

“Reach Out Now: Start Talking Before They Start Drinking”

Why would our community group or coalition want to do this project?

This activity helps schools by providing a curriculum for elementary teachers to follow and as a way to get media attention regarding underage alcohol use. Many youth start thinking about drinking or actually drinking at a very early age. Twenty-nine percent of ninth graders in Michigan reported they had their first drink of alcohol, other than a few sips, before age 13.¹

What area of underage drinking prevention does this project address?

This focus of this project is individual education of 5th and 6th graders and their parents about the dangers of alcohol consumption by youth. It also teaches youth decision-making skills.

Project Description

Reach Out Now is a collaboration by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and Scholastic Inc., to provide school-based, underage alcohol use prevention materials in time for Alcohol Awareness Month each April. This two-part set of materials is designed especially for use by fifth- and sixth-grade students, their families, and their teachers, and is sent to fifth- and sixth-grade classroom teachers nationwide.

At the end of the lessons, students should be able to:

- describe some of the effects of alcohol on the brain and body.
- identify effective alternatives to using alcohol.
- work in groups to develop an effective alcohol prevention message.

These materials may be used to conduct a **Reach Out Now Teach-In** as a media event. This involves inviting a prominent leader into the classroom to help teach the class. The media are invited to attend and report on the classroom activities.

SAMHSA recommends doing the **Reach Out Now Teach-In** during the first week of April Alcohol Awareness Month but these materials can be used anytime and in other youth settings besides the classroom.

Packets for both age groups are downloadable from the web at www.teachin.samhsa.gov. Registration is required to use the website. If you do not have access to the Internet or are unable to download materials call Marie at Prevention Network, 1-800-968-4968 for assistance.

Who needs to be involved?

Parents of 5th and 6th graders are the best people to approach their student's teacher with the idea of using Reach Out Now materials in their classroom. Other adults who are concerned about prevention may also ask school administrators to work with 5th and 6th grade teachers to use this curriculum.

If a school agrees to host a **Reach Out Now Teach-In**, several adults should become involved in the planning. The planning group should include at least one teacher and a school administrator. One person should secure the prominent person to teach. Another person should carry out the media plan.

What resources will we need?

The only costs for this program are copies of “reproducibles” for parents and youth and media releases and postage.

How and why do we get the media involved?

Contacting the media to publicize the **Reach Out Now Teach-In** helps educate parents and other adults who do not have children in the 5th or 6th grade about the importance of reducing underage drinking.

There is a great *Media Package* at www.teachin.samhsa.gov that includes talking points, samples of a media advisory, a pitch letter, press release, op-ed, and proclamation—all written for the Reach Out Now Teach-In. Click on “materials” in menu bar. Accessing this resource requires registration at the site. You may want to add some local talking points but most of the work is done for you if you get this *Media Package*.

How and why do we evaluate this project?

Even though **Reach Out Now** has been evaluated nationally to determine its effectiveness as a curriculum you will still want to evaluate its impact on the youth and parents in your community.

Call a few of the parents of students who participated in the program to see what they thought of the materials and the experience. Do they think that their child learned anything about alcohol? Did the program do a good job opening up a conversation about underage alcohol use?

If project included a **Reach Out Now Teach-In** were you successful in getting any media coverage? Is there a possibility that parents or other adults may get involved in efforts to reduce underage drinking as the result of the media generated by the **Reach Out Now Teach-In**?

¹ 2005 Youth Risk Behavior Survey, Michigan Department of Education, www.michigan.gov/yrbs