



Inclusiveness Is Important In Youth-Led Prevention Groups

Reaching all members of a community is important in both community-wide prevention and in youth programming. Further, to be effective, peer efforts must mix low-risk, pro-social youth and high-risk, asocial youth as much as possible. Mixing students with different histories is also recommended.

Youth-led prevention groups are inclusive. Student Leadership Services, Inc. actively encourages youth to make healthy decisions. Evidence of this is found in its Mission Statement, in workshops, and in its publications. Testimonials from SLS members in the statewide newsletter provide encouragement to other youth to make healthy decisions. Participation on the Michigan Student Advisory Board requires a commitment to make healthy decisions. Peer Resistance Skills presenters must abstain from alcohol and other drugs and be able to testify to that if asked by younger children.

At the same time, past or current destructive decisions made by an individual do not result in exclusion from a group in most instances. All students are encouraged to participate and should encourage their peers to make healthy decisions. This inclusive approach more actively targets those at-risk people who choose to participate in destructive decisions with some regularity.

Participation of these at-risk students in a youth-led prevention group's activities are useful strategies, since it may increase the influence of a group's members on at-risk peers and help them to make healthy decisions. The corollary to this is that students who choose not to participate in destructive decisions are provided an opportunity to express their values and strengthen their resolve in a setting which includes youth-led prevention programming – encouraging healthy decisions while not excluding others – leads to constant discussion. Youth-led prevention group members and chapters may begin dealing with these discussions and begin dealing with the issue of making healthy decisions. Open and frequent discussion of this issue occurs in workshops, at chapter meetings, at conferences, and in newsletter articles, as well as in social dialogues. This is an important, honest and sometimes agonizing process. Youth-led prevention programs provide a supportive, safe forum for a healthy dialogue that is critical for teens in our society – particularly those youth who are considered to be at-risk.

For reference: SLS Advisor Handbook, "Prevention In Practice"
SLS Chapter Handbook, "Students Leading Students"
STAND Handbook, "Students Taking A New Direction"