

BACK TO SCHOOL! BACK TO CODA PROGRAMS!

It's the start of a new school year; a year that promises many memorable experiences and challenges for students and their teachers.

One of today's biggest challenges faced by teachers, school administrators and parents is that of issues of youth drug abuse. For almost 40 years, CODA has been the helping hand to many school boards and communities to help prevent youth drug abuse. By delivering in-class preventive drug abuse education programs, CODA has positively impacted the lives of thousands of Canadian students, teachers and parents through their effective and efficient programs.

As a new academic year starts, we invite you to book your preventive drug abuse education program sessions as early as possible to assure availability.

This academic year, CODA will be delivering the following programs in Ontario:

Drugs and the Brain (DB): This multi-modular program, which focuses on the biological and physio-social consequences of drug abuse, is targeted at students in grades seven through 12, their parents and teachers. In student sessions, many topics are covered and include up-to-date scientific information about all drugs; social issues such as peer pressure and new responsibilities, how they relate to people and how all of these are affected by drug use. Presentations designed for parents and teachers also include information about human psychological development and dysfunction insofar as these affect, and are affected by, drugs. This is so that they can understand their child/student better and be able to engage them and/or intervene when necessary. Using this insightful, direct and non-judgmental approach, students are made aware of the emotional impact which drug abuse can have on them, their families, their friends and their future. They also learn about the devastating effects which these drugs can have on their brains and bodies. Armed with this knowledge, they will be able to make informed decisions. The drug information provided in the presentation can be customized to meet the needs of the specific school. For example, a school faced with crystal meth abuse challenges may request the Between Life and Death: The Crystal Meth Explosion module, as opposed to the general module.

What If? The What If? Drug Awareness Program has been in operation through CODA since 1997. More than 25,000 children have heard the storytelling approach in their classrooms across Ontario, in the Northwest Territories and in South Carolina. The original stories are narrated using stuffed animal characters for enhancement. Stories vary with age groups, touching on more and more involved issues related to substance abuse. Children in junior and senior kindergarten really enjoy the streetproofing and poison-proofing aspects of the story. As with their older siblings and friends, they repeat the rhymes and songs with enthusiasm. The drug discussions can sometimes be surprising. For example, children in grade two have had in-depth knowledge of drugs such as ecstasy, cocaine, marijuana and speed. Their approach to the discussions detailed the descriptions of the drugs, street names and, in some cases, unsolicited demonstrations of how the drugs are used. One child explained that the flower of the marijuana plant was the best part because it had more of the drug in it. As the recipients' grade levels progress, more time is allotted for the program so that more discussion can be accomplished. Disclosures have ranged from one child in grade two turning to her friend (after asking about marijuana) and exclaiming, 'Uh oh, mom isn't gonna like it when she hears this!' to one child plaintively asking what would happen to her when her mother died from using 'really bad drugs.' Schools ensure that staff are present during the sessions to allow for follow-up and to ensure that disclosures are dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Day cares, cub scout and beaver groups, brownies and sparks groups have also enjoyed the program and,

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judging by the feedback from leaders, gained a great deal of knowledge. Summer camps indicated that children repeated the rhyme in the story and prevented others from picking up needles and other discarded drug paraphernalia.

Youth Advisory Council (YAC): CODA's newest initiative is the Youth Advisory Council (YAC). Composed of regional youth representatives, the YAC will act as an advisory body to CODA staff, and as CODA youth representatives in their respective administrative regions. As Ontario is composed of 16 administrative regions, the Youth Advisory Council will be composed of 16 youth advisors, one per administrative region. The YAC will serve as an advisory body that will assess and evaluate the relevance of CODA programming to Canadian youth, improving CODA's strategies and methodology.

The YAC will increase CODA's visibility and outreach to Ontario's diverse youth population.

Since CODA programs are geared towards youth, the YAC will be composed of youth representatives from all over Ontario. As drug abuse is a regionally variant social phenomenon, a YAC reflecting that diversity in its composition will be able to provide CODA with further insight into youth needs and concerns, as are specific to their respective regions. By developing the YAC, youth involvement in CODA programs is expected to increase. Creating a YAC will stimulate a sense of youth ownership of CODA programs, thereby increasing CODA's outreach.

Prescription / Over-the-Counter (Rx/OTC) Drug Abuse: The Rx/OTC drug abuse program targets youth, parents, other adults and health professionals (doctors, nurses, pharmacists, paramedics) in addressing the issues surrounding prescription and over-the-counter drug abuse and misuse. The purpose of this program is to highlight the eminent dangers of misused and abused Rx/OTC drugs. Recipients will be educated regarding the biological and psychosocial effects of Rx/OTC abuse on both short- and long-term consequences and implications. This is a comprehensive educational and awareness-raising program aiming to prevent the abuse and misuse of Rx/OTC drugs. The Rx/OTC program incorporates various learning tools and educational resources as educational videos, pamphlets and interactive activities. The professionals module of this program is delivered through a dynamic and engaging session in which CODA's team of drug abuse experts work towards increasing the capacity of health professionals to prevent Rx/OTC drug abuse within their own working environment and community at large. After establishing the working definitions and latest available statistics on the extent of Rx/OTC drug abuse in Canada, participants will explore the most commonly abused Rx/OTC drugs, as well as the various populations who are known abusers. At-risk populations and communities, along with how to work with them, will also be discussed.

Having identified which popular Rx/OTC drugs are subject to abuse and by whom, the workshop curriculum will move on to shed some light on the most popular methods of drug diversion and the reasons behind Rx/OTC drug trafficking.

Building on this comprehensive look into Rx/OTC drug abuse in Canada, participants will explore current Canadian efforts to monitor, minimize and prevent such abuse, highlighting CODA's role and introducing ways to contribute to preventing Rx/OTC drug abuse.

For more information about youth drug abuse prevention, and/or to book program sessions in your school, please contact our Programs Manager at 416-763-1491 ext. 223.