



Great Lakes (HHS Region 5)

PTTC

Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network

Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

Uncovering What Does NOT Work in Substance Misuse Prevention

Kris Reed, MPH, CPS

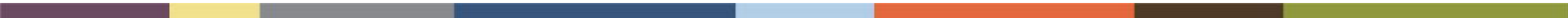
October 14, 2025



Disclaimer

This presentation was prepared for the Great Lakes PTTC under cooperative agreement #1H79SP084318-01 from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). All material appearing in this presentation, except that taken directly from copyrighted sources, is in the public domain and may be reproduced or copied without permission from SAMHSA or the authors. Citation of the source is appreciated. Do not reproduce or distribute this presentation for a fee without specific, written authorization from the Great Lakes PTTC.

The opinions expressed herein are the views of the speakers, and do not reflect the official position of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), or SAMHSA. No official support or endorsement of DHHS, SAMHSA, for the opinions described in this presentation is intended or should be inferred.



What
sparked
your interest
in this
workshop?





Prevention
Focuses
“Upstream”

Our Goal for Prevention:

Put ***effective*** measures in place ***before*** there is a problem.



Continuum of Evidence of Effectiveness



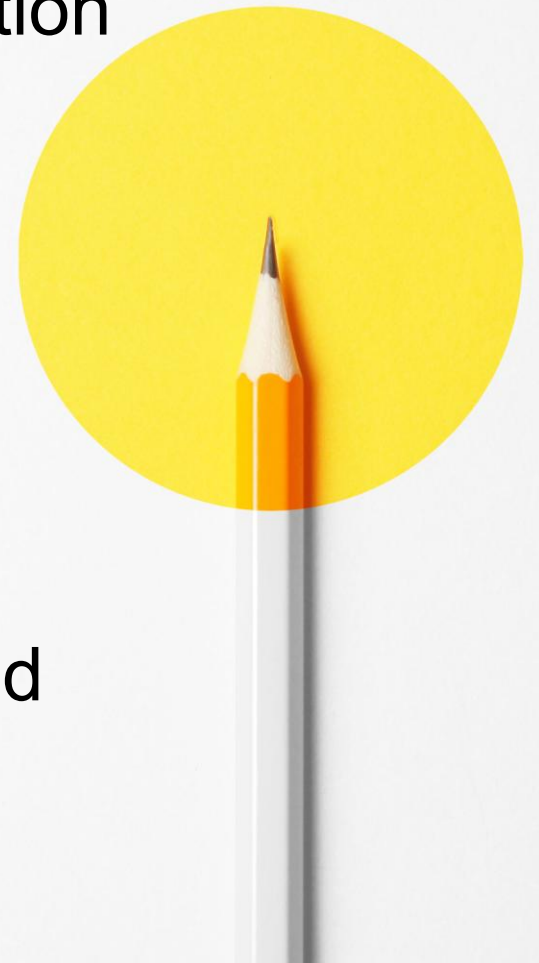
Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) facilitates the data-driven planning necessary for successful implementation

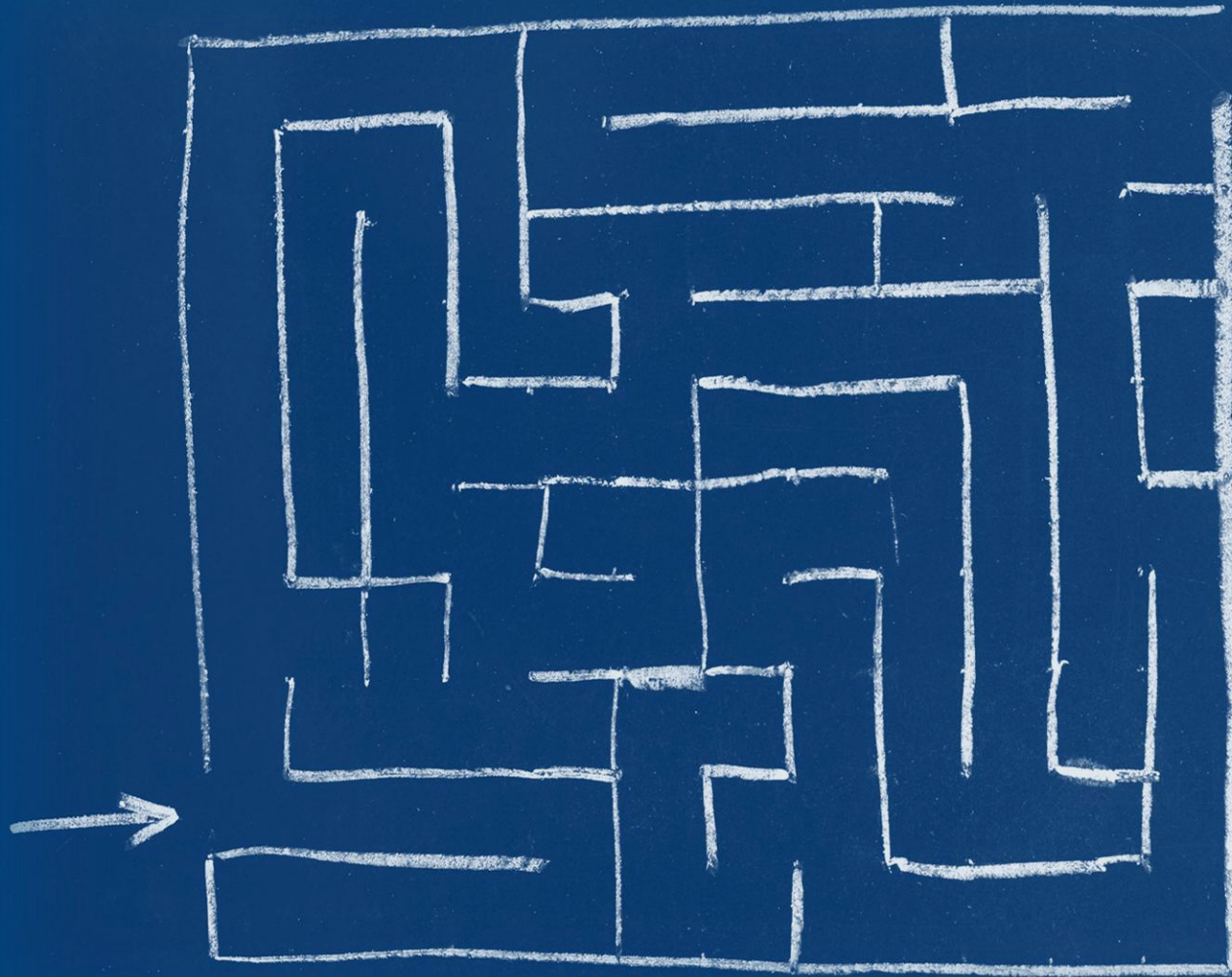


Pop Quiz #1

What is the most important reason that we implement effective, evidence-based substance misuse prevention strategies?

