

Peer Education in College Health Reconsidered: Weighing the Benefits and Costs

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UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER

The State University of New York

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Describe the critical role of four foundational elements – program focus and scope, appropriate training and ongoing supervision, solid and consistent evaluation, and ethical practice and attention to liability issues– in the development and implementation of strong, sustainable peer education programs.
- ✓ Identify peer education models that promote effective practice based on research evidence and best practices in the prevention field.
- ✓ List five steps that can be taken to promote safe and ethical peer education practice and promote learning and personal development of peer educators.



The Case for Peer Education

Why Involve Students in Our Efforts?

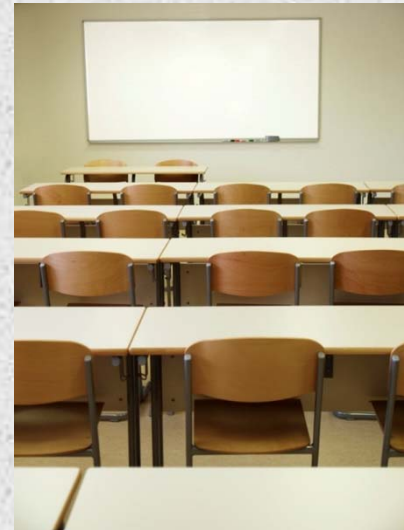
Student Involvement in Prevention Efforts

- Undergraduate students are the single most potent source of influence on undergraduate student affective and cognitive growth and development during college (Astin, 1993; Kuh, 1993; Whitt, Edison, Pascarella, Nora, & Terenzini, 1999).
- The frequency and quality of students' interactions with peers extends to a positive association with college student persistence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993).

Why Engage Students in Peer Education?

Peer Educators:

- Are trusted by classmates
- Have hands-on knowledge
- Are an important link
- Can assist in reducing stigma
- Can provide input to increase prevention program success



Why Engage Students in Peer Education?

Peer Educators:

- o Extend outreach of the professional staff
- o Provide student leadership opportunities
- o Economical

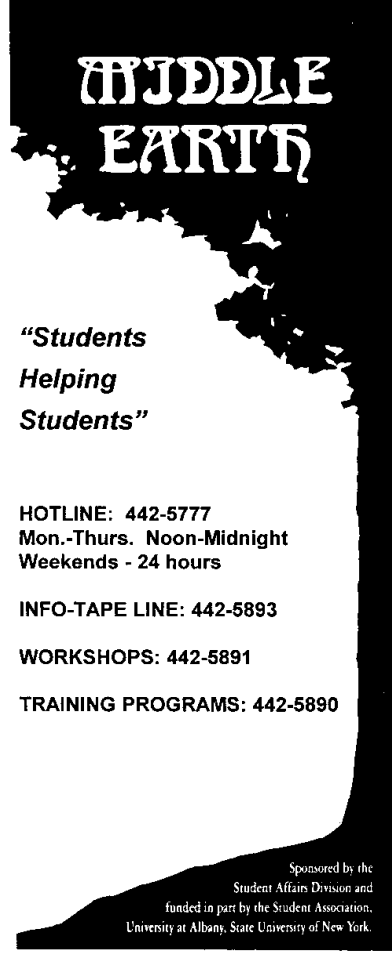


Why Peer Education Works

- Peer influence is a key factor in determining the behavior of college students
- College students regard their peers as a credible and trusted source of information (National College Health Assessment, 2000)
- Studies have shown that peers can be as effective as professionals in delivering alcohol interventions to college students (Fromme & Corbin, 2004)

Middle Earth: Students Helping Students

- o Hotline
- o Peer Education
- o Peer Career Advisement
- o Staff Training and Staff Development
- o Alumni Affinity Group



