

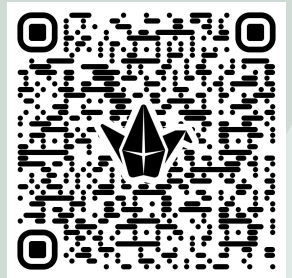


When Suspension Is the Default

Building MTSS for Substance Use in Schools

Alex Kunesh MA APCC PPSC

bit.ly/4iiNeeX



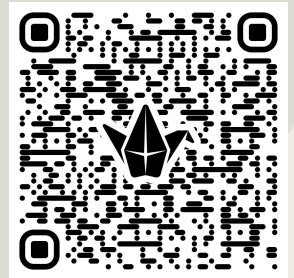


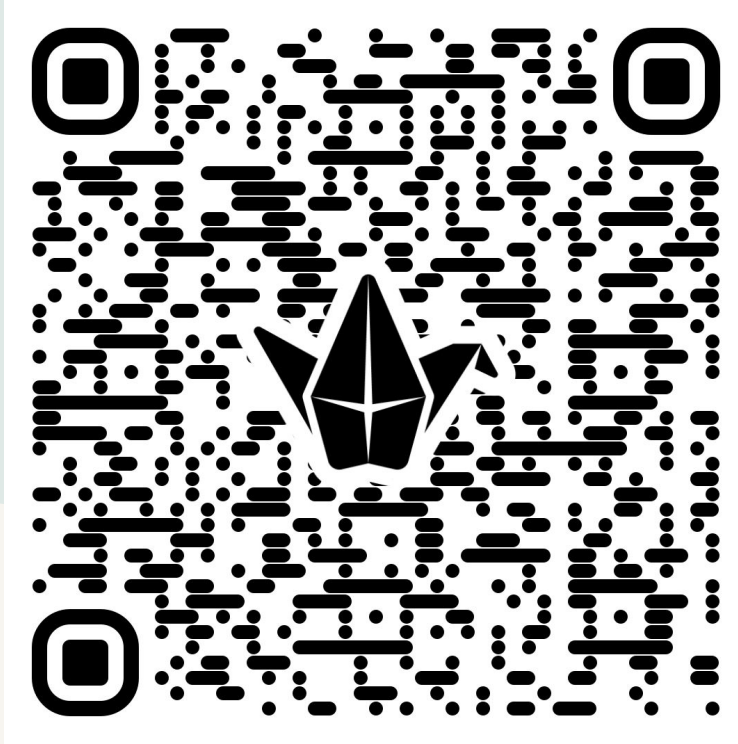
When Suspension Is the Default

Building a DIY MTSS for Substance Use in Schools

- Identify 3 potential components of a tiered response to student substance use
- Identify 3 individual or group intervention strategies to use or adapt at your school
- Demonstrate 2 MI strategies that help students identify their own reasons for change

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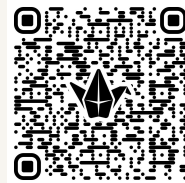




Padlet

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TEACHERS COLLEGE
of SAN JOAQUIN



DISTRICT PROFILE & CONTEXT

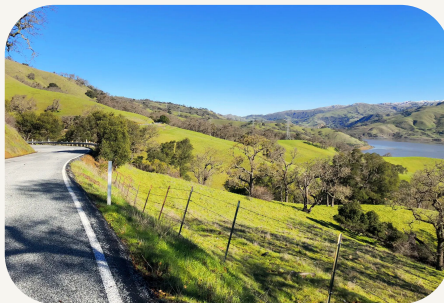
Bret Harte Union High School District

Angels Camp, CA

Rural

Geographic Setting

Limited local transit and external clinical providers make school an integral part of student care.



