Preventing and Treating Substance Abuse

Introduction

Substance abuse can cause damage to the health, finances, and relationships of an individual. On a societal level, public health issues and crime connected with substance abuse present broad-scale problems that need to be addressed. The need for substance abuse prevention and treatment strategies is not questioned, but creating and maintaining successful programs is challenging and complicated.

Prevention Strategies

Prevention programs must be tailored to address the issues and risks of the particular community or groups they are attempting to reach (NIDA, 2003). Many prevention programs seek to enhance protective factors of a target group and reduce the negative effects of the risk factors (NIDA, 2003). Family-based prevention programs generally educate parents regarding the dangers of drugs and work to enhance parent involvement and parent-child communication (Ashery, Robertson, & Kumpfer, 1998). The most effective prevention programs are interactive, such as peer discussion groups or parental role-playing (NIDA, 2003). On a societal level, there are also government strategies to prevent drug use that involve legislation and law enforcement programs (Levinthal, 2008).

Youth Substance Abuse Prevention

Although adolescent drug use has declined slightly over the past few years, the rates of young people using drugs is still substantial especially considering the amount the government has spent over the years on prevention campaigns (Levinthal, 2008). Research has allowed prevention programs to move beyond ineffective just say no tactics to identify components of successful programs targeting youth substance abuse. Successful programs often move beyond simple drug education to encourage greater life skills, such as decision-making, stress-reduction, and social skills that will make adolescents less vulnerable to drug-taking behaviors (Levinthal, 2008). Community-based programs may offer programs such as sports activities or boys and girls clubs that foster self-esteem and alleviate boredom (Levinthal, 2008).

Impact of Substance Abuse on Families

A family member’s substance abuse has consequences in health, family dynamics, and future substance abuse for the entire family. In the United States, studies have found that about half of all children live in families where
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alcohol or substance abuse or illicit drug use is an issue (Family Matters, 2005). Drug abuse by a parent increases the likelihood that the family members will be exposed to domestic violence, divorce, financial problems, and crime (Family Matters, 2005). Babies born to mothers who used drugs during pregnancy are more likely to suffer a range of health problems, such as cognitive deficiencies and conduct disorders (Family Matters, 2005). Treatment plans for an individual often need to include ways to address the problems that substance abuse can create for the entire family.

Substance Abuse Treatment

Getting someone who has a substance abuse problem to agree to treatment is usually difficult and often fails (Butcher, Minkeka, & Hooley, 2007). The treatment process is complicated by the ways in which an individual’s history of substance abuse usually involves many interpersonal issues, such as marital, family, financial, and legal problems (Butcher et al., 2007). Furthermore, the ability of the individual to access adequate treatment is often limited by financial resources and the availability of treatment programs within the community. Often the person who needs help, at first, will not admit to the many problems substance abuse is causing or may simply not wish to stop. While appropriate treatment may vary according to the drug being abused, there are some general types of treatment that can address many different kinds of drug abuse (Levinthal, 2008). For example, 12-step programs may be helpful in treating many different types of addictions. A successful treatment program usually involves addressing the substance issues on several fronts, such as medication to deal with withdrawal symptoms, dietary recommendations, and psychosocial therapies (Butcher et al., 2007). It is not unusual for substance abuse to occur in individuals who also are dealing with other types of mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety, or schizophrenia; therefore, many treatment plans must also take into account possible mental health issues (Levinthal, 2008).

References


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