

# **NORTHWEST IOWA ALCOHOLISM AND DRUG TREATMENT UNIT**

## **Prime for Life! Under 21 Program Description**

Perception of risk is one of the strongest predictors of whether a young person will engage in high-risk drinking or drug use (Bachman et al., 1998; Bachman et al., 1988). A national study of adolescent drinking and drug use has shown that among the primary reasons young people give for not using drugs is concern over addiction and health problems (Johnston et al., 1998). Many adults believe that young people cannot be in touch with risk, or that their “live forever” mentality will work against risk reduction. But, both research and experience indicate that young people do take risk seriously—when the risk has been made real. Any alcohol and drug prevention program must make the risk real in order to have long-term effectiveness.

Prime for Life! Under 21 is a risk reduction program designed for groups of youth, ages 13-20. Its primary application is for young people who are either already engaged in high-risk drinking or drug use (indicated prevention) or in a group that is likely to become involved in high-risk behaviors (selected prevention). Thus, the frequent use of the curriculum is with young people who violated alcohol or drug policies or laws, are in alternative schools, or are in a support group for children of alcoholics. In addition, though, the curriculum is used with young people in classroom and other universal prevention settings. The majority of audiences reached by programs in this report were in this latter group: universal prevention settings with younger students.

The core curriculum for “universal groups” of younger persons who may or may not have current involvement with alcohol and drugs includes five units, though two are optional. The five units are: Unit 1: Common Views and the New View of Alcohol and other drugs; Unit 2: Five Steps to Risk Reduction; Unit 3: Risk Reduction and Drugs (Optional); Unit 4: Phases of Use and Self-Assessment (Optional as intervention-focused); and Unit 5: Choose Your Direction (focusing on Low-Risk attitudes and Protecting What I Value/My Commitment).

## **Prime for Life! Under 21 Evaluation Method**

In an attempt to measure the successful effects of delivering this program to a universal group of young persons among several substance abuse prevention and intervention agencies, a one-page instrument was developed by the program evaluator and members of the agencies that offered this program.

The evaluation instrument is a one-page posttest-only form. It has four parts to it. In the first part, demographic information about program participants is collected. The demographics include their age, gender, race, grade and city (zip code).

In the second part of the form, a series of nine statements are given. After each statement, the program participants are asked to indicate whether—“as a result of attending this program...”—they: “know their low-risk guidelines,” “am more committed to following low-risk guidelines,” “know I can become addicted to alcohol and other drugs,” “are more clear about what is important to me,” “more aware of the danger of drinking 5 or more drinks per occasion,”

“understand more about how peers influence the choices I make,” “will avoid using illegal drugs and misusing legal drugs,” “know more about the harmful consequences of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs,” and “more likely to not use tobacco.” After each statement, program participants were asked to mark one of three boxes that represented the response categories “Not at all,” “A little more,” “A lot more”. Collectively, these nine items represented knowledge, attitudes and behavioral intentions. The content of these items was based on the core curriculum used by the agencies delivering this program.

In the third part of the form, information about the quality of the presenters is obtained. Three items are provided. These are: “The presenter was knowledgeable about the problems of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs,” “The presenter explained the material so that I could understand it,” and “The presenter answered questions well.” Three response categories were provided. Program participants were asked to mark one of the three possible answers. The response categories were: “Disagree,” “Unsure,” and “Agree.”

Finally, the fourth part of the one-page instrument asked two open-ended questions. These two questions are: “The part of this program most important to me is....” And “The best reason for me to make low-risk choices is....” It was hoped this open-ended feedback would provide meaningful information to program sponsors as they reviewed the delivery of their programs.

## **Prime for Life! Under 21 Program Findings**

A total of 235 instruments were used in the following data analysis.

### **Demographics**

Among the program participants, 48% were female and 52% were male. The ages of participants ranged from 12 years old to 19 years old. The average age was 16; the median age was 16 and the modal age was 17 years (N=93). The majority of the youth were in high school (95%). With respect to racial categories, the largest percentage of students were white (90%), followed by Multiracial (5%), Asian (3%), Latino (2%) and Native American (1%). Sixty-three different zip codes were provided, representing a large geographical area served by the program.

### **Program Impact**

The table on the following page shows the percentage of responses given for each of the nine items that measured program impact. The last column of the table shows the “average” point value for each statement. This point-value represents the average of the three possible responses for each statement. A value of 0 was given for “Not at all,” a value of 1 was given for “A little more” and a value of 2 was given for “A lot more.” Consequently, average scores closest to 2 represent the best possible outcomes for program impact.

Item Statement	Percent “Not at All”	Percent “A little more”	Percent “A lot More”	Aver Score 0-2
Know my low-risk guidelines	0	16	84	1.84

More committed to following low-risk guidelines	6	49	45	1.39
Know I can become addicted to alcohol/drugs	7	23	70	1.62
More clear about what is important to me	4	31	65	1.61
More aware of the danger of drinking 5 or more drinks	8	31	61	1.53
Understand how peers influence choices I make	4	42	54	1.50
Will avoid using illegal drugs and misusing legal drugs	6	20	74	1.67
Know more about harmful consequences of alcohol...	0	27	73	1.72
More likely to not use tobacco	15	29	56	1.40

### Impact of Presenters

The following table shows the three items that were used to measure the impact of the presenters in delivering the program content. Again, the percentages of each of the three possible responses are given for each item. The final column represents the “average” score for each item based on the following values: 0= Disagree, 1=Unsure, and 2= Agree. Consequently, average scores closest to 2 represent the highest possible ratings for each item.

