



Effective Programming

There are effective programs that are universal, school-based, and focus on promoting positive youth development, which can reduce youths' risk of problematic substance use.

What the RESEARCH says:

Schools have an important role in preventing problematic substance use among students.

Schools are practical settings to implement healthy relationships and positive mental health programming because most youth attend school, including youth of all risk profiles and backgrounds. Many factors related to student wellness can be addressed at school (e.g., school engagement), as schools provide the diverse settings and activities required for implementing Positive Youth Development (PYD). Compared to traditional school-based programs that emphasize knowledge development (facts, statistics) or utilize fear tactics (disease, mortality) to dissuade students from engaging in problematic drug use, PYD framework is an upstream approach to intervention. School-based PYD programs provide all school staff with the training, guidance, and strategies that have been shown to improve students' well-being (i.e. a state of being happy and comfortable)ⁱ and reduce the likelihood of problematic substance use.

Programming strategies must prioritize skills development.

Skills-based programs can help youth develop skills, such as planning, decision-making, communication, and peer resistance skills, which can help them help themselves and their peers. For example, youth who are experiencing a mental health concern may be reluctant to seek help for a number of reasons: lack of knowledge or awareness of how to access help, confidentiality concerns, stigma, and belief that they can handle their own problems. In light of these barriers, research suggests that it is beneficial to include a skills-based component in youth programming.ⁱⁱ



For more information and additional resources, please visit:

<https://www.csmh.uwo.ca/research/cannabis-education.html>



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There are universal, school-based programs that enhance protective factors to promote well-being, which can also decrease problematic substance use.

The Fourth R programs have demonstrated tremendous success in Canada and abroad. All Fourth R programs are all based on the contention that relationship skills can be taught the same way as many other academic or athletic skills. There are different Fourth R curriculum to match different grade levels and education systems. The Fourth R team has published numerous studies evaluating its programming and implementation.

The Fourth R has developed specific programming for LGBTQ2+ youth and Indigenous youth because these populations are at higher risk for experiencing negative outcomes, such as problematic substance use.^{iii,iv}

[Healthy Relationships Program for LGBTQ2Q+ youth \(Canada\)^v](#)

[Uniting Our Nations Programming for Indigenous youth \(Canada\)^{vi}](#)

International programs with promising results include: the Aussie Optimism Program (Australia),^{vii} Building Resilience and Vocational Excellence (USA),^{viii} Dutch Skills for Life Program (the Netherlands),^{ix} Keepin' it REAL (USA),^x the Life Skills Program IPSY (Germany),^{xi} Life Skills Training (USA),^{xii} and Resilience and Protective Factor Intervention (Australia).^{xiii}

Common characteristics across promising practices include:

Program Content

- Healthy relationships
- Resisting peer pressure
- Problem-solving skills
- Social & communication skills
- Decision-making skills
- Self-awareness
- Empathy

Program Activities

- Interactive in nature (e.g. role-play)
- Engaging and relevant material
- Allow for personal reflection
- Encourage peer-to-peer sharing (e.g., group discussion)



How can I learn more about PYD programs and strategies?

A number of organizations and initiatives provide more information on resources aimed at promoting PYD

Introduce PYD into your school by becoming involved in research and knowledge mobilization opportunities

Check out these resources and try a strategy in the classroom

- [School Mental Health Assist \(SMH-Assist; Canada\)](#)
- [Teach Resiliency \(Canada\)](#)
- [Social & Emotional Resource Finder \(Canada\)](#)
- [The Pan-Canadian Joint Consortium for School Health \(JCSH; Canada\)](#)
- [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL; USA\)](#)

Collaboration between researchers and educators is essential to developing, implementing, and evaluating school-based programs and resources. There are many opportunities to get involved with research and knowledge mobilization efforts in the community. Be aware of research projects being carried out at universities, colleges, research centres, and at your local school district. Visit the [Knowledge Network for Applied Education Research \(KNAER\)](#) for more information and the [Ontario Education Research Exchange \(OERE\)](#) for short summaries on recent Ontario educational research.

There are various worksheets and activities available, such as this tutorial on [Recognizing and Responding to Anxiety in the Classroom](#) from SMH-Assist and the [Youth Engagement Toolkit](#) from the JCSH. Administrators can encourage teachers to try implementing one of these strategies in their classroom.

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