

## **School Districts & Child Welfare Organizations Adopting 'Health & Good Decision Making' Evidence-Based Early Intervention Drop-Out Prevention Series**

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An early intervention drop-out prevention curriculum called the "Health & Good Decision Making Series" has been adopted by a number of school districts and child welfare organizations to reduce school violence and drop-out rates in their communities. The uniqueness of this program is that it concentrates on addressing upper elementary and middle school students with real life everyday situations that they are continually faced with. It has been statistically identified that students who dropout of high school begin the 'dropout process' through poor social decisions and choices that begin in middle school. The interactive software-based curriculum uses the technique of motivational interviewing to teach conflict resolution and help adolescents build character strengths, ethics, citizenship, and to think about consequences before they make decisions. The goal is to help them avoid engaging in unhealthy and anti-social behaviors which jeopardize their opportunity for success. Evidence-based assessments of the program indicate positive behavior change, thinking about consequences before acting, better academic performance, lower drop-out rates, and lower criminal activity rates. These assessments were conducted by the Harvard Educational Consortium and included Boys & Girls Clubs, Boys Towns, Police Athletic Leagues, and select school districts. Organizations using the program have reported an 80% positive assessment and evaluation. Since the program became available in mid-2006, the following organizations have adopted the program:

- \* Real Life Children's Ranch, Florida
- \* Boys Town of New Orleans
- \* YMCAs in Texas, Georgia, and New York
- \* School districts in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Wisconsin, Florida, and Texas

The National Police Athletic/Activities League has made this program the centerpiece of their character education initiative.

The "Health & Good Decision Making" program was developed by Charles Friedman, Ph.D., and Harold Shinitzky, Psy.D., with the sponsorship of Harvard University and the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). Recent research indicates children aged 10 and younger are at most risk of involvement in violence, bullying, gang activity, sexual activity, discrimination and harassment, retail theft, and substance abuse, all of which increase the likelihood of dropping out from school. Attitudes about bullying and response to peer pressure start forming at age seven or eight.

In an interview with OPEN MINDS On-Line News, Dr. Friedman pointed out that "with the decreasing onset age of anti-social behaviors and the internal conflicts of fitting in and being part of a group, every youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is susceptible and vulnerable to poor decision making. The era where a young man or woman could drop out of high school and still find employment which could support a family is gone. With over 30% of our nation's youth dropping out of school, this is no longer a dilemma. It is a catastrophe. The very essence of the American dream is in danger of evaporating."

The software-based curriculum can be presented to a group or to individuals. The evidence-based technique of motivational interviewing uses a "3/2/1" modality. During each session, Phase 3 presents a familiar, realistic, scene with young adult actors to introduce the topic in a non-confrontational, non-judgmental, and non-threatening approach. As the scene reaches a crucial juncture, which is Phase 2, the adolescent viewers are challenged & engaged to identify how they feel about the dilemma presented in the scene and choose what the actors should do next, including doing nothing. Then the scene continues and the outcome related to the choices unfolds. The adult or facilitator initiating the training can review with the adolescent viewer or viewers how their decisions, feelings, and actions determine the outcomes. A separate facilitator survey revealed that teachers and facilitators were able to open a dialogue with students who were normally hesitant to reveal their personality. An added bonus was the fact that many teachers felt uncomfortable or uneasy discussing certain topics which were now presented for them in a very professional and dynamic format. The student assessment also revealed that the portrayal of the possible scenarios was realistic and authentic.

The scripts are based upon research and data provided by the DOJ and assorted educational institutions. The programs were based upon already existing "Evidence-Based & Best Practice" curricula which were not interactive. The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms "GREAT" Anti-Gang Program provided a 17 state focus group where the information was assessed to be culturally diverse, and presented in such a fashion that the students indicated that they were affected in a favorable manner.

The "Health & Good Decision Making" curriculum is available to school districts and youth outreach programs. Some purchasers have subsidized much of the \$2,600 curriculum cost with grants available through the DOJ. Programs address abstinence, attention deficit disorder strategies, bullyproofing an environment, consequences of decisions, gambling with your life, leadership, making good decisions, prevention of dating and sexual violence, nutrition, prevention of discrimination and sexual harassment, prevention of gang involvement, shoplifting, and math: geometry and algebra I and II. Each curriculum has a number of lesson plans (normally 10-12) and each curriculum is accompanied by a facilitator manual.

Dr. Friedman was chosen as the educational consultant for this DOJ and Harvard University initiative; he was recently appointed the educational consultant and curriculum developer for the leadership skills program for the National Police Athletic League. Dr. Friedman's consulting and curriculum development programs are currently being used by The United States Navy, The United States Army, The Department of Justice, The Florida Department of Education, The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, The United States Treasury Department, The "GREAT" Anti-Gang Program, and The Florida Department of Juvenile Justice. Dr. Shinitzky is a renowned research specialist who also is a television analyst for ABC, FOX, and Disney.

For more information the website is [www.MotInt.org](http://www.MotInt.org) and if you have any questions or interests in the curricula & GRANT opportunities available, contact Dr. Friedman at [drfriedman@motint.org](mailto:drfriedman@motint.org). PHONE: 850-320-4956