Wellness Team

- Wellness Coach
- School Counselor
- School Psych
- Mental Health Clinician

Socioeconomically
Disadvantaged

43.1%

Students with
Disabilities

30%

Suspended at least
one day

8.6%



CALAVERAS COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION



Bret Harte Union High School District

Angels Camp, CA • Serving Rural Calaveras County with Dedicated Wellness Systems



Socioeconomically
Disadvantaged

43.1%

Suspended at
least one day

13.1%

Students with
Disabilities

14.1%

Suspended at
least one day

22%

Two or More
Races

7.4%

Suspended at
least one day

9.8%

White

64%

Suspended at
least one day

9%

Long Term
English
Learners

4%

Suspended at
least one day

8.3%

Hispanic

25%

Suspended at
least one day

6.3%

Understanding the Teen Brain & Dopamine Loop

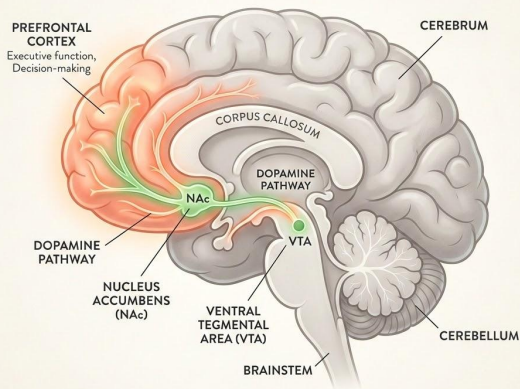
Stanford Medicine REACH Lab • Brain Chemistry & Behavior-Based Prevention

The Reward Pathway

Natural Baselines: Healthy teen brains seek connection and learning, maintaining steady, resilient dopamine baselines.

Chemical Surges: Nicotine and THC alter the dopamine pathway, forcing artificial peaks followed by sudden crashes.

