

Environmental Strategies: It's not about recycling

The Drug Free Communities Grant requires our coalition to focus on environmental strategies when working to reduce alcohol and drug use among teens. So what exactly are environmental strategies?? When you first hear the term you might think we're talking about a recycling program, but that's a completely different topic altogether.

In order to keep kids safe and healthy we need to keep the environment safe and healthy. When it comes to drug use, keeping the environment safe and healthy means maintaining an attitude of "no use" and backing that up with action which limits a youth's access to substances.

Environmental strategies generally take place within multiple settings in a community and target 3 key areas: norms, regulations, and availability. We can look at an example of this with a community effort to reduce and prevent underage drinking. Some strategies can help change norms, for example when underage drinking is considered unacceptable by teens and adults, retail stores will not sell to minors, and adults refuse to provide alcohol to minors. When this is the norm, rates of underage alcohol use will decrease.

An environmental strategy focuses on the shared environment where we all live, work and play. There will be a long term impact by creating those healthy and safe places. In cases where local ordinances limit the number of liquor stores in a community and adults are held legally responsible for providing alcohol to minors, there is chance of teens accessing alcohol. A media campaign might also accompany these changes to better inform the public about why they're necessary and what harm can occur from underage drinking.

Environmental strategies don't always have to focus on eliminating negative influences from a community, but can also enhance the beneficial aspects as well. Many communities already have policies and practices that can reduce teen drug use, yet the community may not know about them. Publicizing these efforts can raise awareness and change attitudes to be in line with actual practices.



Environmental Strategies....

- Reach entire populations
- Impact the overall environment
- Create lasting change in community attitudes
- Produce “quick wins”
- Instill commitment towards long term impact
- Influence community conditions that shape behaviors
- Focus on policy change
- Regulate behavior
- Change attitudes

