

*Effective Substance Abuse and
Mental Health Programs
for Every Community*

Reconnecting Youth

Reconnecting Youth (RY) is a school-based prevention program for youth in grades 9 through 12 (14 to 18 years old) at risk for school dropout. These youth also may exhibit multiple behavior problems, such as substance abuse, aggression, depression, or suicide risk behaviors. Reconnecting Youth uses a partnership model involving peers, school personnel, and parents to deliver interventions that address the three central program goals:

- Decreased drug involvement
- Increased school performance
- Decreased emotional distress

Students work toward these goals by participating in a semester-long high school class that involves skills training in the context of a positive peer culture. RY students learn, practice, and apply self-esteem enhancement strategies, decisionmaking skills, personal control strategies, and interpersonal communication techniques.

INTENDED POPULATION

RY is highly effective with high school youth at risk for school dropout—defined as having fewer than the average number of credits earned for their grade level, high absenteeism, a significant drop in grades, or a history of dropping out of school. The program was developed and tested in the greater Seattle area and has been successfully implemented according to design in California, Colorado, Maine, Texas,

Proven Results*

- 18% improvement in grades in all classes
- 7.5% increase in credits earned per semester
- 54% decrease in hard drug use
- 48% decrease in anger and aggression problems
- 32% decline in perceived stress
- 23% increase in self-efficacy

**Compared to students not participating in Reconnecting Youth.*

INTERVENTION

Universal

Selective

Indicated



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
Center for Substance Abuse Prevention
www.samhsa.gov

OUTCOMES

Relative to controls, high-risk youth participating in RY evidenced:

Increased School Performance

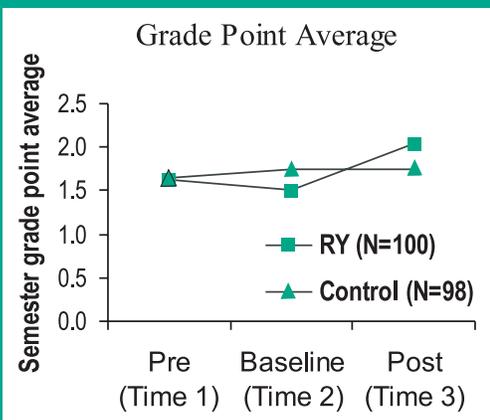
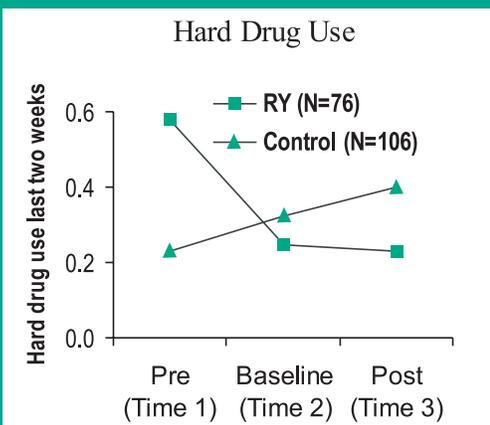
- Increased grades (GPA) in all classes
- Curbed increasing trend in daily class absences
- Increased credits earned per semester
- Decreased high school dropout

Decreased Drug Involvement

- Curbed progression of alcohol and other drug use
- Decreased drug-use control problems
- Decreased hard drug use
- Decreased adverse drug-use consequences

Decreased Emotional Distress

- Decreased suicidal behaviors (threats, thoughts, and attempts)
- Decreased anxiety and perceived stress
- Decreased depression and hopelessness
- Decreased anger control problems and aggression



and Washington. Students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, living in suburban and urban settings, have benefited from the program.

BENEFITS

- Improved grades and school attendance
- Reduced drug involvement
- Decreased emotional distress
- Increased self-esteem, personal control, prosocial peer bonding, and social support

HOW IT WORKS

Four key RY components are integrated into the school environment. They include:

- **RY Class**, a core element, is offered for 50 minutes daily during regular school hours for 1 semester (80 sessions) in a class with a student-teacher ratio of 10 or 12 to 1. After a 10-day orientation to the program, approximately 1 month is spent on each of these topics:
 - Self-esteem
 - Decisionmaking
 - Personal control
 - Interpersonal communication
- **School bonding activities** consisting of social, recreational, school, and weekend activities that are designed to reconnect students to school and health-promoting activities as alternatives to drug involvement, loneliness, and depression.
- **Parental involvement**, required for student participation, is essential for at-home support of the skills students learn in RY class. School contact is maintained through notes and calls from teachers who also enlist parental support for activities and provide progress reports.
- **School Crisis Response** planning provides teachers and school personnel with guidelines for recognizing warning signs of suicidal behaviors and suicide prevention approaches.

