

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

### TIP SHEET

## PROJECT NORTHLAND AND CLASS ACTION: 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.

The Project Northland curriculum is like a recipe; to get the best results, you need to do the following:

- Deliver the program beginning in 6<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Deliver the Slick Tracy 6<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum 1 time per week, and the Amazing Alternatives 7<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, Power Lines 8<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum, and Class Action for high school students either once or twice a week.
- Teach lessons sequentially.
- Use interactive teaching strategies.
- Use all materials related to the lesson.

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 program goals of Project Northland.** The goals of Project Northland are:

1. DELAY the age when young people begin drinking.
2. REDUCE alcohol use among young people who have already tried drinking.
3. LIMIT the number of alcohol-related problems of young people.

**Understand the program goals of Class Action.** Based on the social influences theory of behavior change, the goal of Class Action is to change the social norms around alcohol use and to change negative peer pressure into positive peer pressure.

**Understand how the teacher manuals are set up.** The Project Northland teacher's manuals are set up to provide step-by-step instructions on how to implement each curriculum. Throughout the teacher's manual you will find research facts, implementation highlights, teaching tips, and the prevention rainbow icon, which will correspond to the domains (adolescent, family, peers, school, community, and society) that are impacted during each 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 Northland and Class Action are committed to continued success of the programs and offer guidance for making necessary adaptations. Project Northland and Class Action 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 changes made in this particular setting that have been successful.

## 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 Northland. 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 that agreement in your linkage agreement, as to how you will make up shortened or cancelled lessons.

## 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 Northland and Class Action Internet Support – [www.hazelden.org/projectnorthland](http://www.hazelden.org/projectnorthland)

SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices – NREPP [www.nrepp.samhsa.gov](http://www.nrepp.samhsa.gov)