

keepin' it REAL

Refuse • Explain • Avoid • Leave

Curriculum Fact Sheet

Overview of the Curriculum

keepin' it REAL is an evidence-based drug prevention program designed to increase drug resistance skills among middle school students. Research has shown that many students at these grade levels begin to encounter drug-related situations. *keepin' it REAL* is a video-enhanced, multicultural program grounded in students' cultural norms. It teaches youth how to live drug-free lives, drawing on their personal strengths and the cultural strengths of their families and communities. Principles of multiculturalism, including representation and inclusion, are key elements that contribute to the program's effectiveness.

keepin' it REAL is based on previous work that demonstrates that teaching communication and life skills can combat negative peer pressure and other influences. Using a culturally based narrative and performance framework, the program teaches students how to recognize risk, value their personal perceptions and feelings, make choices that are consistent with their personal and cultural values, and act assertively to stick to their drug-free choices.

Goal of the Curriculum

keepin' it REAL teaches students how to say NO to substance use through practical, easy-to-remember strategies represented by the acronym **REAL** — **R**efuse, **E**xplain, **A**void and **L**eave. These strategies help youth stay drug free by preparing them to act decisively and comfortably in refusing or avoiding offers to use drugs.

Target Audience

The *keepin' It REAL* program was originally targeted to a population of middle school adolescents in the urban Southwest who were considered at risk due to poverty and other factors such as immigration status, English acquisition and acculturation stress. Adolescents represented African-American, American Indian, Mexican-American, Mexican immigrant and white populations. Replications have shown *keepin' it REAL* to be effective within a range of school and agency settings for students ages 10 through 17. The program was designed to intervene with students before they actively begin to participate in risky behaviors such as experimentation with alcohol or other drugs, and to help students reduce existing substance use.

Length

The curriculum consists of 10 sequential lessons to be taught in 10 or more sessions depending on your class time and completing the curriculum within 2 to 3 months.

Curriculum Objectives

At the completion of *keepin' it REAL* curriculum, youth will:

- be prepared to act decisively and comfortably in refusing drugs;
 - recognize risks and take action to avoid drug-related situations;
 - increase their decision-making, communication, planning and refusal skills;
 - be empowered to make choices that support drug-free values;
 - be able to draw on the cultural strengths of their families and communities to help them avoid drugs;
 - be able to transfer skills to real-world situations.
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Curriculum Components

In addition to the 10-lesson curriculum, the program's key learning tool is a video produced for youth by youth, with stories based on actual student experiences. The video segments specifically demonstrate how students can use the REAL strategies to resist drug use in real-life situations. Students can recognize themselves in the prevention message and see solutions that are sensitive to their unique cultural environments.

keepin' it REAL includes the following materials:

- **Teacher Guide** — complete 10-lesson curriculum, including teaching steps, preparation instructions, implementation suggestions, and samples of all the materials needed for each lesson.
 - **Video** — five segments that feature an introduction to the program as well as specific segments for each of the four resistance strategies — Refuse, Explain, Avoid, and Leave.
 - **Student Book** — all student activity sheets and homework assignments.
 - **Transparencies and Masters** — provided in the Teacher Guide for teachers to copy and use as instructional aids in the lessons.
 - **Spanish-language materials** — included in the Teacher Guide and a separate Student Book. (These materials are available in the regional Spanish most commonly spoken in the Southwest United States and Northern Mexico.)
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Content Outline

The curriculum's interactive lesson activities involve students in cooperative learning, group discussion, problem solving and roleplays as they learn, practice and demonstrate the REAL resistance strategies. The activities in the lessons can be taught during different class sessions as long as the lessons and activities are done in order.

- **Lesson 1:** introduces the program and gives a brief overview of the REAL resistance strategies. Students discuss the ideas of options, choices and consequences and make the distinction between a simple preference and a wise choice. They suggest actions to take in some potential pressure situations and think about the consequences of various choices.

