

Welcome to **The Seven Challenges**

The Seven Challenges® Program is designed specifically for adolescents with drug problems, to motivate a decision and commitment to change - and to support success in implementing the desired changes. The Program simultaneously helps young people address their drug problems as well as their co-occurring life skill deficits, situational problems, and psychological problems.

The challenges provide a framework for helping youth think through their own decisions about their lives and their use of alcohol and other drugs. Counselors using The Seven Challenges Program teach youth to identify and work on the issues most relevant to them. In sessions, as youth discuss the issues that matter most, counselors seamlessly integrate the Challenges as part of the conversation.

The Seven Challenges is listed as an evidence-based program in the SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. The Seven Challenges received a perfect score in the "Readiness for Dissemination" category, with the review stating:

"Clear, logically organized, and comprehensive materials are provided to support implementers, supervisors, and administrators. The Program materials, trainings, ongoing support and monitoring work effectively to ensure a successful implementation."

OVERVIEW



THE SEVEN CHALLENGES



We decided to open up and talk honestly about ourselves and about alcohol and other drugs.



We looked at what we liked about alcohol and other drugs, and why we were using them.



We looked at our use of alcohol or other drugs to see if it has caused harm or could cause harm.



We looked at our responsibility and the responsibility of others for our problems.



We thought about where we seemed to be headed, where we wanted to go, and what we wanted to

Traditional approaches to working with adolescents with drug problems have produced high drop out rates and disappointing outcomes. The mad rush to get youth to immediately say "I will quit" often leads to either increased defiance or increased dishonesty, with young people telling adults what they "want to hear." It also leads to failure among certain youth who follow adult directives to quit, but soon relapse because they have not laid a solid foundation for success. Most young people do not seek drug treatment of their own free will. Most are dragged to counseling by their collars. By any definition, they are in the early stages of change. The Seven Challenges Program starts where youth "are at" (usually resistant and reluctant to change), not where adults wish they might be or where young people often pretend to be -- ready, willing, and prepared to succeed with immediate abstinence. Although the program strategy includes capturing any sincere impulse to quit, counselors avert power struggles and insincere commitments to change by striving for honesty and engagement instead of charging ahead with the "mad rush for abstinence." We avoid the pitfall of teaching people to be drug free before they have honestly decided to be drug free. We also resist the temptation to follow the common practice of locking horns; trying to convince young people that they have problems, and backing them into defensive positions. Instead of fear and coercion, we harness the enormous power of education, finesse and respectful confrontation. We take the slow but steady

approach.

Use of Published Materials for Youth

One unique feature of the Program is the use of published materials for youth, which include the story-telling of The Seven Challenges reader and the interactive, nine-volume set of The Seven Challenges Journals. The reader tells the story and presents the point of view of youth who have had drug problems. With The Seven Challenges Journals, youth write in the booklet, counselors respond in the margins using a skill set taught at Seven Challenges training, and both engage in a back and forth written dialogue called Supportive Journaling®. These published materials are available in English and Spanish.

Decision-making / Making Changes

To succeed in working with youth, The Seven Challenges Program places a special emphasis on creating a climate of mutual respect within which individuals can talk openly and honestly about themselves. We engage young people in actively thinking about their use of alcohol or other drugs, and its effect upon their lives. Working through The Seven Challenges helps them understand what needs they are meeting by using drugs, what harm they are causing, what risks they are taking, and what it entails to make changes. We raise consciousness, inspire hope, and motivate informed, internally driven, sincere decisions to change. Once such decisions are made, we teach the tools and provide the support that ensures success.

Co-occurring Problems

People use drugs for a reason. We help youth identify their own motivation. Often they find that they use drugs to cope with situational or psychological problems, or to compensate for life skill deficits. Rather than presenting ourselves as antagonists who want to take away drugs from them, we reposition ourselves as problem-solving partners. We help them overcome their co-occurring problems. We empower youth to meet their needs in positive ways. This gives them the opportunity to consider the possibility of making changes and living well without depending on drugs.

Developmentally Appropriate

The Seven Challenges Program was specifically designed for counseling adolescents. As youth think about and examine their lives, and their drug use, and the potential impact of their drug use upon their future, counselors help them master important developmental tasks - to define their own identity, to learn systematic logical thinking and to prepare for adults roles. This is built into the program. Also, The Seven Challenges reader tells the stories of adolescents and The Seven Challenges Journals were designed for youth.

Culturally Sensitive

The Seven Challenges Program and materials were developed while working with - and listening to -- a culturally diverse group of young people. The program uses an empowerment model, putting personal problems in the context of broader social and environmental issues. Because of the flexibility of the program, culturally relevant work is easily integrated into The Seven Challenges Program as it is implemented.

How the Counseling Works

Although the Program provides a structure for group counseling and a framework for working with individuals, the content of sessions is not pre-scripted, and is exceptionally flexible. Session content is driven by relevancy to youth. A unique feature of the program is that counselors teach youth how to "work" in counseling sessions; that is identify and address the issues that are most pressing to them. Counselors also pay attention to client needs and bring up topics or introduce activities that seem relevant at any given time. We do not try to fit youth into the program. Rather we wrap the program around the issues of most relevance to youth. Discussion revolves around these relevant issues, but we "make The Seven Challenges a seamless part of the discussion" by helping youth see the relationship between a particular topic and one or more of the Challenges.

Counseling Settings

The Seven Challenges Program is exceptionally flexible and has been implemented in a wide array of counseling settings (outpatient, intensive outpatient, inpatient, residential, day treatment, partial care programs, and

accomplish.



We made thoughtful decisions about our lives and about our use of alcohol and other drugs.



We followed through on our decisions about our lives and drug use. If we saw problems, we went back to earlier challenges and mastered them.

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home-based). It is also used in public and private schools, treatment schools, drug courts, juvenile probation departments, and public and private juvenile justice facilities.

Counseling Modalities

Seven Challenges youth sessions can be conducted in individual or group sessions. Sessions incorporate work on drug issues, life skill deficits, and co-occurring issues, with frequency of sessions commensurate with intensity of the problem. Family/multi-family sessions are integrated in a comprehensive Seven Challenges Program. Because The Seven Challenges Program promotes openness in relationships, trauma issues are often exposed. Skill building for trauma recovery on such issues as safety, trust, boundaries, and excessive self blame are incorporated in this program.

Evidence-based

Independent studies funded by The Center for Substance Abuse Treatment in Washington, D.C. and published in peer reviewed journals -- one study at the University of Iowa and the other at the University of Arizona -- have provided evidence that demonstrates the effectiveness of The Seven Challenges as a "co-occurring" program that significantly decreases the substance use of adolescents and greatly improves their overall mental health status. Data also show that the program has been especially effective with the large number of substance abusing youth with trauma issues.

These outcomes combined with The Seven Challenges Manual which is used by counselors as a learning tool and reference book, an array of other implementation materials, and a comprehensive training and support process qualify the program to be categorized as evidence based. The SAMHSA National Registry of Evidence-Based Programs and Practices, (NREPP) gave Seven Challenges a perfect score for "Readiness for Dissemination."

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