1. To meet funder requirements so we can continue to receive funding
2. To ensure we do no harm
3. To bolster community support of our prevention program by delivering programs that are well-liked
4. None of the above





Effective and
Ineffective
Prevention
Strategies

Mindset for This Portion of the Training

- ✓ No shaming
- ✓ No guilt
- ✓ No judgment



Education Strategies





Ineffective: Assemblies⁸

- Often involves scare tactics and other ineffective appeals
- One-time presentation of information
- Impact is not lasting



Ineffective:

Personal Testimonies^{8,10,11, 20,21,26-28}

- Youth and young adults perceive themselves as “indestructible”
- Understanding of connection between behavior and consequences is still developing in youth
- Often feature extreme stories that can undermine the prevention message and messengers if the message does not match the experience





Ineffective:

Mock Car Crashes^{3,4,5}

- Sensationalizes
- Little to no lasting impact
- Can be traumatizing



Ineffective:

“Drunk” Goggles^{6,7}

- Little to no long-term impact
- Research has shown no evidence of effectiveness
- Often part of one-time events



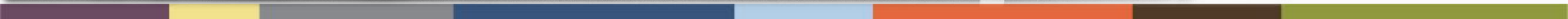
A vertical stack of several books with various colored spines (white, red, brown, blue) against a solid green background. The books are slightly offset, showing their edges.

Effective Education

- Social emotional learning curricula in school
- Parenting programs focused on talking with and supporting youth
- Curricula proven to address risk and protective factors
- Age-appropriate information delivered over time
- Long-term education campaigns with a focused goal and audience



Media Strategies



Ineffective: Fear Arousal/ Scare Tactics

20,21,23,24,25

- Found to be ineffective
- Messages not developmentally appropriate
- Can backfire if experiences are contrary



Ineffective:

Reinforcing Exaggerated Substance Use Norms²⁶⁻²⁸

- Loss of trust in prevention messages
- Can be counter to personal experiences
- Because norms/beliefs guide behavior, perceptions can lead to increased substance use (e.g., “everyone” uses marijuana)



Effective Media



I got this!

I make my own choices. Like not drinking until I'm older. That's the choice for me. And it keeps me from doing something dumb. For more information on waiting to drink, visit IGotThisChicago.org

paact
PREVENTING ALCOHOL ABUSE
IN CHICAGO TEENS

 Ann & Robert H. Lurie
Children's Hospital of Chicago

This campaign is supported by the Strategic Prevention Framework Partnerships for Success Catalogue of Federal Domestic Assistance No. 93.243 funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration through a grant administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services.

- Normative messages regarding peer use and actions
- Positive effects of no use



Pop Quiz #2



For each of the following indicate if research has shown the strategy is effective (thumbs up) or ineffective (thumbs down):

1. Mock car crashes
2. Social and emotional learning curricula
3. School assemblies focused on the dangers of using drugs
4. Media campaigns highlighting a significant increase in youth cannabis use
5. Age-appropriate curricula focused on reducing risk factors and increasing protective factors

Neighbor Chat: Reaction Break



Share a comment, question, doubt, excitement, and/or aha regarding what you have heard so far in this workshop.

Information
Sharing

The image shows a white rectangular piece of paper pinned to a weathered wooden post. The paper has the words 'Information' and 'Sharing' printed in a large, black, sans-serif font, one above the other. The paper is held in place by several small, silver-colored metal staples or pins along its edges. The wooden post is light brown with visible grain and some small holes. In the background, there is a blurred green hedge or foliage. The entire scene is set against a solid green background.



Ineffective: Knowledge-based Interventions⁹⁻¹²

- Drug fact sheets
- Effects of drugs



Ineffective: Myth Busting^{13,14}

- Brings myths to the forefront and makes them more memorable
 - the myths are often in larger font and in bold
- Difficult to remember which was the myth and which was the fact



