

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools

User Guide



Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools User Guide

Talking Points

Keep these 6 talking points handy for any conversation about prevention—whether it's with families, staff, local officials, or community partners. They're a helpful guide when writing announcements, preparing for meetings, developing a presentation, or responding to questions.

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools
6 Key Points

1. Position schools as essential environments for prevention.

When people think about where substance misuse prevention should happen, they don't always think of schools first. But when you consider the amount of time spent in school and the role that environment plays in shaping behaviors, relationships and decision-making, the school setting becomes a natural, invaluable setting for early, sustained prevention.

In Vermont, Student Assistance Professionals (SAPs) and evidence-informed school policies help schools provide direct support, connect families with services, and build systems that promote student success. These approaches strengthen resilience and mental wellness, often aligning with health education and behavioral supports. The Association of Student Assistance Professionals of Vermont (ASAPVT) notes that SAPs increase ties between students and communities and teach "life" skills, while decreasing absenteeism and disciplinary actions, while the CDC's *Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) framework* reinforces the essential connection between student health and academic performance.

Key Messages:

"Substance misuse prevention starts with the spaces where students spend their time—and schools are one of the most powerful of those spaces."


"Schools shape students' skills, relationships, and decisions. That makes them essential partners in prevention."

"A strong school culture is prevention. When students feel supported, connected, and seen, they're more likely to thrive—and less likely to engage in risky behaviors."

These messages help people understand that prevention should be embedded in the school experience, not separate from it. They also reinforce the idea that prevention isn't only about understanding risks—it's about creating the conditions for resilience.

2 | Prevention for Stronger Schools 6 Key Points

HealthVermont.gov/SchoolPrevention

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Elevator Statement

These short scripts are great for staff who may speak with parents, board members, or media. These can be used as introductions to discussions, in presentations, and as a starting point to get people's attention and invite constructive conversations. It gives everyone a simple, shared way to talk about your school's commitment to prevention—and why it matters for student success.

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools
Elevator Statements

Long version


Every Vermont student deserves a learning environment that supports their health, their choices, and their future. That's why school prevention should be part of every child's education—from the early years through graduation. These programs aren't just about avoiding substances—they're about building resilience, addressing mental health early, and giving young people the tools they need. Because when we make prevention an essential part of stronger schools, we give every student—and all of Vermont—the strongest chance to thrive.

One-sentence version

Prevention for Stronger Schools means giving every student what they need to thrive—every year, in every classroom.

1 | Prevention for Stronger Schools Elevator Statements

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Introduction email

Use this email template to introduce the collection of resources available to support substance misuse prevention in schools. Personalize it with your school name, programs, or local context.

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools
Email Intro

SUBJECT:
Strong schools have strong prevention programs

BODY:

Dear **NAME**,

Schools are essential in preventing youth substance misuse. When we support prevention efforts early and often, we don't just help students. We help families, schools, and entire communities thrive.

That's the idea behind Prevention for Stronger Schools. We've pulled together a collection of resources, stories, and strategies to help you connect with schools, families, boards, and decision-makers in your area.

Every action counts. Start small by having conversations or invite discussions through email. Build from that with a letter to the editor of your local paper or get involved with your PTA or school board.


Check out the strategies and resources we have available to help you spread the word about the impact school prevention can have on student health and well-being at HealthVermont.gov/SchoolPrevention.

Let us know how we can support you as you bring this important message and work into your community.

Best,
NAME

1 | Prevention for Stronger Schools Email Intro

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Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools User Guide

Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools Letter to Editor

Letter to Editor #1 Prevention for the Promotion of Better Schools

When we talk about substance misuse, too often we focus on the aftermath—treatment, consequences, or enforcement. But one of the most powerful ways to prevent harm starts much earlier, and it starts in a place we all know well: our schools.

In Vermont, school-based prevention plays a vital role in helping students build the skills, support, and confidence they need to make healthy decisions. With programs led by Student Assistance Professionals (SAPs), and approaches like restorative practices and social-emotional learning, schools are working to create environments where students feel connected, supported, and seen.

This is not prevention. It's not just about avoiding substances—it's about building resilience, addressing mental health early, and giving young people the tools to thrive. When prevention is integrated into school culture, students are more likely to grow—not just academically, but emotionally and socially as well.