**MIDDLE
EARTH**

*“Students
Helping
Students”*

HOTLINE: 442-5777
Mon.-Thurs. Noon-Midnight
Weekends - 24 hours

INFO-TAPE LINE: 442-5893

WORKSHOPS: 442-5891

TRAINING PROGRAMS: 442-5890

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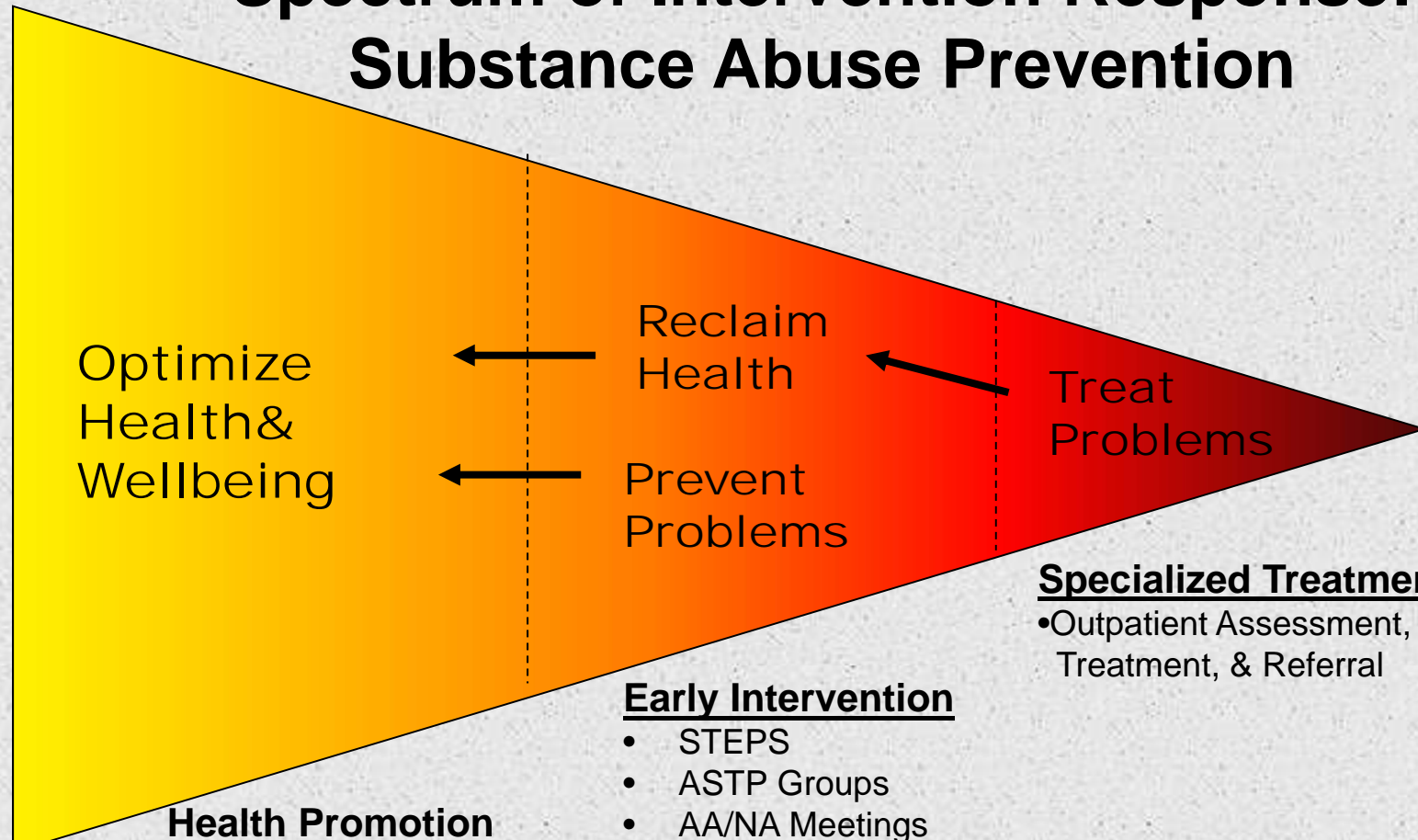
Components of UAlbany Comprehensive Prevention Program

- ✓ Presidential Leadership
- ✓ Campus AOD Task Force
- ✓ Student Involvement/Leadership
- ✓ Social Norms Marketing
- ✓ Campus-Community Coalitions
- ✓ Inclusive Academic Excellence
- ✓ Healthy Living Communities
- ✓ Alcohol-Free Activities
- ✓ Early Intervention
- ✓ Restricting Alcohol Marketing/Promotion
- ✓ Policy Evaluation/Enforcement
- ✓ Parental Involvement
- ✓ Treatment & Referral
- ✓ Research and Program Evaluation - NCHIP