Effective Information

- Education related to risk and protective factors
- Action-focused information



Environmental Strategies



Ineffective: Punitive and Zero-tolerance Approaches¹⁶⁻¹⁹

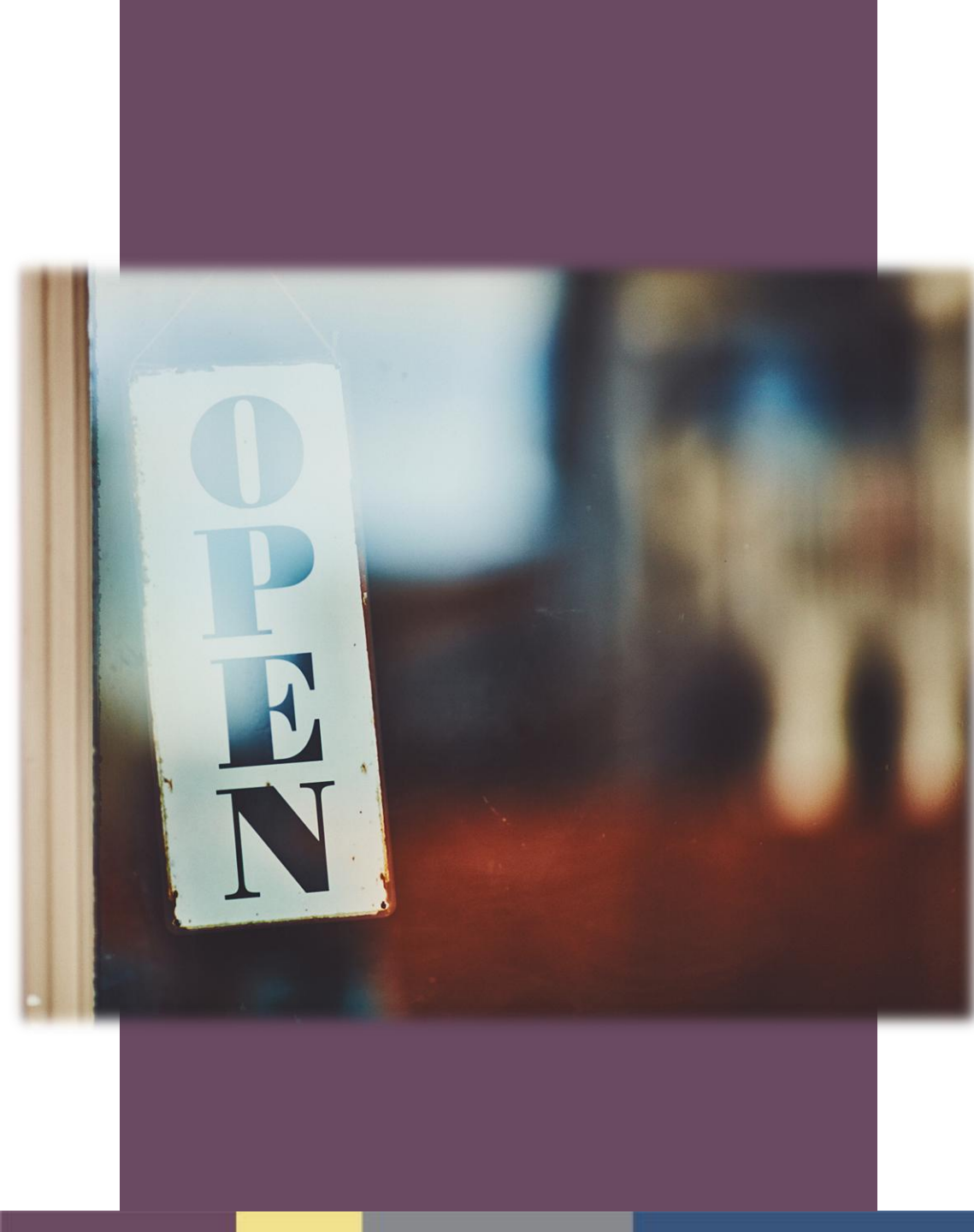
- Many studies showed no effectiveness
- In some studies, found that this approach **increased** the risk of substance misuse
- Suspensions or other punishments can increase the presence of other risk factors for substance misuse
- Suspension and expulsion do not treat the underlying problem of substance misuse
- Doesn't provide positive instructional or rehabilitation opportunities
- Can cause loss of willingness among students to confide in adults



Effective: Environmental Strategies

A few examples include:

- Advertising restrictions
- Media advocacy
- Media literacy



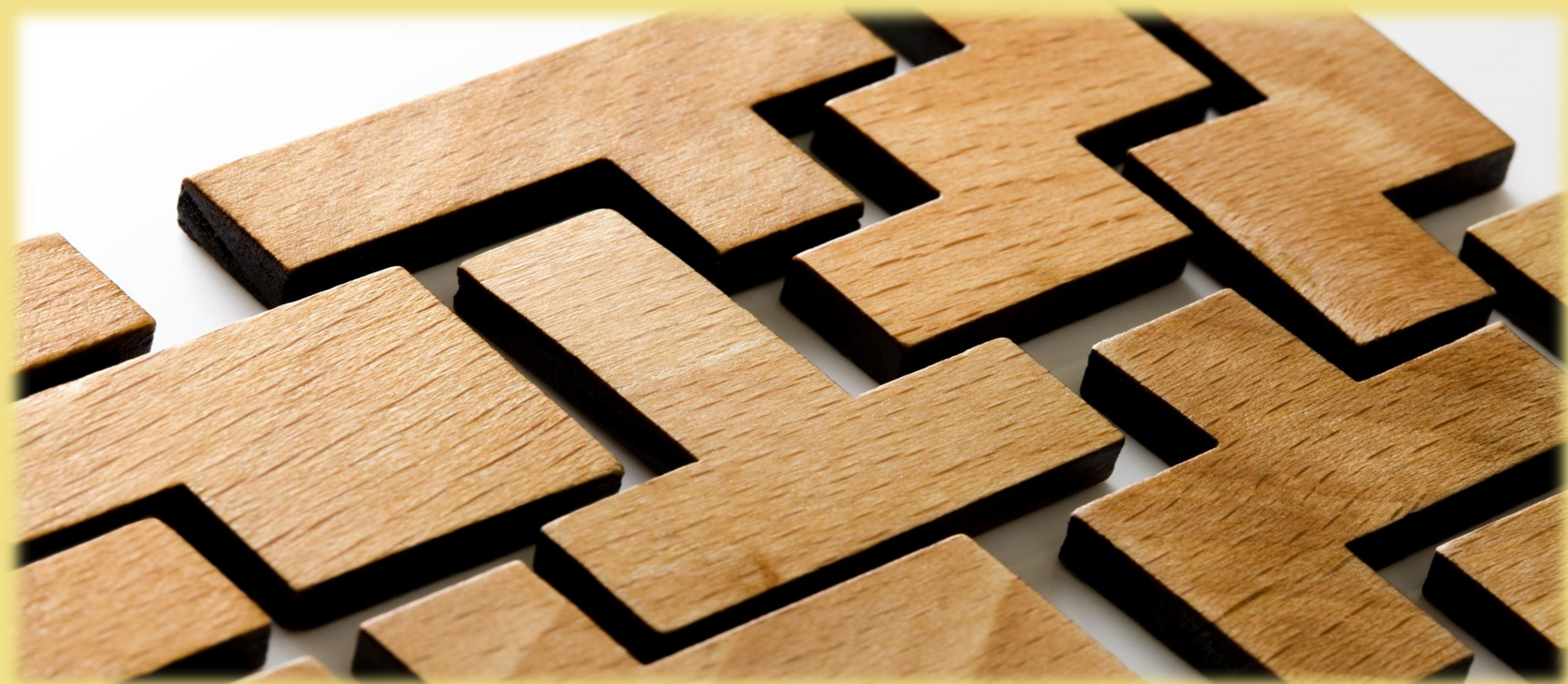
Pop Quiz #3

For each of the following indicate if research has shown the strategy is effective (thumbs up) or ineffective (thumbs down):