Research shows that evidence-based school prevention programs reduce substance misuse, improve school climate, and lead to long-term public health savings. And in communities across Vermont, students are stepping up—leading peer initiatives, presenting to school communities, and shaping healthier cultures from within.

We can't expect schools to do this alone. Prevention works best when families, communities, and policymakers work together to support it—through funding, training, and policies that treat prevention as essential, not optional.

But you don't have to work in our schools to get involved. Share your voice. Talk to your school board about the importance of school prevention being part of the overall culture in our schools—not just health class. Raise awareness of the need for it and support the funding and staffing of Student Assistance Professionals. Only together can we show how much prevention matters to parents and our greater Vermont communities.

If we want to promote better schools in Vermont, school prevention is not just part of the solution—it's the foundation.

1 | Prevention for Stronger
Schools Letter to Editor

[HealthVermont.gov/SchoolPrevention](https://healthvermont.gov/SchoolPrevention)



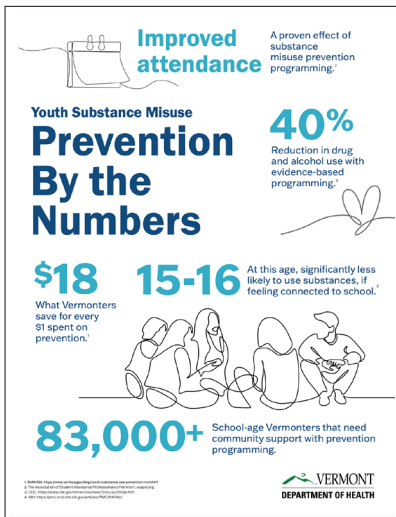
Letters to Editor

You can customize and send these letters to local newspapers or online outlets to show public support for substance use prevention. Choose a version that fits your voice and send as is or add your own specific examples.

Tip: Time the letter to the editor with opportunities for community discussion, like an open school board meeting, PTA meeting, community presentation or Town Meeting Day agenda item and include an invitation for the community to participate.

Infographic Poster

Print and post this high-impact graphic in school staff break rooms, outside student assistant professionals' offices, and areas where educators, school board members and parents can see it.



Substance Misuse Prevention for Stronger Schools School Newsletters

Elementary

Prevention Starts Early

Elementary school is the perfect time to build strong, healthy habits. While substance misuse may not seem like a top-of-mind need for our **elementary school students**, prevention programs at this age focus on decision-making, confidence, and social skills—tools that help kids navigate peer pressure and everyday challenges. These efforts help kids feel more connected, supported, and prepared for what's ahead. For more information and to learn what you can do to help further prevention efforts visit **element URL or email address**.

Middle School

Supporting Students Through Change

Middle school is a time of big transitions—socially, emotionally, and developmentally. At **middle school**, our school substance misuse prevention efforts focus on managing social conflict, making healthy decisions under peer pressure, and understanding how substance use can affect a student's brain and future. As part of our broader goal to move prevention a part of our school culture, these programs help give students the tools to speak up, stay grounded, and feel supported as they grow. For more information and to learn what you can do to help further prevention efforts visit **middle URL or email address**.

High School

Prevention for Real-Life Readiness

High school can be a tough time—filled with challenges, peer pressure, and growing responsibilities and expectations. That's why at **high school**, our school substance misuse prevention focuses on real-life readiness in the face of substance misuse, including alcohol, cannabis, nicotine, and other drugs. Programs emphasize decision-making, mental health, and peer influence—equipping students to make informed, healthy choices. Together, our faculty and student peers are helping our kids manage stress, build coping skills, and stay focused on a strong future. For more information and to learn what you can do to help further prevention efforts visit **high school URL or email address**.

