

SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PREVENTION FIRST
Building community capacity to prevent substance abuse

TIP SHEET

PROJECT ALERT: 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 ALERT curriculum is like a recipe; to get the best results, you need to do the following:

- Teach Project ALERT as it is written – include all activities, use all materials that correspond to the lesson, and teach them in the prescribed sequence.
- Teach lessons the entire length of the session, which is 45 minutes.
- Complete teacher/facilitator Project ALERT self-paced online training.
- Complete home learning activities.

Project ALERT teaching strategies are critical to maintaining fidelity and ensuring successful program delivery. *Active student involvement and practice, modeling, resistance self-efficacy, daily goals, reinforcement, respect, validation, and enthusiasm* are all teaching strategies necessary for implementing the curriculum.

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 Philosophy. Middle school students are a group vulnerable to social influences, but not yet heavy users of alcohol, cigarettes, marijuana, or other drugs. The goal of Project ALERT is to reduce the use of those dangerous substances by keeping nonusers from trying them and by preventing nonusers and experimenters from becoming regular users.

Understand how the sessions are set up. Each lesson plan is organized into three sections: the lesson, teacher resources, and student handouts. The varied activities are designed to move at a quick pace to sustain students' interest, and accommodate limited teaching schedules.

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 ALERT is committed to continued success of the program and offers guidance for making necessary adaptations. Make the most of your training experience by reviewing the Project ALERT guided tour, Teacher Demonstration videos, and website resources.

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 ALERT. 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 or call 217-836-5346.

Project ALERT Overview and Internet Support: www.projectalert.com

SAMHSA's National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices – NREPP
www.nrepp.samhsa.gov