Elements of an Effective School-Based Prevention Program

An effective curriculum includes the following critical elements:

- Enhances "protective factors" and moves toward reversing or reducing known "risk factors"
- Targets all forms of substance abuse
- Elementary school: targets social-emotional learning
- Middle school: focuses on academic and social competence
- Includes skills to:
  - Resist drugs when offered
  - Strengthen personal commitment against substance use
  - Increase social competency
- Employs interactive methods
- Includes a parents' or caregivers' component
- Is administered long-term over the school career, with repeat interventions
- Is adaptable to the specific substance abuse problems in the local community
- Is age-specific, developmentally appropriate, and culturally sensitive
- Is cost-effective

Critical content areas:

- Normative education: helps students realize that use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs is not the norm
- Social skills: help youth develop ease in handling social situations
- Social influences: help youth recognize and resist external pressure (e.g., advertising, role models, peer attitudes) to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
- Perceived harm: helps youth understand the risks and short- and long-term consequences of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use
- Protective factors: supporting and encouraging the development of positive aspects of life—such as helping, caring, goal setting—challenging youth to live up to their potential and facilitating constructive affiliations with peers
- Refusal skills: teaching youth ways to refuse alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs effectively and still maintain friendships

What does not work:

- Scare tactics
- Teaching only the adverse consequences of substance use
- Focusing only on values clarification
- Focusing only on raising self-esteem
- Large assemblies
- Didactic presentation of material