- **Lesson 2:** defines risk and helps students examine the risks inherent in everyday situations. A team guessing game helps students experience first-hand the pressure and consequences of taking risks and look at how their risk-taking choices can affect others.
- **Lesson 3:** examines effective ways to handle conflict and teaches communication skills. Students learn how to use I-statements to express personal views and feelings in assertive but respectful ways, and to acknowledge the views and feelings of others without necessarily agreeing with them.
- **Lesson 4:** introduces the first resistance strategy — Refuse. Students learn verbal and nonverbal refusal skills as well as assertiveness techniques to help them say no in clear and respectful ways. A video and class discussion show them ways to apply refusal skills in real-life situations.
- **Lesson 5:** introduces the second resistance strategy — Explain. Students learn communication skills to explain why they do not intend to engage in risky behaviors. Guidelines for explaining help them be clear and take action to show that they're serious about their drug-free choices. They watch a video that models the guidelines and practice the explaining strategy with a partner.
- **Lesson 6:** introduces the third resistance strategy — Avoid. Students learn actions they can take to avoid potential pressure through class discussion and a video. They learn the A-B-C-D (Ask, Brainstorm, Choose, Do) problem-solving method to help them analyze and avoid risky situations.
- **Lesson 7:** introduces the final resistance strategy — Leave. Students learn ways to get out of risky situations. They summarize and apply all of the REAL resistance strategies by viewing and evaluating a video and then practicing through roleplays.
- **Lesson 8:** helps students clarify their personal values and beliefs about drug use. Students examine myths and identify accurate norms related to drug use. They also identify personal characteristics they value in themselves and demonstrate strategies that will enable them to act in ways that are consistent with their values.
- **Lesson 9:** examines feelings and how emotions may affect the ways people react in various situations. Students examine what it's like to feel differently or want to act differently than others in a group. They learn communication skills for describing and standing up for their feelings, beliefs and intended actions in effective and assertive ways and practice through roleplays.
- **Lesson 10:** helps students identify their personal support networks of family, friend and others who can assist them with health-related issues and choices. They learn strategies for asking for help and examine which strategies would be best in which situations. A final student-led discussion of the *keepin' it REAL* program reviews what students have learned and affirms their new knowledge and skills.

The *keepin' it REAL* Video

A key learning tool is the *keepin' it REAL* video. The five segments of the video demonstrate how to use REAL strategies to resist drug use in real-life situations. The video segments were all written, acted and produced for youth by students from South Mountain High School in Phoenix, Arizona.

- **Introduction to *keepin' it REAL*:** (5 minutes) provides an intriguing overview of the making of the video and introduces students to the *keepin' it REAL* program and the drug resistance strategies.
- **Breakin' Bad Habits:** (7.5 minutes) shows how a teen breakdancer uses refusal skills to refrain from drug use while maintaining social acceptance and self-confidence.
- **Why Not:** (6.5 minutes) presents a series of short interviews in which teens explain how and why they choose not to use tobacco, alcohol or other drugs.
- **Dream Theme:** (8 minutes) tells the story of a young man who falls asleep and dreams about repeatedly being offered drugs at a party. When he wakes up, he decides to avoid the risk by not attending the party.
- **Ain't No Game:** (8 minutes) shows the REAL strategies in action and demonstrates the negative consequences of smoking.

Discussion sessions following each video segment help students clarify and integrate the information and strategies presented.

Special Considerations

The curriculum requires the use of TV monitor and VCR.

Theoretical Framework Used in the *keepin' it REAL* Curriculum

Key components of several theoretical perspectives — Communication Competence Theory, Narrative Theory, Focus Theory of Norms, Ecological Risk and Resiliency — were interwoven with cultural values and norms to provide a basis for the content and structure of *the keepin' it REAL* curriculum. Critical to the development of the project was the recognition of the social constructions used by individuals to develop self-identity, including language, age, class, gender, socio-economic status and racial or ethnic heritage. Using a narrative theory gave students a tool to think in abstract terms and to examine themselves and the world around them. Gender differences and other power differentials influencing students' capabilities for participation and self-expression were also considered in the design of the project.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) methodology was used in the development of the curriculum. PAR is a collaborative research methodology that engages members of a community through direct participation. Community members are seen as collaborators, contributors and

experts regarding their own community. It is a research model that has been found to be particularly effective in public health and social science studies and programs. PAR “emphasizes social change to solve practical problems.”

Unique Features of the *keepin’ it REAL* Curriculum

keepin’ it REAL is a culturally grounded curriculum. This means that the lesson and activities are based on the notion that students already know a lot about communicating and have strengths that come from their cultures. Research indicates that peer-produced, culturally specific curriculum may be more effective than more traditional methods involving materials created by adults operating from a so-called “culturally neutral” perspective. These “culturally neutral” messages are based upon dominant cultural values and often do not reflect cultural and community-based values of adolescents in minority cultures. Youth are found to base much of their decision making on their peers and the media. Students who found their culture and learning styles represented in prevention videos were more likely to benefit from the experience.

