

# The **PREVENTION** **CONNECTION**

Good Soil: see pp 2-3 NEWSLETTER

## *Prevention Programs and Individual Change*

By Charles Horejsi, Ph.D., Professor, Department of Social Work, University of Montana

**W**hen we discuss prevention programs, we usually refer to a set of actions, often at the community level, which will decrease the chances that a certain problem will develop. For example, in an effort to decrease addiction to tobacco, we might launch a community education campaign designed to inform community members about the dangers of smoking. To take another example, we may attempt to reduce child abuse by identifying and reaching out to high-risk families, then offering various support services. In any case, whether community programs are successful depends upon whether the prevention program stimulates, encourages, and supports an *individual's desire* to change. Desire is just the starting point: effective programs must also facilitate real change in the ways people function.

Prevention programs must be designed to bring about individual change. Although we can discuss and plan community-level changes, in the final analysis, we are seeking ways to change the thoughts, feelings and behavior of the *individual*. Whether or not an individual can and does make a particular change is a function of three major prerequisites: *motivation*, *capacity*; and *opportunity*.

**Motivation**—*In order to change, the individual must experience both the*

*pull of hope and the push of discomfort.*

It is helpful to view motivation as a perceived balance between a sense of hope and a sense of discomfort. For an individual to change, both must be present. For these purposes, *hope* can be defined as a firm belief that change is possible. At the same time, the individual must experience some discomfort, which can be defined as pain, frustration, or dissatisfaction associated with the current situation or behavior pattern. If the individual has hope but no significant discomfort, the efforts to change will be short-lived because change is inevitably difficult and frustrating. New Year's resolutions fail because we are filled with hope, but deep down, not all *that* dissatisfied. On the other hand, if there is pain and discomfort but real hope is lacking, there is little reason to take on the added discomfort of trying to change.

**Capacity**—Motivation in and of itself is not enough to generate change. One must also possess *capacities* for change, or the abilities, skills, prior experiences, attitudes and values prerequisite to change. Different types and combinations of capacities are required for making different types of change. Depending upon the type of change sought, an individual might need intellectual ability, the ability to read and write, the ability to make and follow a plan, self control, self awareness, the ability to lower personal defenses, skill in building relationships, or physical mobility, to name a few.

**Opportunity**—In addition to motivation and capacity, the *opportunity* to change must exist. Individual change always takes place within an environmental context. Opportunity, for these purposes, consists of the forces and factors within the community, family and social network that encourage and support change. On the other hand, an individual will lack the opportunity to change if his or her family, peer group, the job market, community attitudes and the like discourage and undermine efforts to change.

**Summary**—We cannot plan or design a prevention program at the community level without first examining our beliefs and assumptions about why, when, and under what circumstances individuals make changes—in thought and in deed. All three factors noted in this article—motivation, capacity and opportunity—are essential to the process. No amount of motivation can substitute for a lack of capacity or a lack of opportunity, and no amount of opportunity can make up for the lack of motivation.

The successful community prevention program, then, affects individuals by:

- increasing motivation for change,
- expanding capacities for change, and
- uncovering or developing opportunities for change.

## The Jan and Vicki Column

**B**uilding a comprehensive prevention system can sometimes seem overwhelming, and figuring out how to sustain one can feel nigh on to impossible. That's why this issue of the *Prevention Connection* is dedicated to providing some nuts and bolts for your prevention toolbox. You will find tips from the field on involving youth, navigating the rocky coalition waters, finding reliable data sources and social marketing. We've also included academic advice on

youth development, community readiness, research and evaluation.

In June, the Interagency Coordinating Council on State Prevention Programs adopted their Guiding Principles for Effective Prevention. (Refer to page 22.) These principles are intended to bring together diverse languages and prevention systems, and are based on the Principles of Effectiveness supported by the Department of Education, Health and Human Services, and the Office of Juvenile Justice, and which are utilized by their respective state agencies. Incorporated into these guidelines are the

*Communities That Care* and Search Institute's *Healthy Community, Healthy Youth* models.

The Prevention Resource Center (PRC), too, is an important resource in the prevention toolbox, inasmuch as it assists communities and prevention agencies in piecing the prevention puzzle together. To this end, the PRC can assist with coordinating state policy, building community infrastructure, and providing resources.

We hope that you will come to view this issue as a valuable resource in your permanent prevention collection.

Jan and Vicki

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## Good Soil: Eight Principles for Building Agreement

Submitted by Nedra Chandler, Montana Concensus Council

**W**hen the *Prevention Connection* asked me to write an article for this issue, they asked for tips on turf busting. "Turf busting?" I asked, conjuring up images of Montana's sod-busting homesteaders. As it turned out, I didn't have to start researching soil management. In this case, *turf busting* means *breaking down communication barriers between the various groups and individuals in a community so that problems can be addressed in the most comprehensive way possible*.

