that we are the heart of this community and, as such, must take an active role in prevention and intervention. We are focused on (1) providing information that will enable staff to recognize students who may be struggling with drugs, alcohol or other issues; (2) providing strategies for intervention that incorporate both compassion and discipline; and (3) defining our role as Collaborator and Consultant to families.

COMMUNITY REINFORCEMENT

Breaking the Silence

Embodied in our school's strategic plan is the assertion that we will aggressively confront the social and emotional issues of our community. In support of this effort we have undertaken a project called Breaking the Silence. On the first Monday of every month parents, students, staff and community members come together to learn and generate dialog around common, and sometimes controversial, issues such as addiction, mental illness and high-risk behavior.

Community Outreach

We believe that preventing drug and alcohol abuse is a global issue. It isn't enough to assist only *our* students and their families. To truly make an impact, we must extend our knowledge and services to all families in the greater San Antonio area. School personnel and families from other school districts are routinely invited to our Breaking the Silence sessions. We have assisted a number of schools districts in identifying drug and alcohol treatment options for students. In addition, we have provided training to area agencies whose mission it is to serve families affected by drugs and alcohol. Partners include Alpha House, Volunteers of America, St. PJs, Seton Home, Boysville, Haven for Hope, Bexar County Juvenile Probation, Big Brothers Big Sisters, San Antonio Council on Drug and Alcohol Abuse, Texas Department of State Health Services, Presa Community Center, and ChildSafe.

References

1. Department for Education and Employment. *Protecting Young People*. 1998.
2. The Search Institute. *Successful Young Adult Development*. 2004.
3. National Institute on Drug Abuse. *Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents: A Researched Based Guide for Parents, Educators and Community Leaders*. Second Edition. 2003.