

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

**PREVENTION FIRST**  
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse

### TIP SHEET

## PROJECT TOWARDS NO DRUG ABUSE: FIDELITY AND ADAPTATION

### FIDELITY AND ADAPTATION OVERVIEW

Balancing the concepts of fidelity and adaptation when implementing programs can be challenging. To properly deliver this program you need a solid understanding of these concepts and a plan for adhering to program fidelity and making purposeful adaptations.

Fidelity is defined as *the degree to which a program is implemented according to its design*. Rigorous evaluation studies of model programs indicate that implementing the program according to the program design will produce predictable outcomes. Delivering the program exactly as it is intended shows a high degree of fidelity. Implementing programs with a high degree of fidelity allows you to demonstrate accountability and predict the effectiveness of the program.

Project **Toward No Drug Abuse (TND)** offers a fidelity model, which is their recipe for success:

- Sessions are taught in a classroom environment with at least 10 participants.
- Deliver all 12 lessons to participants.
- Deliver sessions as written, using the instructional techniques suggested.
- The TND game is used to begin each session and included at the conclusion of the session, time permitting.
- Sessions are interactive and encourage student involvement.
- Use students' workbooks with each session.

Adaptation is defined as *modifications to aspects of a program or practice, including content, delivery method, and length of program sessions*. Sometimes it is necessary to make changes to the program to fit the needs of a particular situation or the needs of the target population. Changes that make the program more relevant to student culture and the geographic setting can help create a better fit with the community. Adaptations can deteriorate program effectiveness and should be made with caution.

Striking a balance that addresses both the need for fidelity to the original model program and the demonstrated need for local adaptation is an essential task for professionals to deliver well-run programs.

## STRATEGIES TO BALANCE FIDELITY AND ADAPTATION

**Understand the theory behind the program.** Project TND uses a motivation-skills-decision making model. This model is based on the premise drug misuse and other problem behavior is predicted by three classes of variable:

1. Motivation variables consist of one's attitudes, beliefs, and desires regarding the target behavior. If one does not feel that drug use is wrong, if one holds myths regarding the effects of drug use, if one places a low importance on health as a value, and if one remains curious about using drugs, then misuse is more likely.
2. If one lacks general social conversation skills and self-control skills to bond to lower risk groups, one is more likely to misuse drugs.
3. If one lacks the rational decision-making skills to be able to fully consider options that include inputs from motivation and skills information, one is relatively likely to misuse drugs.

**Understand how the sessions are set up.** Each session has a title, description, and an explanation of the purpose and skills students will learn during the session. Adaptations should not be made if they take away from the purpose of the session or in any way changes the skills taught during the session.

**Assess fidelity/adaptation concerns for the setting.** Determine which adaptations must be made to suit the need of the population or setting. Weigh the potential change against the core competencies of the program and ensure that the program effectiveness will not deteriorate as a result of the change.

**Consult the program developer.** Project TND is committed to continued success of the program and offers guidance for making necessary adaptations. Project TND can offer input on successful adaptations and suggestions based on programs being implemented in similar settings.

**Consult with the school or organization where the program will be used.** Communication about the importance of fidelity and required adaptations is necessary to garner sustained support for the program. These conversations can evoke valuable input on successful changes made in this particular setting.

## HELPFUL HINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

**Create a strong linkage agreement.** Strong linkage agreements allow for schools to know the details about the implementation requirements of Project TND. A strong linkage agreement allows for you to detail the number of classroom lessons required, length of sessions, and any other necessary requirements to implement the program with fidelity. A strong linkage agreement also allows for the school and the prevention provider to list and acknowledge shared expectations and roles and responsibilities.

**Always have a back-up plan.** School schedules can often times be unpredictable. Weather emergencies, school emergencies, practice evacuation drills, field trips, testing, and other planned and unplanned situations can occur in a school day that may shorten your class lesson or cancel your lesson altogether. It is a good idea to have an agreement with the school ahead of time, and include the plan of how you will make up shortened or cancelled lessons in your linkage agreement.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about technical assistance or the services we offer, please contact [providerservices@prevention.org](mailto:providerservices@prevention.org) or call 217-836-5346.

Project TND Internet Support - [tnd.usc.edu](http://tnd.usc.edu)

Project TND Implementation, Fidelity, and Adaptation Assistance

Leah Meza - Program Manager – Project TND, [leadmedi@usc.edu](mailto:leadmedi@usc.edu) or 1-323-422-8202