

D.A.R.E. and SCHOOL CONNECTEDNESS

Results of a growing number of studies suggest that enhancing protective factors for youth and adolescents may reduce the negative effects of stressful life events, while shielding our youth from the potentially harmful outcomes of negative situations and occurrences. Enhanced protective factors may increase abilities of young people to avoid risks or hazards; and promote social and emotional competence to thrive in all aspects of life in the present and future. School connectedness, the belief by students that adults and peers in their school care about them as individuals and their learning experience, is a particularly promising protective factor. For twenty-five years, D.A.R.E. has been noted as positively contributing to the four factors that influence school connectedness (adult support, belonging to positive peer groups, commitment to education and school environment).

In a publication entitled *School Connectedness Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth (2008)*, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, reiterates the importance school connectedness plays in providing protective factors to students. The CDC recommends six strategies for communities to employ to increase school connectedness. It should be noted that these very strategies have long been pillars of the D.A.R.E. program.

Create decision-making process that facilitate student, family, and community engagement; academic achievement; and staff empowerment.

The focal point of D.A.R.E. lessons is a decision-making model. Through facilitated discussion and cooperative learning group experiences, students are provided ample opportunity to develop, refine and internalize decision-making skills. While following an examination of family, peer and community norms, students are empowered to apply their decision-making abilities to real life situations.

In a unique and successful manner, D.A.R.E. brings together the triad of students, family and community. “The only national drug abuse prevention delivery system that supports the rapid diffusion of new prevention strategies and includes uniform training and credentialing of instructors who are monitored for quality implementation of prevention programming is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education network (D.A.R.E.) linking community law enforcement to schools. D.A.R.E. provides an understanding of the essential parameters of this successful delivery system that can be used in the development of other types of national infrastructures for community-based prevention services.”¹

Provide education and opportunities to enable families to be actively involved in their children's academic and school life.

D.A.R.E. programming provides families/adult caregivers with plentiful opportunities for involvement in the academic and social learning of students. Many parents credit D.A.R.E. with fostering substance abuse discussion in the home, which often results in the opportunity to establish family rules. In addition to spontaneous conversations stemming from D.A.R.E. classes, parents of D.A.R.E. students also have the opportunity to become actively engaged with their child's D.A.R.E. experience by availing themselves of D.A.R.E. Parent Alerts, D.A.R.E. Family Talk Activities and D.A.R.E. Community Education programs. One recent survey² of parents documented the impact of D.A.R.E.:

- 88% said their child spoke at home about how they will make future decisions.
- 96% agreed their child spoke at home as a result of the D.A.R.E. Program's influence.
- 96% agreed that the D.A.R.E. Program had a positive impact upon their child.

Provide students with academic, emotional, and social skills necessary to be actively engaged in school.

The D.A.R.E. curricula are designed to fulfill many academic and social skill needs. D.A.R.E. curricula employ brain-based learning theory techniques that enable students to make meaning of the information provided, apply the information within the context of a decision-making model and utilize the acquired communication, resistance and refusal skills in their daily lives. Support for the learning experience is furnished by creating a linkage between the curriculum and the real-life experiences and personal associations of students.³ Each D.A.R.E. lesson attends to learning objectives of other curricular disciplines, such as language arts, mathematics and health.

Use effective classroom management and teaching methods to foster a positive learning environment.

D.A.R.E. instructors interact with students in a structured, caring and proactive manner, producing a positive pro-social bonding opportunity. D.A.R.E. instructors utilize facilitative teaching methodologies, addressing the need of visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners. Students enhance their own learning through the processing of information, application of a decision-making model and teaching one another in small cooperative learning groups. The effectiveness of D.A.R.E. instructors has been evidenced, "Our analysis indicated students who had police officers as instructors evaluated program instructors significantly higher than students who had non-police officers as instructors."⁴

D.A.R.E. instructors were perceived by students as more credible than non-police instructors. D.A.R.E. instructors' delivery of program content ranked in the very high end of the range compared to other studies, which suggest D.A.R.E. instructors are equal to, and in some cases,

better than other types of instructors in delivering substance abuse prevention programs as designed.⁵

Provide professional development and support for teachers and other staff to enable them to meet the diverse cognitive, emotional and social needs of children and adolescents.