IMPLEMENTATION ESSENTIALS

From planning through implementation of the RY curriculum, partnerships with school officials are vital. Typical partners include the RY teacher, RY coordinator, parents, designated district representative, the principal, vice principal, student support services, staff, and administrative support staff—especially attendance and registrar. Regular meetings to ensure readiness, commitment, and financial resources will help set a strong foundation for successful replication.

Personnel

- One full-time RY coordinator per every five to six classes is needed to provide teacher support, encouragement, and consultation. The role typically includes bimonthly meetings as well as weekly classroom observation. The RY coordinator is hired and paid by the RY teacher funding source (e.g., school, independent agency). Ideally, the RY coordinator is a skilled RY teacher with supervisory and training expertise.
- RY teachers are selected, not assigned, using preestablished criteria to ensure the program has teachers who are committed to working with high-risk youth and show special aptitude based on student, other teacher, and administrative recommendations.

RY offers recommended selection criteria to identify potential participants. From this group, students should be invited rather than assigned to RY, and their parents must sign an agreement for them to participate. Students' expressed willingness to work toward program goals is essential.

Reconnecting Youth operates best in an environment with active supports. School administrators should secure links with community groups for involvement such as funding, “adoption” of a school to provide mentoring or in-kind donations, or help with providing drug-free activities.

Room, Equipment, and Supplies

A classroom large enough to accommodate the RY teacher and 10 to 12 students is necessary. Teachers will need a copy of the *Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills* curriculum and will need to prepare student notebooks from handouts contained therein. The curriculum can be obtained from the publisher. Please note that the curriculum cost is not included in training costs. Recreational and school-bonding activities, including transportation, will also need to be budgeted.

Training and Technical Assistance

To ensure best-results implementation fidelity, all RY teachers and coordinators should receive implementation training. Onsite implementation training for potential RY teachers and coordinators is available from RY personnel. Initial implementation training lasts 5 days. Followup implementation consultation of 1 day every 6 months during the first year of implementation plus phone consultation is recommended. At least one yearly followup consultation, to manage implementation challenges and to assess implementation fidelity in subsequent years, is also recommended.

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The development and framework for RY were largely informed by early descriptive work of Dr. Leona Eggert and her colleagues. Early work identified the vulnerabilities among youth at risk for high school dropout, “skippers,” and the co-occurring problem behaviors of school deviance, drug involvement, and depression/suicidal behaviors. Reconnecting Youth was specifically designed to meet the participants’ needs for inclusion and excitement while teaching them how to be “winners,” stay in control, make wise decisions, and evaluate potential consequences of their choices. The program has been funded for testing by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Education in suburban and urban areas of the Pacific Northwest. A two-semester version of the program, with a parent component, is currently being evaluated with funding from NIDA. RY has been adopted by Texas and Maine as an integral part of statewide prevention programming.

EVALUATION DESIGN

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was used to test the efficacy of the RY indicated preventive intervention. Trend analyses served to compare the pattern of change for experimental and control groups across pre- and posttests (5 months) and followup tests (5 to 7 months).

PROGRAM DEVELOPER

Leona Eggert, Ph.D., RN, FAAN

Over the past 15 years, Dr. Leona Eggert has led a team of prevention scientists in the Reconnecting Youth Prevention Research Program. They have designed and tested numerous programs to help high-risk youth increase their school performance, drug-use control, and mood management. Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) is an indicated school-based prevention program targeting potential high school dropouts. The program has received extensive funding from both NIDA and NIMH for testing the RY prevention model. Developers and authors Dr. Eggert and Ms. Liela Nicholas consult nationally and internationally on the implementation and evaluation of the program.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Copies of the curriculum can be obtained from the publisher:

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RECOGNITION

Model Program—Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services

Programs That Work—National Institute on Drug Abuse, National Institutes of Health, U.S.

Department of Health and Human Services

Grade “A” & “A+”—Drug Strategies, Inc.