Cost and Ordering Information

keepin’ it REAL can be ordered from ETR Associates. To place an order, visit ETR’s website at <http://www.etr.org> or call toll-free at (800) 321-4407. The web price for the curriculum — which includes a teacher’s guide, one student workbook and one 36-minutes video — is \$99.95. Sets of five student workbooks in English and Spanish are available for \$18.95 per set.

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Evaluation Fact Sheet

The Intervention: *keepin' it REAL* Curriculum

A decade of research funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), an agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, led to the development of *keepin' it REAL*, a drug prevention program designed to increase drug resistance skills among middle school students. Perceiving the need to develop and test culturally specific prevention interventions, researchers combined narrative theory with the focus theory of norms and implemented an experimental design with 24 treatment schools and 11 control schools over a 48-month period.

Research Design

In Year 1, the 35 public schools were stratified by enrollment and ethnicity (percent Hispanic), and block randomization was used to assign school to 1 of 4 conditions: Mexican American, Black/White, Multicultural or Control. The students in the treatment schools each received a parallel version of the curriculum (Mexican-American, Multicultural or Black/White), while students in the control schools participated in existing prevention programs chosen and instituted by their schools. These consisted of other research-based programs and, in some cases, programs supported by local professional athletes. The final sample consisted of 3,318 Mexican or Mexican-American students and 1,141 students of other Latino or multiethnic Latino origin, 1,049 non-Hispanic White students, and 527 African-American students.

In Year 2, a pre-intervention questionnaire was administered to all participants (Wave 1). Then the curriculum was implemented in seventh-grade classes at treatment schools, followed by a Wave 2 post-questionnaire. Teachers utilized the English and/or Spanish materials available with each version of the curriculum. During the summer, a bilingual television public service announcement and outdoor billboard campaign was conducted.

In Year 3, school-based booster sessions were delivered with students in the treatment schools; follow-up questionnaires (Wave 3) and final questionnaires (Wave 4) were administered to students in all schools.

Wave 2, 3 and 4 questionnaires were administered 2, 8 and 14 months, respectively, after complete program implementation. The questionnaires utilized a 3-form design that employed planned "missingness" to limit the number of items each individual student received in the questionnaire, while maximizing the total number of items included for analysis. At each wave, students responded to the items used to obtain information about their demographic characteristics; recent alcohol, tobacco and marijuana use; anti-drug personal norms; descriptive norms; and intentions to accept substances.

Evaluation Results

Overall, the program produced significant effects in reducing gateway drug use (alcohol, tobacco and marijuana), increasing attitudes that support not using drugs, strengthening norms that support drug-free choices, and increasing resistance strategies useful in avoiding drug use.

Compared to control group students, *keepin' it REAL* students reported:

- Better behavioral and psychosocial outcomes, including reduction and cessation of substance use, increased repertoire of resistance skills, more frequent use of those skills, and internalizing mediators of substance use such as highly developed and well-articulated personal anti-drug norms.
- Significantly less substance use, especially alcohol.
- Increased adoption of strategies to resist using alcohol, tobacco and marijuana.
- Retention of unfavorable attitudes against someone their age using substances.
- Perception that their peers' substance use experimentation was significantly less than previously believed.

Compared to the control group, at two-year follow-up, *keepin' it REAL* students reported:

- 32-44% reduction in marijuana, tobacco and alcohol use
- 30-38% increase in knowledge about and negative attitudes toward drug use
- 29-34% decrease in intent to accept substances

Both the Mexican-American version and the multicultural version of the curriculum reduced the use of gateway drugs and had a beneficial impact on a number of other substance-use-related psychosocial variables. Both versions showed effects on personal norms, and the multicultural version produced significantly better outcomes on resistance strategies, positive substance use expectancies and friends' injunctive norms than the control condition. The intervention had its greatest impact on use of alcohol, the substance used by the largest and most rapidly growing number of students.

The research findings clearly showed that infusing cultural elements and values into prevention programs appears quite beneficial. The process of incorporating a representative level of relevant cultural elements into the prevention message appeared critical to the program's success.

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