DOPAMINE REWARD PATHWAY

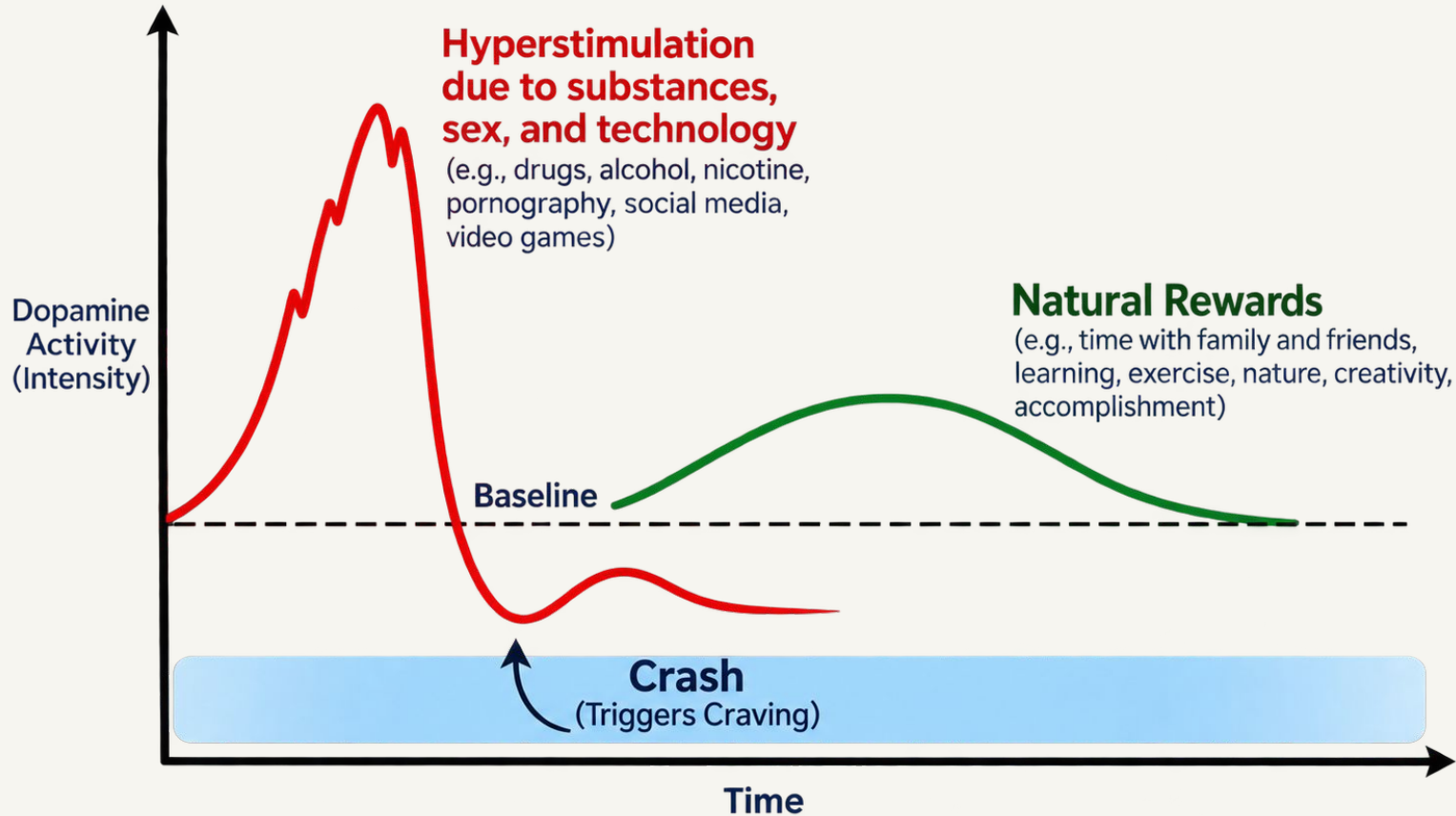


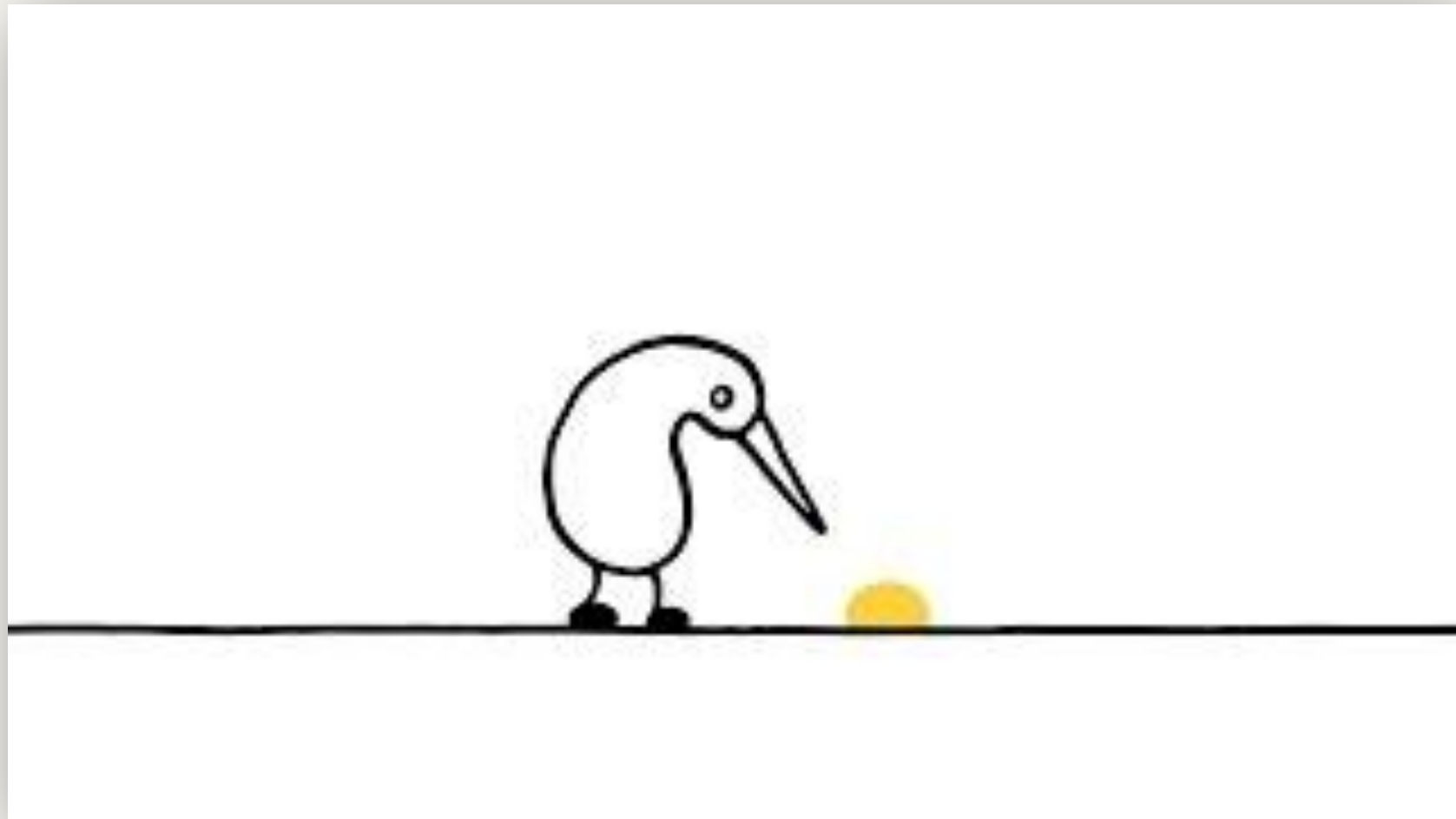
The Crash Effect

Immediate Reward Wins: Repeated use can strengthen reward associations, favoring immediate rewards over long-term goals.