- Normative messages regarding peer use
- Restricting advertising of alcohol and tobacco
- Myth busting
- Zero tolerance school policies



Components of Strategies/Programs



Ineffective:

Program Components/Characteristics

- Programs for caregivers/parents only (less effective than those with youth and their caregivers)⁹
- Didactic delivery methods¹¹
- Developmentally inappropriate for population²⁸⁻²⁹
- Group together youth at higher risk³¹



Effective: Program Components/Characteristics

- Building social and personal skills
- Cite immediate consequences
- Communicate positive peer norms and correct misperceptions
- Involve youth with peer-led components
- Use interactive approaches that include skill practice

Source: Washington State's Prevention Tools: What Works, What Doesn't, <https://theathenaforum.org/prevention-101/community-library/best-practices-toolkit-prevention-tools-what-works-what-doesnt>





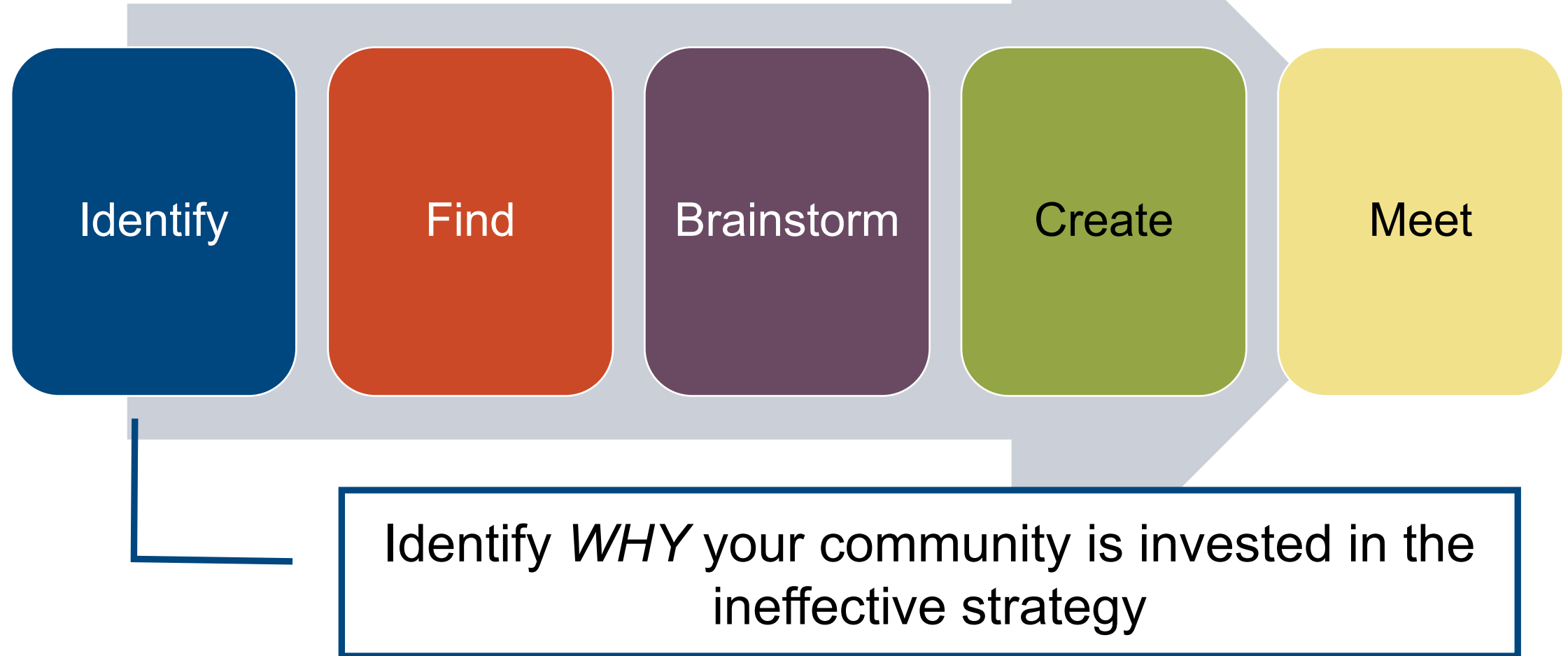
Moving Forward...

Why Do We Continue Using Ineffective Strategies?

- Perception that the interventions are “liked” by the audience
- Partners not open to change
- Partners insist on implementing despite evidence
- Individuals feel the strategy “worked for me”
- Concern regarding capacity and/or cost