The assumption behind turf busting is this: if everyone (e.g., health departments, law enforcement professionals, school boards, city and county councils, environmental groups, churches, youth groups, business groups, state social service agencies) holds to their accustomed power bases and carries out business as usual, there is less likelihood of positive change than if these parties work together toward a common purpose. Examples of positive change might include reducing the number of youth who use tobacco or alcohol, reducing violent crime, or increasing the availability and quality of childcare. Sometimes it is enough for each

group to stick to its own turf and do the work it does best. But a collaborative approach to certain types of problems can lead to the development of a comprehensive strategy carried out over the long term. This can be very effective.

Once you've busted up the sod, what about building the turf? How do you nourish the soil so that effective cooperation grows among those who figure they rule a piece or two of community ground—metaphorical or actual? One of the most important nutrients is *contribution*. Let there be no doubt: if people feel they have participated in jointly developing a solution to a problem, they are more likely to stay committed and implement that solution. Researchers refer to this outcome as *durable*. If people feel the process was fair, if they were meaningfully included, and the substance of the issue is/was adequately addressed, then the outlook for a durable solution to a community problem is good.

With an eye to a durable, effective prevention program, how does a community develop a process that's fair, inclusive, and substantive? Here are eight principles for building agreement and cooperation across the various power bases of people that exist in any community.

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## Eight Steps to Building Agreement

PRINCIPLE	COMMENTS AND CAUTIONS
1) <b>Agree on a purpose.</b>	<b>Make sure the purpose is clear and doable.</b> People need a compelling reason to participate. Be choosy. Be ruthlessly practical. Don't try to build unanimous agreement unless it's truly necessary. Ask: <i>Do the participants agree about the purpose? Is a collaborative approach the best way to achieve this purpose?</i>
2) <b>Acknowledge that group work is hard work.</b>	<b>Group work takes more time and more patience than unilateral work</b> and yet it's no secret that Montanans have meeting fatigue. Community leaders and others report that they don't have time for meetings that lack focus, run too long, or don't produce results. Still, there is often no better way than group work to solve community problems. How can this apparent tension be resolved? <i>Don't ask or expect people to commit intensive amounts of time for periods much longer than a year.</i>
3) <b>Acknowledge alternatives to group work, if they exist.</b>	<b>Don't expect any party to participate if they feel that there is an easier, more effective, or better way to achieve their goals.</b> Demonstrate respect for every party's right to participate – <i>or to choose not to participate.</i> Alternatives to group work might include: hiring an independent consultant, filing a lawsuit with other like-minded parties or pursuing legislative changes through lobbying elected officials.
4) <b>Jointly decide on the rules that will guide your work together.</b>	<b>Don't rush to solutions until you have agreement on specifics of the process. Remember the purpose; listen respectfully and keep an open mind.</b> By far, the most common mistake groups make is in avoiding the question: <i>How will we work together?</i>  People are leary of spending too much time on procedures and process; such time is commonly undervalued, yet it <i>must</i> be invested. We humans are impatient, but we care about process. <i>Will it be fair? Will it be a safe place to express my perspectives? Will the time spent be worthwhile or will I curse the day I got involved?</i>  The key question is, "What do we mean by agreement?" Spell it out. Will you use a consensus-based approach whereby participants seek unanimous agreement? Which parties must agree? Are there particular seats at the table for representative groups or is each meeting for whoever can make it? Will you vote?  <b>Jointly craft and adopt the ground rules.</b> Define basic etiquette and procedure. Listen respectfully and keep an open mind. Agree on a basic work plan - know <i>who</i> is going to do what, and by when, but adapt and revise the plans as needed. Consider asking a volunteer or paid facilitator to assist with this step — or call the Montana Consensus Council to get examples of ground rules and work plans adopted by other working groups.
5) <b>Insist on accountability.</b>	<b>Hold yourselves accountable to the ground rules and work plan.</b> Don't let untrustworthy behavior pass unnoticed. Every participant must take some responsibility for whether or not the group is making acceptable progress. Toward this end, don't let poor participation, inept facilitation, or lack of leadership go unaddressed. Find a diplomatic yet direct way to correct the problem and move forward.
6) <b>Make sure the process is inclusive.</b>	<b>Find meaningful, practical ways for all stakeholders to have a say in the process and in the results.</b> If you are looking for ways to reduce drug use by youth, for example, don't forget to involve young people in the process. Be thoughtful about how you ask for involvement and the kind of input you seek. If you ask for public comment, be sure to show how it influenced your decision.
7) <b>Encourage joint fact finding.</b>	<b>Avoid the my-solution/your-solution wars.</b> Build a common understanding of the issues <i>before</i> generating specific options to solve the problem. Don't assume a uniform level of understanding—start by jointly gathering and interpreting information. Strive for easy and equal access to that information. Consider using field trips, panel discussions, focus groups, and peer reviews to help build a common information base.
8) <b>Commit to implementation of results.</b>	<b>Clarify the participants' commitments.</b> Don't forget to talk about <i>how</i> the prevention plan is actually going to be funded and carried out. Identify implementation roles and responsibilities; monitor and evaluate the results. <i>And remember: mistakes and missteps are inevitable. Learn from them and move on.</i>

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— A list of Montana Consensus Council publications is available upon request.

— Visit the Council's website, under construction at [www.mt.gov/MCC](http://www.mt.gov/MCC)