Comprehensive Program

Spectrum of Intervention Response: Substance Abuse Prevention



Optimize
Health &
Wellbeing

Reclaim
Health

Treat
Problems

Prevent
Problems

Specialized Treatment

- Outpatient Assessment, Treatment, & Referral

Early Intervention

- STEPS
- ASTP Groups
- AA/NA Meetings
- Consistent Policy Enforcement
- Good Samaritan Policy

Health Promotion

- Social Norms Campaigns
- Peer Services
- Coalition
- Healthy Living Communities



Effective Peer Education Practice

Key Considerations



Consideration #1: Focus of Services

- o What do you think of when someone says 'Peer Education Program'?
- o What do you want your peer education program to focus on?
- o What services will your program include?
- o What are some of the most important elements that a peer educator/mentor should have?

Consideration #2: Staffing & Resources

- o Who will serve as the peer education program director? How much time will that individual devote to running the program?
- o How many hours will the program operate? How many students will be needed to operate the program, and what will be their time commitment?
- o Where will the program be located? Who will supply the furniture for the office? How will the phone system work?
- o How much funding and other resources will the program need to operate?



Consideration #3: Training & Supervision

- o What will be the training focus of the peer education program?
- o What training model shall we use? How will the training program be structured?
- o What will be the training contract with students (volunteer basis, course credit, money)?
- o What is our mechanism for ongoing supervision of students?



Consideration #4: Recruitment & Retention

- o How will you recruit students for my peer education program?
- o What qualifications should you look for in student applicants?
- o How should you conduct the application process?
- o How can you motivate and reward your peer educators once they become a part of the program?
- o How should you address issues of performance and discipline in your program?



Consideration #5: Marketing the Program

- o How will you market your program?
- o Who will fund your marketing efforts?
- o Can you partner with other campus groups, offices, or community agencies to help advertise our programs?
- o How can your own students serve as ambassadors for our program?
- o How can you work with our campus and community media offices to advertise our services?

Consideration #6: Liability Issues

- o Does your program have clear protocols addressing how to respond to situations that are urgent or life-threatening?, such as sexual assault, suicide or homicide risk?
- o Does your program have a mental health backup system staffed by a licensed mental health professional or agency in place to respond to urgent and emergency situations?
- o Do referral networks with community agencies exist for times in which your program is not open, and are these advertised?
- o Does your university have a document/contract specifying who accepts the liability for the program?
- o Is there a malpractice policy in place for your program?

Consideration #7: Evaluating Effectiveness

- o What mechanisms do you have in place to track and monitor the course of contacts to your peer education program? How are these records kept secure and confidential?
- o What mechanisms do you have in place to track the performance of your undergraduate peer educators/mentors?
- o Do you have templates to produce annual reports for your program, highlighting data on effectiveness?
- o Do you have a “brag document” or organizational resume that you can use to let people know of your accomplishments and successes?



Challenges and Ethical Issues

Formulating Our Responses

The Many Roles Advisors Play

- o Agency Administration
 - o Course Instruction
 - o Supervision
- o Peer Educator or Hotline Worker Backup
 - o Crisis Intervention
 - o Surrogate Parent
 - o Fire Marshall
- o Washer-Dryer Repairperson
 - o And More!



Formulating Our Responses to Challenging Situations: Questions to Consider

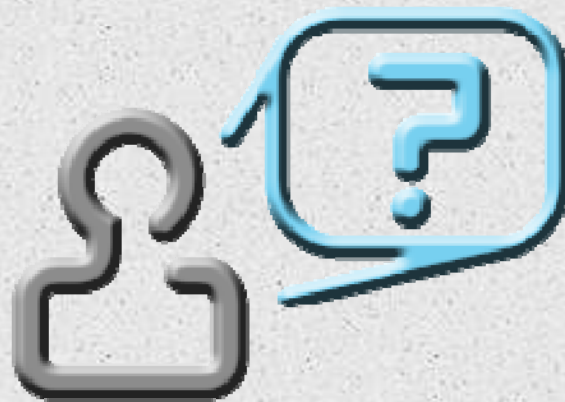
- o What do I know about the situation (who, what, where, when, how long)?
- o In what role am I responding (administrator, instructor, clinician, other...multiple roles)?
- o Who are the students involved, and what is the nature of my relationship with them (am I grading them, are they former counseling clients of mine, ...)?