Steps to Moving Toward More Effective Strategies – Step 1

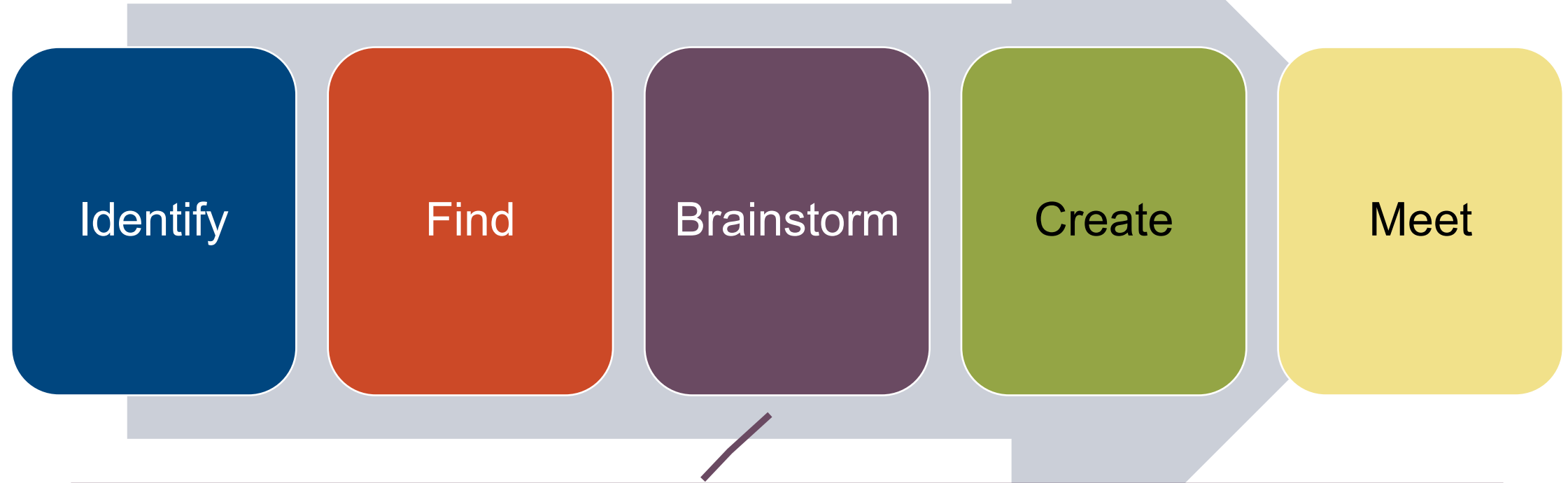


Steps to Moving Toward More Effective Strategies – Step 2



Find evidence-based, effective strategies that can be implemented instead

Steps to Moving Toward More Effective Strategies – Step 3



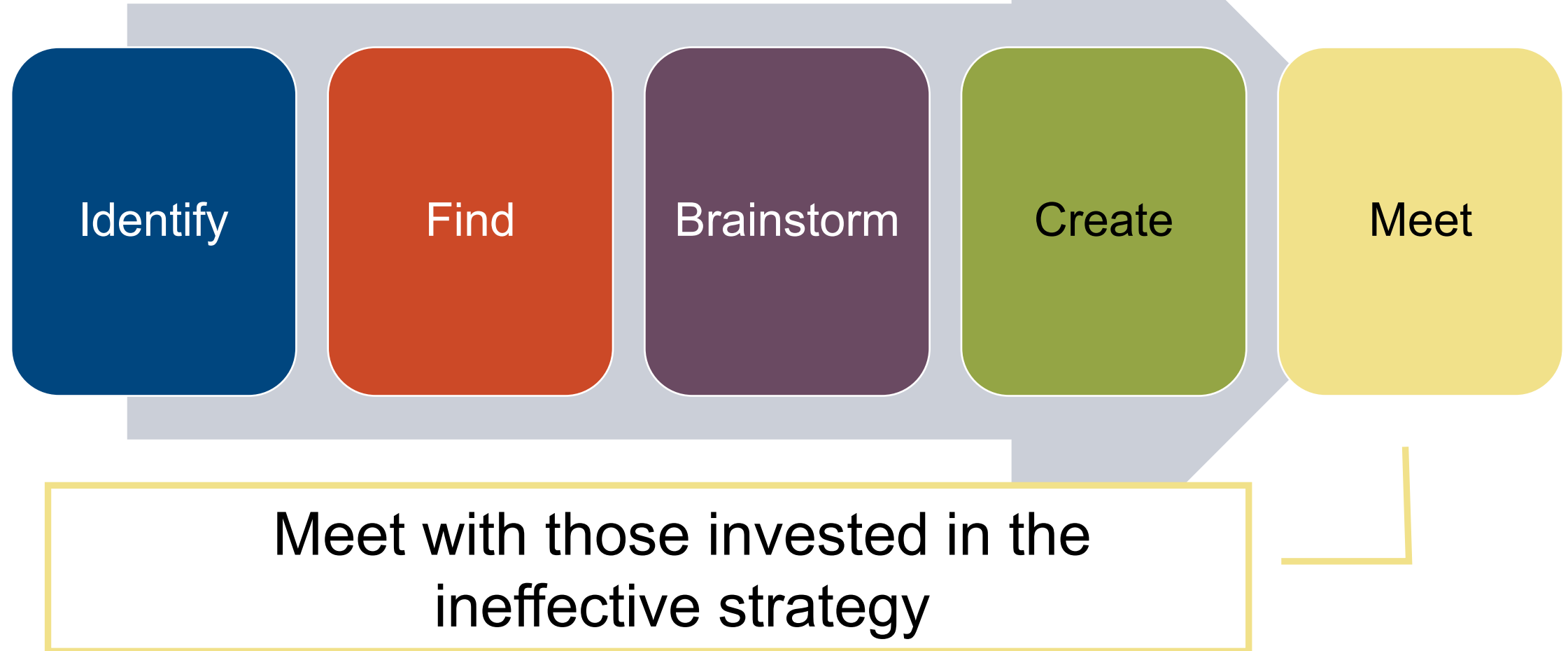
Brainstorm how the change could benefit those invested in the ineffective strategy

Steps to Moving Toward More Effective Strategies – Step 4



Create a message to persuade people to embrace replacing the ineffective strategy

