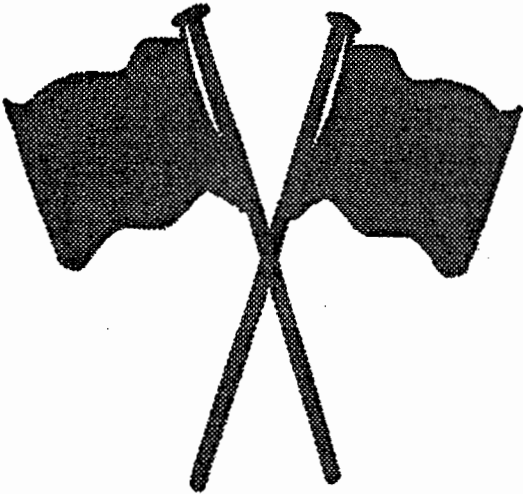


Red Flags to Prevention Education

	<h1>Red Flags</h1>	<p>The experience of prevention specialists and the knowledge obtained from research have identified some activities that should be avoided in prevention programs. Heed these warnings so that prevention efforts are not counter productive. These "red flags" include the following:</p>
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#1: DO NOT.....Trivialize prevention.

Failure to treat seriously the prevention of drug use and violence negates the effect of the program.

- If prevention activities in this guide are not integrated in regular lesson plans as graded activities, students perceive the prevention messages as unimportant
- Inconsistent verbal and behavioral "no-drug-use" and "no-violence" messages undermine the significance of those messages.
- Insufficient professional development for teaching prevention weakens the capability of staff to give and model appropriate messages.



#2: DO NOT.....Use inappropriate guest speakers.

Sometimes well-meaning teachers inadvertently incorporate resources that are "red flags", such as:

- Inviting a guest speaker to talk about recovering from drug use or about past gang experiences. Speeches by former addicts, pushers, or gang members may make a strong anti-drug, anti-violence impressions on adults, but students often receive a totally opposite messages. Students may be impressed that a person can use drugs and be involved with violence, yet still be perceived as a successful, even famous adult.
- We rob students of healthy role models when we fail to expose them to successful adults and older peers who have not used drugs and who have not led lives of violence.
- Some prevention speakers may fail to present messages in an age appropriate manner unless they receive appropriate guidance from educators.
- Students may be confused by mixed messages if presenters represent groups that support drug interests or activities that promote violence.

**#3: DO NOT.....Engage in self-disclosure.**

Personal revelation by either teachers or students should not be encouraged as a means of stimulating classroom discussion.

- Honest dialog is an important aspect of prevention and students should be encouraged to strengthen their thinking skills by considering problems relevant to their own lives, not what happened in a teacher's experience.
- Urging personal revelations places students in situations for which they are not prepared.

**#4 DO NOT.....Group students according to behaviors related to drugs or violence.**

Be careful not to group students according to behaviors related to drugs or violence.

- Like-minded peers tend to reinforce the same attitudes and behaviors in each other even if those are negative or harmful.
- Less-randomized student groupings are not as likely to expand student perspectives and thus inhibit learning. For example, cooperative teams without a balance of males and females, cultural backgrounds, and levels of ability and interests will not challenge thinking skills in the way a more diverse group might.

**#5: DO NOT.....Teach how to use drugs or weapons under the guise of informing about drugs or weapons.**

- Dramatic discussions of how drugs make people feel or elaborate descriptions of drug paraphernalia may stimulate curiosity and encourage experimentation. For example, do not provide a list of products that someone might inhale. This type of education in the 1960's produced a generation of "educated consumers".
- Discussions of weapons should not glorify the weapons, nor should curriculum or presentations give the impression that guns are more common than they, in fact, are.

**#6: DO NOT.....Sensationalize the drug and violence epidemics.**

Dramatic scare tactics may generate attention; however, such tactics are not a useful prevention strategy.

- Distorted film scenarios cause educators to lose credibility in prevention education when students recognize the discrepancy with reality.
- Developmentally, adolescents tend to feel invulnerable, and are likely to view scare films as a personal dare.
- Most importantly, however, focusing on extreme examples distracts classroom attention from addressing the early-stage behaviors where prevention is most effective.



#7: DO NOT.....Expect students to report incidents with no assurance of support.

Do not expect students to report incidents of drug use or violence to school adults (for example, knowledge of an imminent fight, a friend's coming to school drunk every day, or someone being harassed on the bus),

- when staff have not been trained in appropriate responses
- when staff have not been enlisted in site-based commitment to safe school climates
- when staff are not expected to model no-drug and no-violence behaviors and attitudes themselves
- when parents are not provided prevention resources.

The lack of clear procedures to assure consistent, fair, and effective responses undermines a trusting relationship between adults and students.

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