The Loop: Over time, natural rewards feel less satisfying, creating a withdrawal loop of stress, anxiety, and repetitive cravings.

Dopamine and the Teen Brain's Reward System

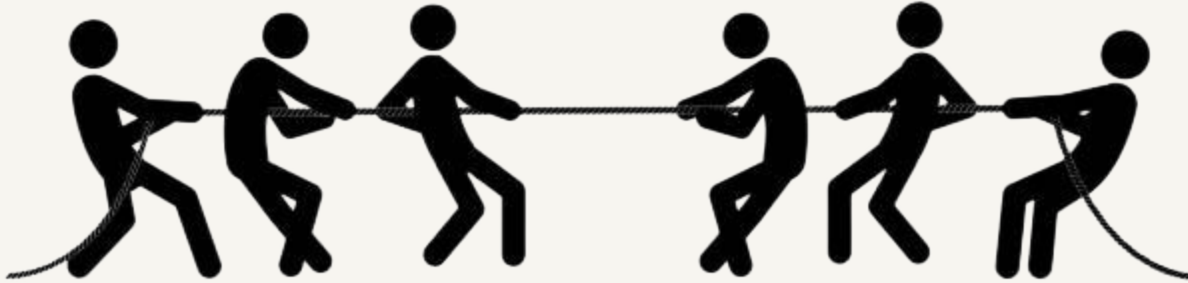




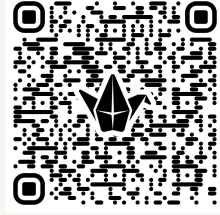
Mapping Current School Systems



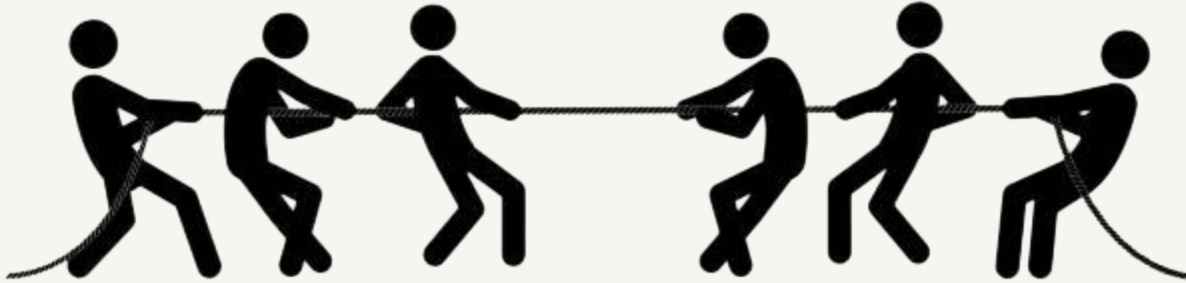
The Tension: between traditional suspension-based responses and alternative or restorative interventions



Mapping Current School Systems



The Tension: between traditional suspension-based responses and alternative or restorative interventions



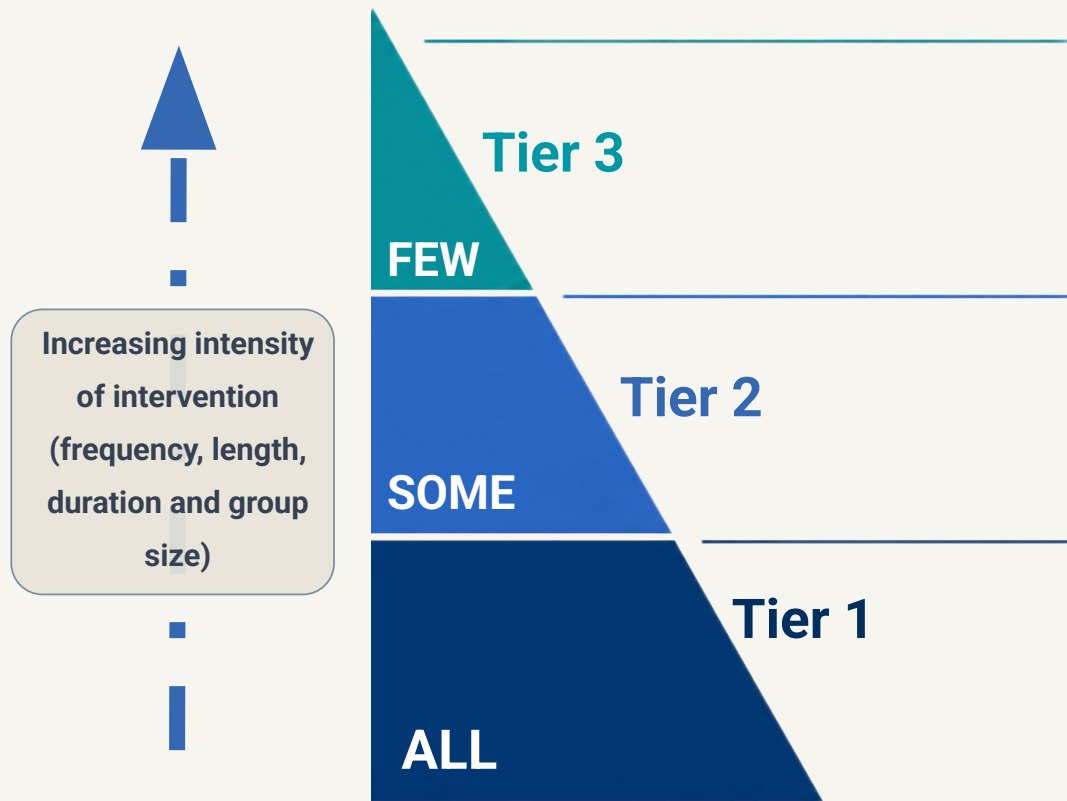
- Relationships are restorative - not another worksheet