Steps to Moving Toward More Effective Strategies – Step 5

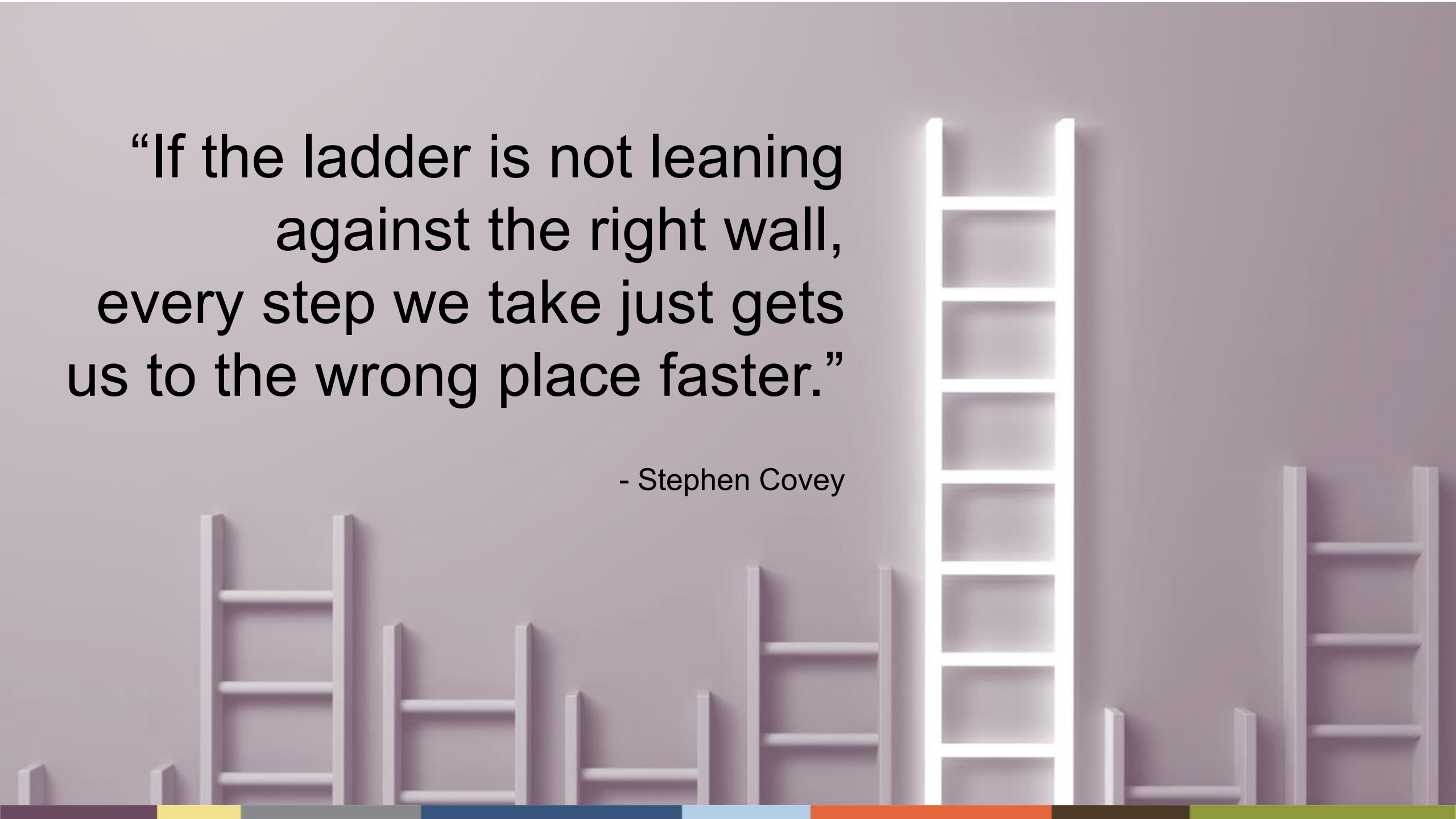


So the bottom
line is...



“If the ladder is not leaning
against the right wall,
every step we take just gets
us to the wrong place faster.”

- Stephen Covey



Ideas for Moving to Action

- **Chat with a colleague** re what you learned
- **Read** [What Research Shows Does NOT Work in Substance Misuse Prevention](https://pttcnetwork.org/products_and_resources/what-research-shows-does-not-work-in-substance-misuse-prevention/)
(https://pttcnetwork.org/products_and_resources/what-research-shows-does-not-work-in-substance-misuse-prevention/)
- **Review the strategies** you are implementing regarding their evidence of effectiveness
- **Engage** your colleagues/coalition members in a discussion on **why** your community invests in ineffective strategies
- **Download** the slide deck from the [learning portal](https://pttcnetwork.org/what-does-not-work-in-prevention/) to deliver this presentation to your colleagues/community (<https://pttcnetwork.org/what-does-not-work-in-prevention/>)
- **Explore** the [online registries of effective prevention strategies](https://pttcnetwork.org/products_and_resources/guide-to-online-registries-for-substance-misuse-prevention-evidence-based-programs-and-practices/)
(https://pttcnetwork.org/products_and_resources/guide-to-online-registries-for-substance-misuse-prevention-evidence-based-programs-and-practices/)
- **Create a plan** to move from an ineffective strategy to an effective one

Upcoming Great Lakes PTTC Trainings

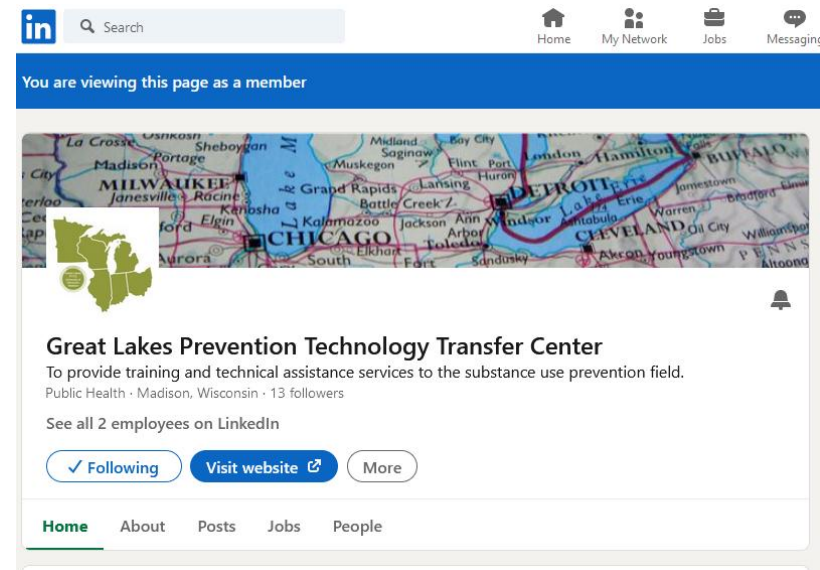
<https://tinyurl.com/5PTTCevents>

- **Foundations of Substance Misuse Prevention Series**
 - Introduction to Substance Misuse Prevention – October 28
 - Protective Factors – November 13
 - Risk Factors – December 2
 - What Does Not Work in Prevention – January 7
 - What Works in Prevention – February 5
 - Logic Models – March 10
- **Leveraging Individual Donor Development for Substance Misuse Prevention**
November 4 from 10-11:30 CT
- **Evidence-based Practice Implementation Support**
November 4, 11, 18 and December 2 and 9 from 1-2:30 CT

Like and Follow Us for the Latest Info!