Item Statement	Percent “Disagree”	Percent “Unsure”	Percent “Agree”	Aver Score 0-2
Presenter was knowledgeable about problems...	1	7	92	1.91
Presenter explained the material....	3	9	88	1.86
Presenter answered questions well.	2	11	87	1.85

### Open-ended Responses

The unduplicated responses to each of the two open-ended statements are given below. The first statement read: “The part of this program most important to me is....” Responses were: (Note: Responses in **bold** reflect multiple responses among participants)

- Knowing my values and things that are important to me
- Making a plan and sticking to it
- **Learning about alcoholism**
- Learning what drugs and alcohol can do to you
- Showing me where I am at on the phases
- **Help me not to do it anymore**
- All the fun movies
- **Tolerance levels and triggers**
- To know what my guidelines are
- **It showed how alcohol can affect us**
- **Genetic passing down**
- **Talking about alcohol**
- It helped me understand more about drugs
- **Learning the health factors involved**
- **Being able to ask questions and not just listening all of the time**
- The section on smokeless tobacco

- Learning about the social and health problems that go hand and hand with drugs/alcohol
- Finding out that once an alcoholic always an alcoholic
- **I now know about alcoholism and am less likely to continue to drink**
- Learning about how to have fun without drinking
- **Learning low risk choices**
- Learning consequences of underage drinking
- **Getting to speak your mind about what you go through**
- Learning about marijuana
- That she wanted to help and cared about our choices
- All of it. I needed the knowledge to prepare myself for the future

The second item asked participants to complete the statement: “The best reason for me to make low-risk choices is:” (Note: responses in **bold** were repeatedly given among participants).

- To keep myself out of trouble and know what’s important to me
- It affects who I am and who I’m with and the decisions I make
- **To stay happy and healthy and keep my record clean**
- Because I’m a good person
- **My family**
- **To stay out of trouble and not get addicted**
- **So I don’t become an alcoholic**
- So I can have a good life
- My family history
- **I don’t want to ruin things for myself**
- **The consequences in the end**
- For my own safety and for the safety of those around me
- To make me more happy in my life journey
- **My future**
- **So my family and friends will trust me again**
- I am underage and it is illegal to drink
- **Sports and school activities**
- **Not to get into trouble again**
- **My goals and values**
- The things I will lose if I don’t make low-risk choices
- **So I don’t have to come to a class like this again**
- To love life without drugs and alcohol
- So I don’t die
- I will soon have another life to care for and he or she deserves my full attention and responsible child care
- Alcohol isn’t worth losing the important things in your life

## Prime for Life! Under 21 Program Summary

Among the 235 youth who provided feedback about their experience with this program, there was considerable support for the core objectives of this program. The three highest ranked items among the nine “impact” items were: “I know my low-risk guidelines” (Average=1.84), “I know more about the harmful consequences of using alcohol, tobacco and other drugs” (Average= 1.72), and “I will avoid using illegal drugs and misusing legal drugs” (Average=1.67). Two of these demonstrate increased knowledge and one represents increased behavioral intent to avoid drugs. Other items close in the top-half were: “I know I can become addicted to alcohol and other drugs” (Average= 1.62) and “I am more clear about what is important to me” (Average= 1.61). Again, these represent increased clarity of values (an attitude) and increased knowledge (about addiction). The item that had the least support was “I am more likely to not use tobacco” (Average=1.40).

There was strong support for the presenters of this program with the highest item representing the “knowledge” of the presenters (Average=1.91), but closely followed by the presenters’ ability to explain the material (Average=1.86) and answer questions (Average= 1.85). Collectively, these represent strong skills among program presenters in communicating with this diverse student group (ages ranged from 12 to 19 years).

In their open-ended comments, the young persons affirmed the importance of knowing their values; making a plan and sticking to it; learning about alcoholism; learning the consequences of alcohol and other drug use; knowing their tolerance levels and triggers; learning low-risk choices; getting to speak your mind; having the knowledge to prepare for the future.

When asked what their best reasons for making low-risk choices, students wrote to keep myself out of trouble; to stay happy and healthy; so I don’t become an alcoholic; because of my family history; so I don’t ruin things for myself; because of my family; for my future; because of sports and school activities; so I can have a good life; so I don’t die; so I don’t have to come to a class like this again; because I will soon have another life to care for and he or she deserves my full attention and responsible child care; and alcohol isn’t worth losing the important things in your life.

In conclusion, the quantitative and qualitative data obtained from the students who participated in this program suggest that the program objectives were met. Student knowledge, pro-social attitudes and behavioral intent to avoid alcohol and other drugs were all increased as a result of this program. The presenters were also praised for their knowledge, their willingness to help and care about the choices that youth make.

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