- Vulnerability takes tangible connection

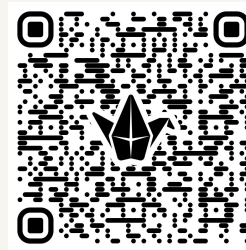
- Restorative should never be forced or mandatory

Mapping Current School Systems

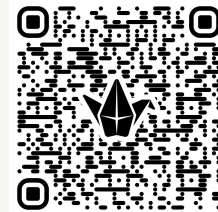
Current Systems: Consider the systems currently in place within your school.



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The MTSS Framework



1

Universal Prevention

Broad, school-wide education and climate-building efforts.

- Safety First curriculum in all 9th grade health classes
- Whole school assembly with Tony Hoffman
- FNL Mentoring & Leadership Programs
- Athletic policies
- School Policy



Stanford
MEDICINE

REACH Lab





2

Targeted Intervention

Structured response, beyond discipline, brief, relational, goal oriented, harm reduction, unconditional positive regard

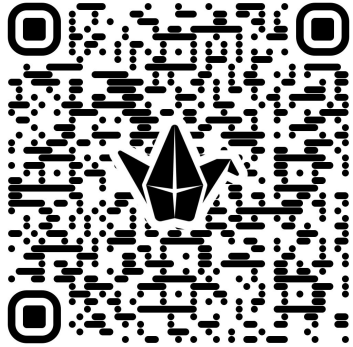
Request for Help

**Suspension
1st and 2nd time**



Mapping Current School Systems

The Pathway: What does the referral, discipline, and support pathway look like for a student caught using substances on your campus?



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When a Student is Caught with a Substance on Campus
WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

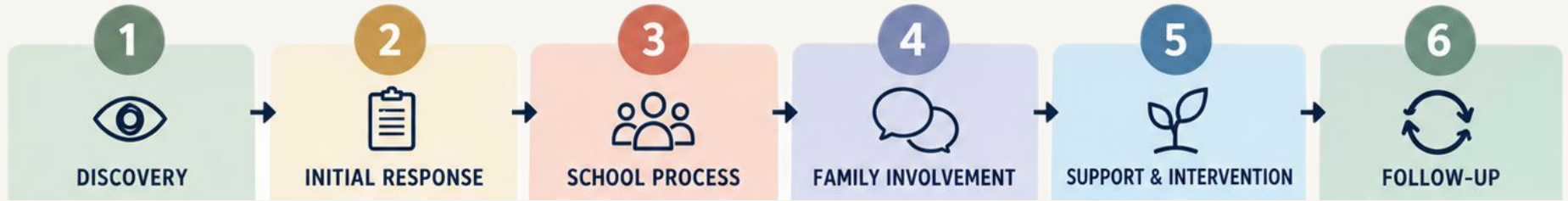
Use this graphic organizer to map your school's current process. What actually happens at each step? Who is involved? What works well? Where are the gaps?