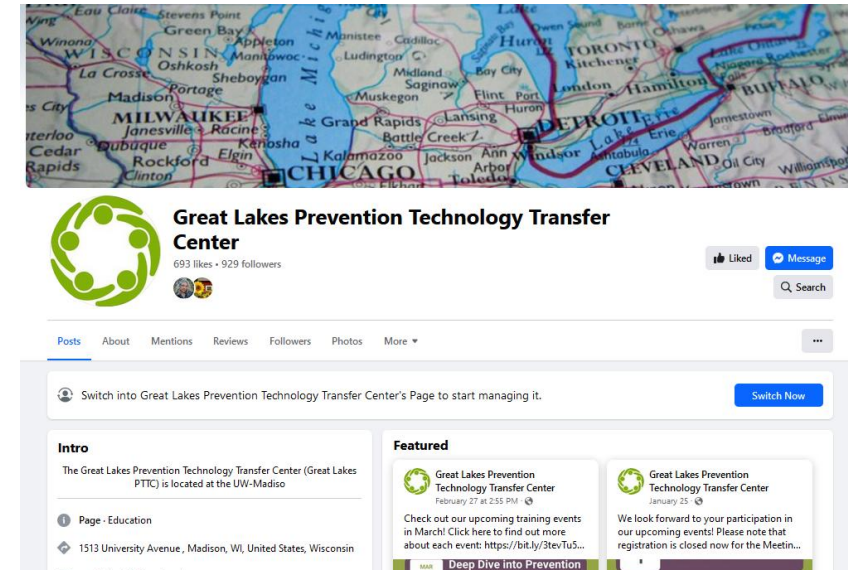
LinkedIn

@glpttc



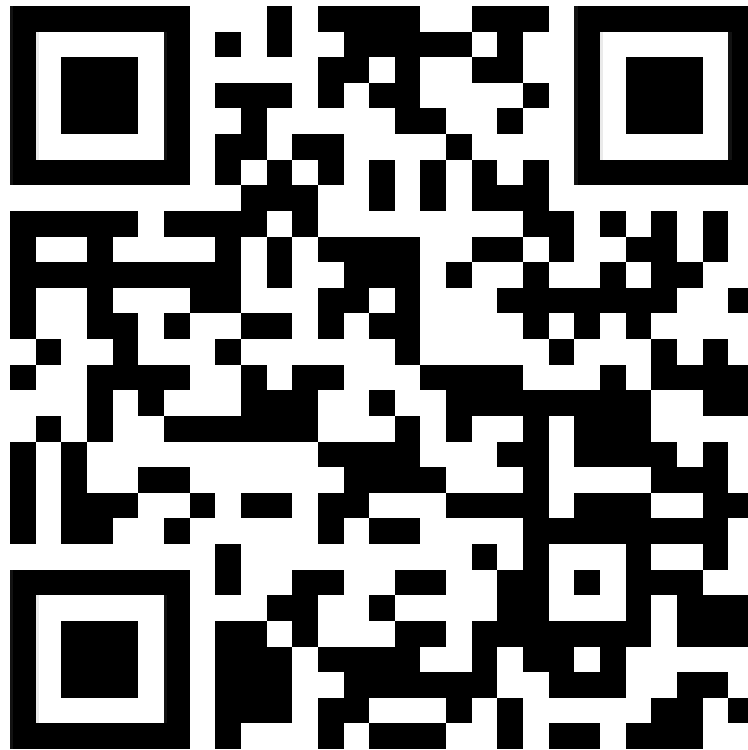
Facebook

@glpttc



Stay in Touch!

Weekly email newsletter: <https://explore.wisc.edu/LP=1208>



References (1)

1. Sparks, A., & Collins, R. (2023, May). Prevention spotlight: What does & does not work in prevention. https://pttcnetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Final_What-Does-Doesnt-Work-in-Prevention-v.3-1.pdf
2. Werch, C. E., & Owen, D. M. (2002). Iatrogenic effects of alcohol and drug prevention programs. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 63(5), 581-590.
3. Elder, R. W., Nichols, J. L., Shults, R. A., Sleet, D. A., Barrios, L. C., Compton, R., & Task Force on Community Preventive Services (2005). Effectiveness of school-based programs for reducing drinking and driving and riding with drinking drivers: A systematic review. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 28(5 Suppl), 288–304. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2005.02.015>
4. Hafner, J. W., Bleess, B. B., Famakinwa, M. F., Wang, H., & Coleman, M. (2019). The effect of a community crash reenactment program on teen alcohol awareness and behavior. *Adolescent Health, Medicine and Therapeutics*, 83-90. <https://doi.org/10.2147/AHMT.S191079>
5. Washington State Department of Social and Health Services. (2017). Prevention tools: What works, what doesn't. <https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/publications/documents/22-1662.pdf>
6. Morales, A. C., & Day, J. (2017). The effects of a fatal vision goggles intervention on middle school aged children's attitudes towards drinking and driving and texting while driving. (Doctoral dissertation, Brenau University).
7. Jewell, J., & Hupp, S. D. (2005). Examining the effects of fatal vision goggles on changing attitudes and behaviors related to drinking and driving. *Journal of Primary Prevention*, 26, 553-565. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-005-0013-9>
8. Tobler, N.S., Roona, M.R., Ochshorn, P., Marshall, D. G., Streke, A. V., & Stackpole, K.M. (2000). School-based adolescent drug prevention programs: 1998 Meta-Analysis. *The Journal of Primary Prevention*, 20, 275–336. <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1021314704811>
9. Allen, M. L., Garcia-Huidobro, D., Porta, C., Curran, D., Patel, R., Miller, J., & Borowsky, I. (2016). Effective parenting interventions to reduce youth substance use: A systematic review. *Pediatrics*, 138(2). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2015-4425>

References (2)

