



Adolescent Substance Use Prevention: Targeting Implicit Cognitions in the Classroom

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Introduction

A two part directed study focused on preventative measures in the initiation of substance use in adolescent.

1. A literature review of research examining implicit adolescent substance use cognitions.
2. A pilot project of two lessons from the HABIT prevention program, designed by Dr. Marvin Krank.

Literature Review

A survey of studies primarily focusing on adolescents between the ages of 12 – 18 years.

Key Predictors of Substance Use:

- Expectancy outcome liking¹
- Measurements of implicit attitudes²
- Personality traits³
- Perceived peer & societal norms⁴
- Stage of Development⁵

Keys to Delaying or Negating Initiation:

- Exploiting Cognitive Dissonance⁶
- Evaluative Conditioning⁷
- Challenging Outcome Expectancies⁸
- Correcting Misinformation⁹

What is HABIT?

- “HABIT” stands for “Healthy Automatic Behaviours, Intentions, and Thoughts”
- Habit is a substance use preventative program designed for early adolescents in grades six and seven.
- Backed by research, the program targets the cognitive factors related to early drug use through implicit cognitive training and explicit exercises that promote healthy choices and behaviours.
- The goal is to build up student’s resilience to early initiation of substance use.

HABIT Pilot

- Participants: 29 students in grades 6 and 7 at Coldstream Elementary School.
- Elementary classroom teacher Heather Fester presented material.
- 2 lessons were presented over 3 weeks in for a total of 3 sessions.
- Program instruction was accompanied by HABIT worksheets.
- Teacher presented all materials orally and invited student participation in discussion.

Topics Included:

1. Types of Health and Personal Values
2. Personality Types and Making Healthy Choices

Pilot Feedback

Students Enjoyed:

- Looking towards their future
- The benefit of creating habits for life while they are young
- How different types of health work together
- Brainstorming and thinking more in-depth about topics

Students Requested:

- No homework
- More examples to clarify concepts

Observations

- The importance of teaching style
 - Teacher enthusiasm and variety in teaching approach was key to keeping children engaged.
- The importance of strong relationships with schools during program development.
- Recognizing age appropriate content (Ex: Using relevant illustrations to explain concepts).
- The importance of examples to help clarify more complex concepts.

Further Development:

HABIT has undergone revision and expansion to include five lessons:

1. Types of Health
2. Inoculation Lesson: Cannabis and Alcohol Myth
3. Personality
4. What are Drugs
5. Drugs and the Brain

- An online exercise has been added to deliver the inoculation lesson and test its effectiveness.
- Habit is currently being presented in one elementary school with plans to expand to several others before the end of the school year.

References

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