1	2	3	4	5	6
DISCOVERY Student is found with a substance on campus (e.g., possession, use, paraphernalia).	INITIAL RESPONSE Immediate actions (e.g., ensure safety, confiscate substance, notify admin, contact parents).	SCHOOL PROCESS Discipline, documentation, meetings (e.g., administrator, counselor, SART/SARB), consequence or contract.	FAMILY INVOLVEMENT Communication with caregivers and collaboration on next steps.	SUPPORT & INTERVENTION Connection to supports (e.g., counseling, education, assessment, outside resources, re-entry plan).	FOLLOW-UP Check-in, monitoring, progress toward goals, return to school and ongoing supports.
WHAT HAPPENS?	WHAT HAPPENS?	WHAT HAPPENS?	WHAT HAPPENS?	WHAT HAPPENS?	WHAT HAPPENS?
WHO IS INVOLVED?	WHO IS INVOLVED?	WHO IS INVOLVED?	WHO IS INVOLVED?	WHO IS INVOLVED?	WHO IS INVOLVED?
WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?	WHAT WORKS WELL? WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

REFLECTION
What patterns do you notice about your current process? Where are the biggest opportunities for improvement?



Mapping Current School Systems



- Vape detectors
- Higher sensitivity
- Escorted by campus monitors
- Option to request a counselor

- Admin
- Safety assessment
- Wanded
- Option to include a counselor
- Family contact

- Suspension
- Referral to YVAPE and/or counseling
- Social probation
- Restorative adjacent

- Opportunity to create connection across families
- Admin is the initial point of contact

- Assess - what tier are we at?
- CRAAFT?
- Student interest?
- Family interest?
- Insurance?
- Intervention plan

- Case management
- Maintenance

Tier 2 Tools: YVAPE

An evidence-informed, structured intervention for students navigating nicotine and vaping—an alternative to punitive responses.



-  **1** COMPLETE A BRET HARTE BEFORE SURVEY ON A BLUE GOOGLE FORM
-  **2** ATTEND A 20 MINUTE ZOOM OR PHONE CALL WITH A YVAPE COACH
-  **3** WATCH AT LEAST 3 VIDEOS & DISCUSS 5 OF THE QUESTIONS

-  **4** ATTEND A 20 MINUTE ZOOM OR PHONE CALL WITH A YVAPE COACH
-  **5** COMPLETE THE AFTER SURVEY ON THE PINK GOOGLE FORM

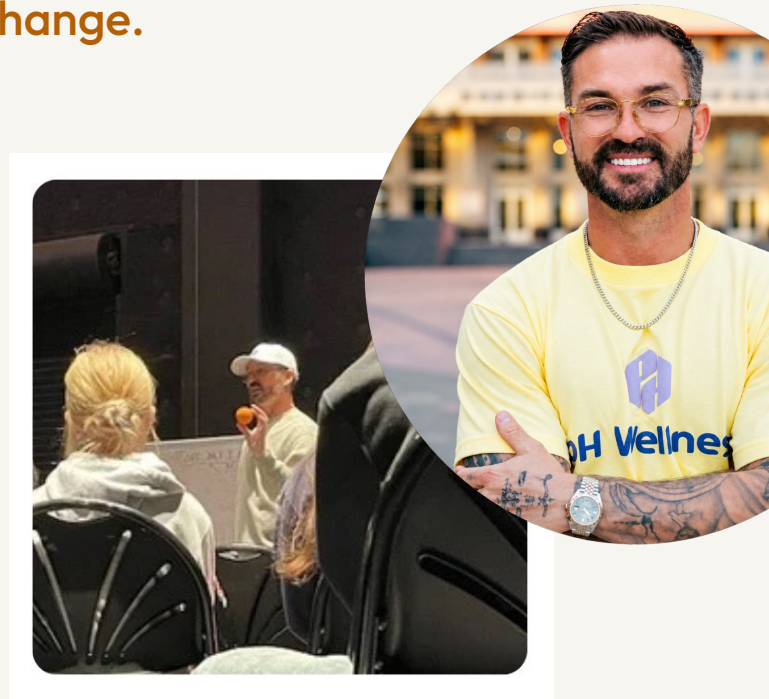
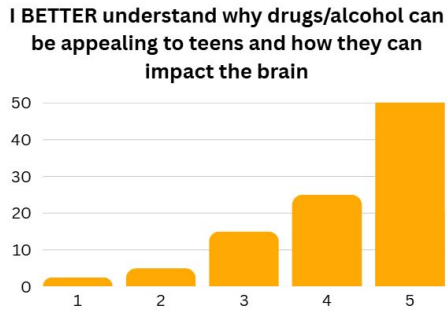
KICK / T **Y** **V A P E**
California

Tier 2 Tools: Tony Hoffman

A lived-experience, relationship-centered approach that uses storytelling and connection to support prevention, reflection, and change.