10. Stockings, E., Hall, W. D., Lynskey, M., Morley, K. I., Reavley, N., Strang, J., Patton, G., & Degenhardt, L. (2016). Prevention, early intervention, harm reduction, and treatment of substance use in young people. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 3(3), 280-296. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(16\)00002-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(16)00002-X)
11. Emmers, E., Bekkering, G. E., & Hannes, K. (2015). Prevention of alcohol and drug misuse in adolescents: An overview of systematic reviews. *Nordic Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 32(2), 183-198. <https://doi.org/10.1515/nsad-2015-0019>
12. Fishbein, M., Hall-Jamieson, K., Zimmer, E., Von Haeften, I., & Nabi, R. (2002). Avoiding the boomerang: Testing the relative effectiveness of antidrug public service announcements before a national campaign. *American Journal of Public Health*, 92(2), 238-245. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.92.2.238>
13. Schwarz, N., Newman, E., & Leach, W. (2016). Making the truth stick & the myths fade: Lessons from cognitive psychology. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 2(1), 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/237946151600200110>
14. Newman, E., Dawel, A., Jalbert, M. C., & Schwarz, N. (2020). Seeing is believing: How media mythbusting can actually make false beliefs stronger. <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/media-mythbusting-can-make-false-beliefs-stronger/>
15. Student Well-Being McDonald Center. (n.d.). Myths and current research. University of Notre Dame. <https://mcwell.nd.edu/your-well-being/physical-well-being/drugs/marijuana-or-cannabis-sativa/quitting-marijuana-a-30-day-self-help-guide/myths-and-current-research/>
16. Toumbourou, J. W., Beyers, J. M., Catalano, R. F., Hawkins, J. D., Arthur, M. W., Evans-Whipp, T., ... & Patton, G. C. (2005). Youth alcohol and other drug use in the United States and Australia: a cross-national comparison of three state-wide samples. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 24(6), 515-523.
17. Oesterle, S., Hawkins, J. D., Steketee, M., Jonkman, H., Brown, E. C., Moll, M., & Haggerty, K. P. (2012). A cross-national comparison of risk and protective factors for adolescent drug use and delinquency in the United States and the Netherlands. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 42(4), 337-357.

References (3)

18. Galanti, M. R., Coppo, A., Jonsson, E., Bremberg, S., & Faggiano, F. (2014). Anti-tobacco policy in schools: Upcoming preventive strategy or prevention myth? A review of 31 studies. *Tobacco Control*, 23(4), 295-301.
<https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2012-050846>
19. Kana'iaupuni, S. M., & Gans, M. (2005). How effective is zero tolerance? A brief review. Honolulu: Kamehameha Schools–PASE, 04-05:23. https://www.ksbe.edu/assets/research/collection/05_0232_kanaiaupuni.pdf
20. Prevention First. (2008). Ineffectiveness of fear appeals in youth alcohol, tobacco and other drug (ATOD) prevention. Springfield, IL: Prevention First. <https://www.prevention.org/Resources/348ad797-5165-4695-885f1e958b8f5591/IneffectivenessofFearAppealsinYouthATODPrevention-FINAL.pdf>
21. SAMHSA. (2015, November). Using fear messages and scare tactics in substance abuse prevention efforts. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies.
<https://preventionactionalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/fear-messages-prevention-efforts.pdf>
22. Prevention Solutions. (2017, November). Not your mother's scare tactics: The changing landscape of fear-based messaging research. https://solutions.edc.org/sites/default/files/Not-Your-Mothers-Scare-Tactics-Brief-The-Changing-Landscape-of-Fear-based-Messaging_0.pdf
23. Anderson, D. M. (2010). Does information matter? The effect of the Meth Project on meth use among youths. *Journal of Health Economics*, 29(5), 732-742. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhealeco.2010.06.005>
24. Anderson, D. M., & Elsea, D. (2015). The Meth Project and teen meth use: New estimates from the national and state youth risk behavior surveys. *Health Economics*, 24(12), 1644–1650. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3116>
25. Erceg-Hurn, D. M. (2008). Drugs, money, and graphic ads: A critical review of the Montana Meth Project. *Prevention Science*, 9, 256-263. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-008-0098-5>
26. Sanchez, Z. M., Folgar, M. I., Matias, J. P., Pimentel, M. P., & Burkhart, G. (2023). Framing substance use as “recreational” is neither accurate nor helpful for prevention purposes. *Journal of Prevention*, 44(6), 795-811.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-023-00745-z>

References (4)

27. Amialchuk, A., Ajilore, O., & Egan, K. (2019). The influence of misperceptions about social norms on substance use among school-aged adolescents. *Health Economics*, 28(6), 736-747. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hec.3878>
28. Butler Center for Research. (2015). The social norms approach to student substance abuse prevention. <https://www.hazeldenbettyford.org/research-studies/addiction-research/social-norms>
29. Caputi, T. L., & Thomas McLellan, A. (2017). Truth and D.A.R.E.: Is D.A.R.E.'s new Keepin' it REAL curriculum suitable for American nationwide implementation? *Drugs: Education, Prevention and Policy*, 24(1), 49–57. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09687637.2016.1208731>
30. Onrust, S. A., Otten, R., Lammers, J., & Smit, F. (2016). School-based programmes to reduce and prevent substance use in different age groups: What works for whom? Systematic review and meta-regression analysis. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 44, 45-59. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2015.11.002>
31. Van Ryzin, M. J., & Dishion, T. J. (2014). Adolescent deviant peer clustering as an amplifying mechanism underlying the progression from early substance use to late adolescent dependence. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 55(10), 1153-1161. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12211>
32. Monarque, M., Sabetti, J. & Ferrari, M. (2023). Digital interventions for substance use disorders in young people: Rapid review. *Substance Abuse Treatment, Prevention, and Policy*, 18, 13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13011-023-00518-1>
33. Dumas, D. M., Esp, S., Turrisi, R., Bond, L., & Flay, B. (2020). Efficacy of the eCHECKUP TO GO for high school seniors: sex differences in risk factors, protective behavioral strategies, and alcohol use. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol and Drugs*, 81(2), 135-143.
34. Dumas, D. M., Esp, S., Johnson, J., Trull, R., & Shearer, K. (2017). The eCHECKUP TO GO for High School: Impact on risk factors and protective behavioral strategies for alcohol use. *Addictive Behaviors*, 64, 93-100.
35. Mason, M., Ola, B., Zaharakis, N., & Zhang, J. (2015). Text messaging interventions for adolescent and young adult substance use: A meta-analysis. *Prevention Science*, 16, 181-188. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11121-014-0498-7>
36. Petrosino, A., Turpin-Petrosino, C., & Finckenauer, J. O. (2000). Well-meaning programs can have harmful effects! Lessons from experiments of programs such as Scared Straight. *Crime & Delinquency*, 46(3), 354-379. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128700046003006>