“The only national drug abuse prevention delivery system that supports the rapid diffusion of new prevention strategies and includes uniform training and credentialing of instructors who are monitored for quality implementation of prevention programming is the Drug Abuse Resistance Education network (D.A.R.E.) linking community law enforcement to schools. Analysis of the organizational structure and function of D.A.R.E. provides an understanding of the essential parameters of this successful delivery system that can be used in the development of other types of national infrastructures for community-based prevention services.”⁶

“Several conclusions can be drawn from this analysis of the D.A.R.E. delivery system that would inform the development of an integrated national prevention service delivery system. Having a national umbrella organization that sets standards for the delivery of quality services allows control over the "brand" including

- the selection of the prevention programming strategies/services,
- development of manuals or guidelines for the delivery of the services,
- specifying the criteria and knowledge needed by prevention instructors,
- training in this knowledge base and how those services are to be delivered, and
- monitoring both the delivery and the outcomes of service delivery.”⁷

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Create trusting and caring relationships that promote open communication among administrators, teachers, staff, students, families and communities.

The presence of a D.A.R.E. instructor in a school provides another caring adult for students to bond with and relate to. Through the D.A.R.E. program open communication among students, parents and school staff are promoted. The D.A.R.E. instructor provides the student with linkage to their peers, school and greater community.

In her landmark study on resiliency, Emmy E Werner concludes: “Young children maintain relatively small number of relationships that give them feedback and shape their sense of coherence. But in the course of this longitudinal study we learned from resilient youth that even under adverse circumstances change is possible when older children or adolescents develop new competencies and meet people who give them positive reinforcement and a reason for a commitment and caring”.⁹

A national Canadian study of the D.A.R.E. program resulted in an extremely positive view of the program from the standpoint of students, parents, teachers, principals and detachment commanders. Surveying of 221 schools across nine provinces and the Yukon, determined all five stakeholder groups found dramatic benefits from the program.¹⁰

Overall responses to the survey questions found overwhelmingly positive responses generally exceeding 90% approval ratings among all five constituent groups. The D.A.R.E. Program was overwhelmingly well received by all stakeholders. Overall, participants found the programming and officers exceeded their expectations. In many cases, the D.A.R.E. Officers have become prominent figures and familiar role models in their community’s schools.¹¹

Throughout their involvement in the school setting, D.A.R.E. instructors serve as prominent and participative leaders with in the school-community. Their regular interaction with students, parents, teachers, school staff and the community at large allow them to be instrumental in not only their efforts to improve child and adolescent health, but to ensure students have positive role models and confidence reach out to parents, staff members and in the full effort of achieving true school connectedness.

¹ Jeffrey C Merrill, Ilana Pinsky, Ley A Killeya-Jones, Zili Sloboda, and Tracey Dilascio
Substance abuse prevention infrastructure: a survey-based study of the organizational structure and function of the D.A.R.E. program
Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy 2006, 1:25 (6 September 2006)

² **D.A.R.E. DRUG ABUSE RESISTANCE EDUCATION National Client Survey 2007**
Drugs and Organized Crime Awareness Service
Royal Canadian Mounted Police

³ Jensen, E. *Brain-based Learning*.
Del Mar, CA: Turning Point Publishing, 1996.

⁴ Hammond, Augustine, et al, *Do adolescents perceive police officers as credible instructors of substance abuse prevention programs?*
Health Education Research, 2007

⁵ Zili Sloboda, et al. *Implementation fidelity: the experience of the Adolescent Substance Abuse Prevention*

Health Education Research Advance Access published online on June 20, 2008
Health Education Research, doi:10.1093/her/cyn035

⁶ Jeffrey C Merrill, Ilana Pinsky, Ley A Killeya-Jones, Zili Sloboda, and Tracey Dilascio
Substance abuse prevention infrastructure: a survey-based study of the organizational structure and function of the D.A.R.E. program
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⁷ **Ibid**

⁸ **Ibid**

⁹ Werner, E.E. & Smith, R.S. *Vulnerable, but invincible: A longitudinal study of resilient children and youth*. New York, McGraw Hill. 1982

¹⁰ ***D.A.R.E. DRUG ABUSE RESISTANCE EDUCATION National Client Survey 2007***
Drugs and Organized Crime Awareness Service
Royal Canadian Mounted Police

¹¹ **Ibid**