

RECONNECTING YOUTH: A PEER GROUP APPROACH TO BUILDING LIFE SKILLS

Reconnecting Youth (RY) is a proven, award winning program that helps high-risk youth achieve in school and decrease drug use, anger, depression, and suicidal behavior. Designed for students aged 14-18, RY is a high-school based curriculum that uses skills training in a supportive environment to enhance personal competencies and social support resources.

Program Content:

RY was developed for an indicated audience and is targeted for youth at risk for school dropout and who may exhibit multiple behavior problems such as substance abuse, aggression, depression, or suicide risk behaviors. At risk for school dropout is defined as having fewer than the average number of credits earned for the grade level, high absenteeism, a significant drop in grades, or a history of dropping out of school.

The RY class is held daily during regular school hours for 1 semester (80 sessions) in a class with a student-teacher ratio of 12 students to 1 teacher. Four key RY components are integrated into the school environment. They include:

- RY Class – After a 10-day orientation to the program, approximately 1 month is spent on each of these topics: self-esteem, decision making, personal control, and interpersonal communication
- School Bonding Activities - consisting of social, recreational, school, and weekend activities that are designed to reconnect students to school and health-promoting activities as alternatives to drug involvement, loneliness and depression.
- Parental Involvement - Required for student participation, is essential for at-home support of the skills students learn in RY class. School contact is maintained through notes and calls from teachers who also enlist parental support for activities and provide progress reports.
- School Crisis Response - Planning provides teachers and school personnel with guidelines for recognizing the warning signs of suicidal behaviors and suicidal prevention approaches.

National Recognition:

- SAMHSA Model Program
- Suicide Prevention Resource Center
- Department of Education
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
- National Institute of Mental Health

Program Effectiveness:

Decreases In Substance Use

- Curbed progression of alcohol and other drug use
- Decreased drug use and control problems
- 54% decrease in hard drug use
- Decreased adverse drug use consequences

Reductions In Behaviors Related To Risk Factors

- Decreased suicidal behaviors (threats, thoughts and attempts)
- Decreased anxiety
- 32% decline in perceived stress
- Decreased depression and hopelessness
- 48% decrease in anger control problems and aggression

Improvements In Behaviors Related To Protective Factors

- 18% increase in all grades in all classes
- Curbed increasing trend in daily class absences
- 7.5% increase in credits earned per semester
- decreased high school dropout
- 23% increase in self-efficiency

Protective Factors

Targeted for an Increase

Individual

- Communicate using self-esteem enhancing talk
- Decision-making and the ability to apply it to drug use, school and mood management
- Personal control, stress, and mood management skills
- Intrapersonal communication and negotiation skills

Family

- Practicing interpersonal communication skills at home
- Enlisting parent support for program goals

Peer

- Daily reinforcement of the positive peer group culture norms
- Replacing deviant peer/group belonging with prosocial group behavior

School

- Setting norms for and monitoring attendance, achievement, mood, and drug-use control
- School network support
- Facilitating prosocial activities

Risk Factors

Targeted for a Decrease

Individual

- Impulsiveness
- Poor decision making and coping skills
- Uncontrolled emotions
- Learned helplessness
- Low self-worth: deviant self-image
- Poor social/intrapersonal skills

Family

- Family distress and serious conflicts
- Poor family-school connections
- Unclear/unfair rules

Peer

- Deviant friends in peer group network
- Peers who skip school and use drugs
- Peers lacking personal goals related to school achievement and attendance
- Susceptibility to negative peer influence

School

- Negative view of the school experience
- Norms of skipping school
- Substance use at school
- Poor teacher-student relationships
- Low access to help
- Nonparticipation in school activities