1 | Prevention for Stronger
Schools Newsletters

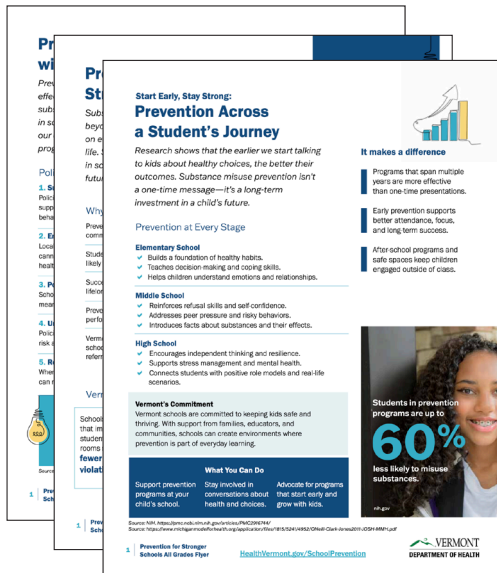
[HealthVermont.gov/SchoolPrevention](https://healthvermont.gov/SchoolPrevention)



School Newsletter Blurbs

Include these ready-to-use messages in school newsletters or other communications with educators, administrators and parents. They describe the importance of prevention programming in elementary, middle and high schools.

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Fact Sheet Flyers

Each flyer offers clear, and concise information about school-based prevention—highlighting Ongoing Successes, Prevention Throughout a School Career, and Policy. Use them at town meetings, events, PTO meetings, info nights, or as a quick reference to help share the power of prevention.

Tip: School boards might be most interested in the “Successes” and “Policy” flyers, while parents might be most interested in the “Prevention Through a School Career” flyer.

Social media

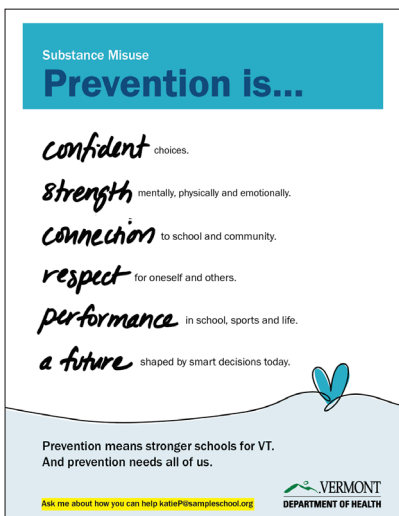
Share these posts on your organization’s social media accounts to promote substance misuse prevention programs in schools. You can customize the post and links for your organization. Videos are sized to work for Facebook and Instagram.



Flyer/Poster

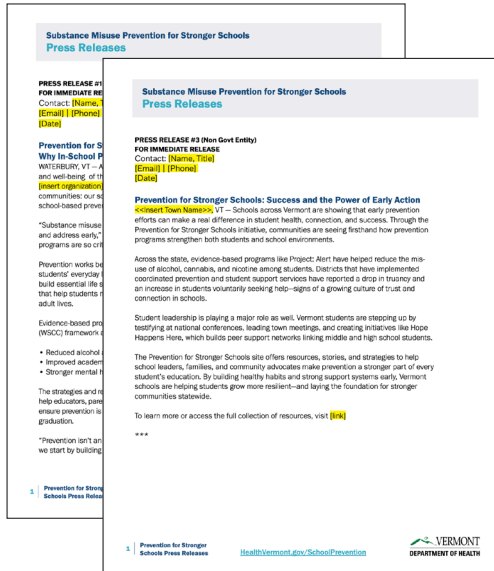
Print and display this poster in school offices, teachers’ lounges, town halls, libraries—anywhere school-minded community members gather. It highlights the often-overlooked benefits of prevention and reminds everyone who sees it that they have a role to play.

Tip: You can customize the contact information at the bottom of the poster with your email, your organization’s website and/or information on an event related to substance misuse prevention in schools.



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User Guide



Press Releases

Press releases can be a great way to get the word out with local news sources about the importance of school prevention. Customize these with your organization's information and add spokespeople for the quotes. Send them to your local news agencies.

Tip: Time the press release with a significant event or achievement related to substance misuse prevention in your school or organization and include this information in the press release, e.g.: the launch of a new substance misuse program in your school, a successful substance misuse-related school event or student-led initiative, or the passing of local policy to support school substance misuse programming.

FAQs **Coming Soon**

Use these FAQs to help with a range of questions that may come up in a conversation about prevention.

Note; if you are getting specific questions and you would like help answering them, or to have them included in this resource, please contact DSU at ahs.vdhdsu@vermont.gov and we can help.