Formulating Our Responses to Challenging Situations: Questions to Consider

- o What are my options for intervening, and what are the potential outcomes?
- o Who will potentially be affected by my response?
- o Who should I communicate with before, during, and after the response?
- o Who should be involved in delivering the response?

Case Studies

Putting Principles Into Practice



Her Only Hope

Two days prior to your departure to travel to a national peer education conference, you learn that one of the peer educators who will be traveling in your group has made a suicide threat by telling a peer that she was planning to kill herself by driving her car into a tree. The peer educator was transported to the local psychiatric emergency room for evaluation and was released the following day (the day prior to the trip). After her release from the ER, the student and her mother come to your office and tell you about what happened and the student states clearly that she still wants to go on the trip. When you ask the student's mother what she thinks about this, she gives her wholehearted support for travel, indicating to you that she wants her daughter to go to the conference with you and the other peer educators. The student's mother adds that the trip is a positive thing in her daughter's life and she trusts that her daughter will be safe and well-supervised in your hands. The student tells you that the trip is the only positive thing in her life right now, and not being permitted to travel with you would devastate her. What do you do?

Cooking Up Conflict

Your peer educators want to embark on a new initiative for incoming freshmen on Indian Quad entitled "Freshmen Recruitment Initiative and Educational Development", AKA "FRIED". You are concerned about the interpretation of the acronym, from which the students plan to develop T-shirts and other giveaways, in light of the alcohol and drug abuse prevention mission of your program. When raising your concerns with the students, a vocal peer education program undergraduate student officer, Chris, responds that he and the other officers don't care what you think, and if you stop them from using the FRIED name, they will report this issue to the student government leadership for violation of their free speech rights and rights to operate as a student organization. As part of their complaint in the event their free speech rights are violated, the student officers plan to ask the student government to cut the student government funding to your program that supports two salary lines, effective immediately. What do you do?

A Matter of Trust

One of your peer educators, Anna, comes to your office and tells you she is pregnant and plans to have an abortion. She asks you to help her find a clinic which would conduct the abortion for her. She adds that she does not have transportation to get to her clinic procedure and asks if you could take her there, saying that she would be embarrassed to have anyone else know about her situation. Anna tells you that she has been very depressed about this issue for a few weeks and it took a lot for her to decide to have the abortion and to take the risk to ask for your help and support as she goes through this stressful situation. In fact, you have noted that Anna has been quiet in class recently and you did not know why. Though you are surprised at her request, you want to respond in a manner that will be understanding and will not make her shut down.



Keeping the Faith

Students in your peer education group want more variety in condoms and dental dams for a sexual health program. The fiscal technician refuses to approve the order, citing religious convictions and concern that the products will encourage students to have casual sex.

Saving Face(book)

As part of his role as a peer educator in the group you supervise, Richard works with the student newspaper to submit articles for a weekly wellness-focused column developed by your peer education group. While you are reading the student newspaper one day, you note that Richard has also begun to write a series of local bar reviews, recommending which bars might be "good places to pick up girls." You inform the peer education group's undergraduate student President, Amanda, of Richard's writing articles about local bars and she feels that this behavior is not consistent with the alcohol/drug abuse prevention mission of your peer education group and dismisses him from his officer position. Several weeks after he is dismissed as an officer, Richard emails you with several pictures he downloaded from Amanda's private Facebook profile showing her consuming alcohol at several parties. You know that Amanda is under age 21. According to the peer education group student organization constitution, the advisor has the authority to remove the peer education group undergraduate student President from his or her position for behavior that violates the agency's prevention mission. As if this line of facts was not enough to think about, it comes to your attention from a third peer educator, Beth, that last summer Richard attempted to begin a romantic relationship with Amanda, but she dumped him in early September., before Richard even had his first chance to put pen to paper for his first bar series article in the student newspaper. What do you do?

Thank You!



Questions?

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