"His words touched me. I didn't think I needed help or had a reason to even ask for help. Now I'm trying to understand where my urge to constantly be high comes from and what I can do about it."

- 12th grade male student



Tier 2 Tools: Quit Kits

Practical, harm-reduction informed tools are essential for extending intervention into ongoing support. Power in both the “*why*” and the “*how*”



Build Your Own Quit Kit

- Student-centered tool
- Sunflower seeds, fidgets, toothpicks, gum, and mints to support behavioral replacement
- Reusable containers
- Light psychoeducation
- Partner with TUPE and PH





Tier 2 Tools: Punch Cards

Student lead goals, student lead rewards, student lead encounters



Goal-Setting Punch Cards

- Visual and tangible
- Tracks daily progress
- Celebrates small milestones
- Reinforces active engagement
- Highly relational



I will not use at school 3/5 days

I will not buy a new cart this week.

I will wait until 6 pm 5 days this week.

Earn \$5 Starbucks Card

Earn 15 minutes of basketball or frisbee

Earn a free taco bell lunch



Tier 2 Tools: Group Structures

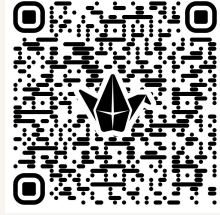
Group Counseling

Semi-structured group formats focusing on confidentiality and non-judgment. Allows students to safely explore triggers, tolerance, and coping mechanisms without forced change.

1. Forming
2. Forming
3. Forming
4. Topic 1: The Why - not to force change, decide what you want to be/or not be your change
5. Topic 2: Tolerance Levels/Usage
6. Session 3: Mistakes Made while under the Influence
- 7-8. Topic 4 and 5: Impact and influence of family
9. Session 6: Emotion Identification & Beliefs
10. Session 7: Coping Mechanisms
11. Session 8: Setting Goals for the future
12. Final Session: Celebration

- Daily individual check in collects data
- Depth of group grows over time
- Prepare for storming
- Reach to peer leaders
- Start small & get moving
- Go with the flow

A Flexibly Structured 3-Session Brief Intervention



1

Building Trust & Mapping the Landscape

Establish rapport and collaboratively map substance use patterns (when, where, triggers) to understand the context without shame.

2

Motivation & Identity Exploration

Use card sorts and systems mapping to connect substance use to personal values, identity, and circles of influence.

3

Planning & Skills Practice

Identify alternatives to use, practice coping skills (like 4-7-8 breathing), and build a collaborative harm-reduction or quit plan.



Intensive Support

Concern for SUD Dx

3

Request for Help | Continued Suspensions | Expulsion Attendance | Sx of Anx & Depression or SUD

- Increased use
- Cravings
- Time spent
- Inability to cut down
- Continued use despite psychological problems
- Giving up activities including school and peers
- Increasing levels of tolerance
- Withdrawal
- Solution focussed shifts to established clinical care
- Underlying cause
- Outreach to resources with potential for referral
- Groups, cessation tools, community and connection



1.5

Maintenance

Substance Use Continuum: Use varies person to person and over time. Reminder that maintenance is an important factor.

2.5



No Current Use

Has not used or not using now



Experimentation or Occasional Use

Trying or infrequent use



Increasing or Repeated Use

More frequent use, curiosity, or regular use in certain settings



Higher-Risk or Problematic Use

Use that is associated with risks or negative consequences (e.g., school, relationships, mental health)



Possible Substance Use Disorder

A pattern of use that may meet clinical criteria (mild, moderate, or severe)



TIER 1

Prevention & Education

Build knowledge, healthy skills, and supportive environments.

TIER 2

Early Intervention & Brief Support

Increase support, explore patterns, reduce risk, and build motivation.

TIER 3

Comprehensive Assessment & Treatment

Individualized intervention, treatment, and ongoing recovery support.

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing shifts responses from shame-based language to strengths-based strategies that support behavior change.

“At the core of MI is love, a careful attuning to another human being because we care about them”

OARS

KEY SKILLS IN MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING



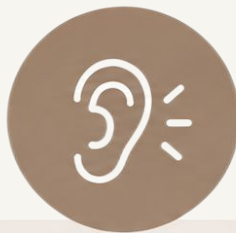
OPEN QUESTIONS

Invite the student to share their thoughts, experiences, and perspective.



