

Diversion Programs & Alternatives to Suspension for Substance Abuse

Summary of Research Recommendations, October 2008

- ▶ **A substance abuse screening or assessment is essential to determine the appropriate level of intervention needed.** The JASAE screening tool (Juvenile Automated Substance Abuse Evaluation) is used by JCCO's in Maine and is available to schools and communities through the Juvenile Treatment Network (www.juveniletreatmentnetwork.org). Screening and assessment will find that many youth who are caught do not have a diagnosable substance abuse problem and are not in need of treatment or counseling services. Research suggests that for these youth, a "less is more" approach is most effective for reducing the problem behavior.
- ▶ **For youth caught abusing substances who are not in need of treatment, group programs can sometimes do more harm than good.** This could be due to their unintended effect of reinforcing the identities of these youth as "troublemakers" or "users" or "drinkers" or "smokers," causing the youth to internalize those labels. Group programs can also encourage young people to bond and identify with other youth who have been similarly labeled, which can lead to an increase in the problem behavior. This phenomenon does not apply to treatment programs, which do have a history of using a group setting effectively. Lazovich, D., et al., 2001, p.1790-1791; Kammer, J. & Minor, K., 1997, p.51-56.
- ▶ **Consider providing one-on-one interventions for youth whenever possible.** One-on-one interventions may help to minimize the harmful effects of labeling and bonding that can occur with group programs, without condoning underage drinking behavior as "normal." Kammer, J. & Minor, K., 1997, p.51-56.
- ▶ **Consider using brief intervention and motivational interviewing during the one-on-one intervention.** Brief intervention is an evidence-based strategy to reduce alcohol use among high-risk drinkers who are not alcohol dependent. Among adolescent drinkers, one-on-one brief interventions, using the technique of motivational interviewing, have found promising results in reducing alcohol consumption. Bailey et al., 2004, 157-167; Werch et al., 1996, p.335-338; Werch et al., 2005, 284-290.
- ▶ **Carefully consider any educational programs that are being offered to juveniles caught using alcohol or tobacco.** Examine the evaluation data or evidence behind the strategies or content used in the program. To date, there are no published studies that have found educational programs alone to be effective for juvenile offenders in reducing substance abuse or recidivism rates compared to control groups--And many studies have found well-intentioned educational programs to have a negative effect. Patrick & Marsh, 2005, p.59-73.



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