

Working Together

Appendix C

What The Research Says

There is now considerable research about the developmental needs and interests of children and young people, and about effective preventive and developmental programs.

Capacities And Risks

- Programs that focus on the positive, on building the strengths and capacities of each child and young person, are more effective than those that focus solely on addressing specific problems such as misuse of drugs and alcohol or specific negative behaviours such as acting out in anger.
- Teaching social and emotional knowledge, skills, and behaviours to children and young people leads to reduced high risk behaviours.
- Many different kinds of problem behaviours are caused by the same risk factors.
- Building the capacities of children and young people and preventing high risk behaviours is most effective through multi-year and integrated approaches where families also participate.
- Having knowledge and demonstrating skills in formal settings does not automatically mean that children and young people will use this knowledge and these skills in their everyday lives. Training and learning require practice in real situations.

Diversity

- Each child and young person is unique. Effective programs must be flexible, responding to the uniqueness of each person.

- Children and young people grow up in very diverse families: two parent families where one parent is at home full-time, two parent families where both parents work, single parent families headed by both women and men, extended families, and gay and lesbian families. Each of these families can be a supportive environment for children and young people.
- Effective programs must recognize the increasingly diverse family backgrounds of children and young people.
- Children and young people come from families that are different: culturally, economically, spiritually, and linguistically.

Environment

- Children and young people spend most of their time with their peers, at home with their families, and in school. The amount of time they spend in other programs is much smaller in comparison.
- Many children and young people, and their families, live in poverty, or have low incomes. They are not able to afford the resources and programs that they need and are interested in. They often feel socially excluded from their communities.
- High incomes, increased education, and positive health all correlate.

Families

- Healthy families play key support roles in the lives of children and youth.
- In helping children and young people learn, develop, and avoid high risk behaviours it is as important to strengthen their families as it is to work with the children and young people directly.

Schools

- Students are more attached to schools when their learning environments are holistic, safe, caring, well managed, and participatory.
- Strong attachment to school leads to better attendance, higher grades, and higher graduation rates.
- Increases in the positive connections among students, that is a positive sense of being part of a safe and caring community, often increase educational outcomes and academic achievements.

- Strong attachment to school leads to reductions in high risk behaviours such as drug and alcohol misuse. Children and young people who are strongly attached to school tend to learn skills and behaviours that allow them to avoid engaging in high risk behaviours.
- Providing opportunities for students to participate may also increase their motivation to behave in positive ways with others, thereby increasing school safety and decreasing crime.
- School environments that are safe, caring, well managed, and participative lead to children and young people learning social and emotional skills such as self awareness, social awareness, self management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.
- Children and young people can be taught social and emotional skills in school, which allow them to participate in behaviours that support their positive and healthy development, and avoid high risk behaviours.
- High risk behaviours are often associated with low academic performance.
- Social and emotional skill development has a direct impact on learning in academic areas, and may be a prerequisite for academic success.