



THE *keepin' it REAL* (kiR) CURRICULUM

An Innovative Approach to Substance Abuse Prevention

The *keepin' it REAL* curriculum represents over 20 years of research conducted by the Drug Resistance Strategies Project to understand more about how our youth make choices concerning alcohol and other drugs. Out of this research a school-based substance abuse prevention program, *keepin' it REAL*, was developed collaboratively by Penn State University, Arizona State University, and schools around the country. Grounded in cultural norms and values, the program teaches youth how to live drug-free lives confidently, drawing on their personal strengths and the strengths of their families and communities.

The acronym REAL is its central message and teaches four ways to refuse alcohol, tobacco and other drug offers -- Refuse, Explain, Avoid, and Leave. The curriculum teaches students *how to say no* by presenting practical drug resistance strategies that are easy for them to remember and use. These strategies help youth stay away from drugs by preparing them to act decisively and comfortably in a difficult situation. Students also learn how to recognize risk, value their perceptions and feelings, and make choices that support their values.

This innovative, culturally-grounded curriculum was developed to allow students to recognize themselves in the prevention message. Instructors are trained to implement the curriculum effectively in their classrooms. The objective of the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum is to reduce substance abuse by teaching risk assessment, decision-making, and valuable communication and life skills.

A Program that Speaks to Students

The *keepin' it REAL* curriculum is organized as a ten-week program. Each of the ten lessons requires one 45 minute class period and is designed to promote interaction between students and teachers. Student centered activities are included to involve students in their learning and allow them to practice REAL resistance strategies. The program's key learning tool is a series of videos involving high school youth and based on students' real stories. The videos demonstrate how students have used REAL strategies to resist drugs in real life situations.

***keepin' it REAL* Works in the Real World**

keepin' it REAL was implemented in 35 middle schools in Phoenix, Arizona. Over 6,700 students participated in the evaluation showing that *keepin' it REAL* reduces alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco use, teaches anti-drug norms and changes attitudes and expectations. As a result, *keepin' it REAL* was selected as an evidence based program by SAMHSA and is listed on the National Registry of Effective Programs.

Notes to the Instructor

The skills of the keepin' it REAL curriculum that you will be teaching are tools that will help students successfully negotiate everyday life. Many students are unaware of the power of their own words and actions and the role "choice" plays in their lives. By helping students become aware of risks and teaching them how to make effective decisions using "Refuse," "Explain," "Avoid," and "Leave," they become empowered, and can be proactive in responding to situations that might otherwise be difficult for them.

Each of the REAL strategies is taught in an individual, video-supported lesson to allow students to explore the many aspects of a particular strategy. Activities have been created to help students practice the strategy. Students have the opportunity to learn how and when to "Refuse," "Explain," "Avoid," and "Leave." The instructor has the opportunity to incorporate the background and experiences of the students into the discussions in making REAL strategies a part of students' repertoire of decision-making and communication skills.

Please keep the following in mind as you carefully prepare each lesson:

- Each lesson contains instructions, activity pages, overheads/PowerPoint, and homework.
- Be a listener.
- Facilitate discussions that actively engage students in thinking about ways to solve their own problems.
- Use students' examples, their words, and their experiences in discussions.
- Encourage students to take ownership of the new skills.

REAL PREVENTION

OVERVIEW OF LESSONS:

keepin' it REAL

LESSON 1: OPTIONS AND CHOICES

Objectives

1. Understand the purpose of the *keepin' it REAL* curriculum
2. Recognize that what they do may have favorable or unfavorable consequences
3. Differentiate between simple preference and “wise choice” – a choice that is well thought out

LESSON 2: RISKS

Objectives

1. Identify risks that could be potentially harmful to them
2. Identify risks present in a situation
3. Identify risks present in seemingly safe situations

LESSON 3: COMMUNICATION AND CONFLICT

Objectives

1. Increase skill in verbalizing preferences that are not popular
2. Understand that you can acknowledge others' views without agreeing with them

LESSON 4: REFUSE

Objectives

1. Understand that there are ways of saying “no” that are clear without humiliating others
2. Demonstrate (through video materials made by high school youth) ways of saying “no” that are clear without humiliating others
3. Increase skill in saying “no” in ways that are clear without humiliating others

LESSON 5: EXPLAIN

Objectives

1. Understand that there are ways of explaining reasons for their actions in a way that everyone understands exactly what they mean
2. Demonstrate (through video materials made by high school youth) ways of explaining reasons for their actions in a way that everyone understands exactly what they mean
3. Increase skill in ways of explaining reasons for their actions in a way that everyone understands exactly what they mean

LESSON 6: AVOID

Objectives

1. Understand that there are ways of staying away from situations you don't want to be around
2. Demonstrate (through video materials made by high school youth) ways of staying away from situations you don't want to be around
3. Increase skill in staying away from situations you don't want to be around

LESSON 7: LEAVE

Objectives

1. Understand how to get away from something that is undesirable or harmful
2. Demonstrate (through video materials made by high school youth) how to get away from something that is undesirable or harmful
3. Increase skill in getting away from something that is undesirable or harmful

LESSON 8: NORMS

Objectives

1. Identify choices that make them feel good about themselves, are in their best interest, and show consideration for the people they care about
2. Understand norms of drug use among people their age
3. Understand what it means to value themselves

LESSON 9: FEELINGS

Objectives

1. Recognize that even if they are a part of a group, they have their own unique feelings and reactions to every situation
2. Understand their feelings are valid even if others don't agree

LESSON 10: SUPPORT NETWORKS

Objectives

1. Identify ways to get help/support when needed
2. Identify and Describe their personal social support networks