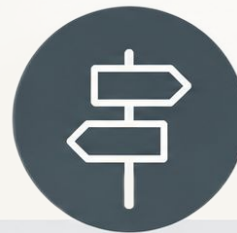
AFFIRMATIONS

Recognize strengths, effort, and positive intentions.



REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Show understanding, explore meaning, and help the student feel heard.



SUMMARIZE

Bring the conversation together, highlight key points, and support next steps.

coaches | admin | faculty | peers | family

Motivational Interviewing: Student-Centered Communication

Motivational interviewing shifts responses from shame-based language to strengths-based strategies that support behavior change.

Key Communication Strategies to Elicit Change

- **Ask, don't tell:** Use open-ended questions to explore ambivalence rather than forcing compliance.
- **Reflect, don't judge:** Validate the student's experiences and normalize their feelings without endorsing the substance use.
- **Affirm Strengths:** Point out the student's competence and abilities.



Motivational Interviewing: Student-Centered Communication

Motivational interviewing shifts responses from shame-based language to strengths-based strategies that support behavior change.



"Walk me through what happened from your point of view."

"What do you like about using?"

"What, if anything, do you not like about it?"

"Where does using fit into your life right now?"

"Have you noticed it affecting anything you care about?"

"What tends to happen before you decide to use?"

"I'm not here to make you to quit, that's impossible. I have no control over what you do."

"What matters most to you about that?"

"How does that fit with who you want to be?"

"On a scale of 1-10, how ready are you to make that change? What might support you to move ½ a knotch?"



Instead of: “Do you know how bad vaping is for you?”



Try: “What do you like about vaping, and what do you like less about it?”



Adapting to Your School



REFLECTION

What patterns do you notice about your current process?
Where are the biggest opportunities for improvement?



Closing & Call to Action

Professional Learning Community

To make these interventions sustainable, we must build a shared language and support staff in carrying this work collectively.

Our goal is to provide prevention, but when met with an incident, we must have the option for maintenance and intervention, not just a consequence.

Engage with your professional learning community to scale these practices.

Identify one concrete next step today

Move your school from reactive responses to a sustainable, student-centered system of care.

Literature

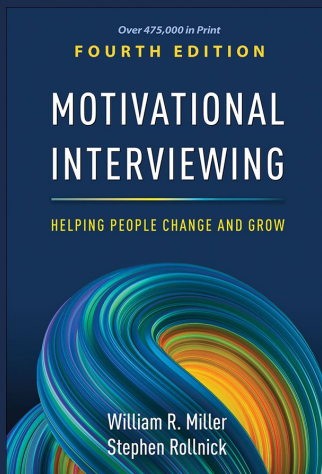
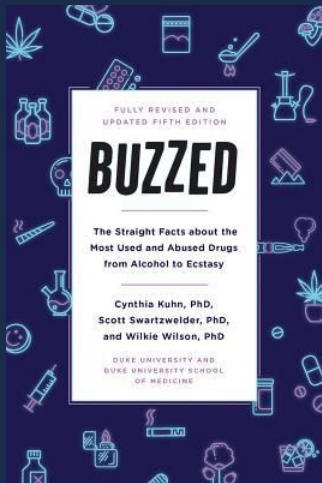
10 to 25

The Science of
Motivating Young People

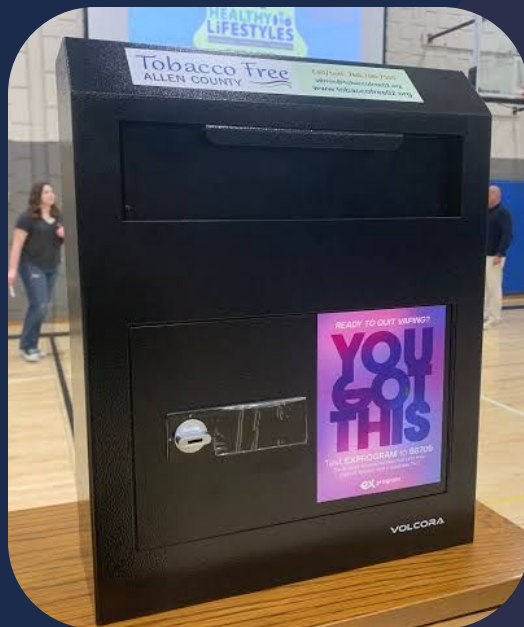


A Groundbreaking Approach
to Leading the Next Generation—
And Making Your Own Life Easier

DAVID YEAGER, PhD



Goals on the horizon



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