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A Paradox: Protecting Our Children While Educating Them About Drugs and Alcohol Abuse

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(Excerpt from Rutland Town's [The Circle](#) publication)

There has been a constant stream of reports about drug and alcohol abuse in our communities. Here in Rutland, Vermont, a small city of 17,000 residents (2000 census), the issue of drug and alcohol abuse has been magnified by the media. There have been articles about Rutland's problem in the New York Times ("A Call to Arms on a Vermont Heroin Epidemic" Feb. 27, 2014) and Rolling Stone Magazine ("The New Face of Heroin" Apr. 3 2004) and reports on the NBC Nightly News with Brian Williams ("Hooked: America's Heroin Epidemic" Apr. 7, 2004). Drug and alcohol abuse are the impetus for many other social ills including domestic violence, depression, and theft. A tragic consequence of abuse is the effect it has on children.

What can be done to target abuse and protect our children? Police cannot "arrest (their) way out of the problem," according to Rutland Police Chief James Baker addressing a focus group meeting to bring the problems of drug and alcohol abuse to the forefront in our area. He went on to add that fighting drug and alcohol abuse "will require the efforts of other organizations focused on prevention and treatment along with a newly unveiled initiative to collapse the thriving drug market in the city to bring about real change." (Rutland Herald March 28, 2014) As a result, a collaborative, Project Vision, has been formed which is comprised of many agencies including the United Way, law enforcement agencies, social services, and schools.

I am a kindergarten teacher at a K-8 school in the Rutland, Vermont area. At Rutland Town School I am proud of the work we are doing to build competencies in our students and help prevent drug and alcohol abuse. We are in our fifth year of implementing the Lions Quest social and emotional learning program. We are using the K-5 "Skills for Growing" program and the 6-8 "Skills for Adolescence" program. A social emotional learning program, such as Lions Quest, provides common language among students, teachers, and parents to promote positive youth development and prevention "to cultivate capable and healthy young people of strong character." (<http://www.lions-quest.org/mission.php>) At the k-5 level, the program is comprised of five developmentally appropriate units: Building a School Community, Growing as a Group, Making Positive Decisions, Growing Up Drug Free, Celebrating You and Me. For program fidelity, students must discuss and practice lessons from all areas; however, unit 4, Growing Up Drug Free, focuses on drug and alcohol abuse prevention. The unit discusses ways to:

- Reduce risk factors that encourage drug use
- Engage the home, school and community in developing assets for young people within a unified school-community initiative
- Promote the protective factors that discourage drug use
- Establish normative beliefs that drug use is not the norm among young people, and provide a clear "no use" message
- Address internal and external pressures to use drugs and teach peer pressure strategies
- Teach resistance and other social skills, as well as emotional competencies
- Provide accurate, age-appropriate information about the short- and long-term impact of drug use on a young person's health, friendships, interests and future goals
- Encourage students to be healthy role models through service-learning projects in the school and community
- Provide evaluation instruments to measure the effectiveness of the program.

At Rutland Town School, we are trying to do our part to protect our students while making them aware of pressures that can negatively affect their health and well being. Spending a few minutes every day discussing and practicing the social and emotional learning lessons in Lions Quest pays off in dividends. Students are given vocabulary and strategies to build their social competencies with regards to responsible decision-making, self awareness, self management, social awareness, and relationship skills. When students and teachers are putting these social competencies in practice, they can get down to achieving at high levels of academic learning.

Here is an example of writing done at the Kindergarten level from the unit "Growing Up Drug Free:"

How Do You Stay Healthy

Brush your teeth.

Go to the doctor for a check up.

Eat healthy foods like carrots and broccoli.

Sleep and rest well.

Drink lots of water.

Exercise!

Spend time with family and friends.

At Rutland Town School, we are always working to help students achieve at high levels of learning and realize the importance of having open lines of communication with families to achieve that goal. We are looking at ways to better communicate the content of the Lions Quest program with families. We have asked parents to contact the school with any questions or

comments about this social and emotional learning curriculum. We are working at doing our part to develop students resist negative pressures and be happy and productive citizens.

For more information about the content of this article see the links below:

<http://www.lions-quest.org/>

<http://www.casel.org/social-and-emotional-learning/core-competencies/>

[http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/us/a-call-to-arms-on-a-vermont-heroin-epidemic.html?
_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/28/us/a-call-to-arms-on-a-vermont-heroin-epidemic.html?_r=0)

[http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/3/12/
new-england-townrippedapartbyheroin.html](http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2014/3/12/new-england-townrippedapartbyheroin.html)

<http://www.nbcnews.com/video/nightly-news/54892357#54892357>

<http://www.rollingstone.com/culture/news/the-new-face-of-heroin-20140403>