Northeast & Caribbean (HHS Region 2)

PTTC Prevention Technology Transfer Center Network
Funded by Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

POP-UP EVENT: SUMMARY NOTES

Keeping Our Prevention Efforts Going in the Face of COVID-19

March 27, 2020

This online event offered substance misuse prevention practitioners working within HHS Region 2 an opportunity to share their responses to current COVID-19 closures and learn from others in the field. While primarily attended by the prevention field in HHS Region2, the session also welcomed others from across the United States.

The peer sharing nature of the event encouraged a rich discussion of innovative ways to continue prevention efforts during COVID-19. Participants shared adaptations to deliver their services virtually and remain engaged with their stakeholders, other community members, and youth. Participants also highlighted the challenges of these remote interactions. The event concluded with participants suggesting topics of future interest to the prevention workforce during this unprecedented time.

The information below is a compilation of participant responses to the central questions addressed in the session. Please note that many of the suggestions made by participants were not strictly evidence based and should not be regarded as such. The overall purpose of this summary is to share the collective experience from the prevention field during the early days of this challenging time.

Ongoing Prevention Activities during COVID-19

- Meeting remotely with usual coalition members, stakeholders, and youth
    - Coalition meetings using online platforms such as Google Hangouts, Teams, Zoom.
    - Daily online group check-in via online platform, text, or email
    - Zoom for staff supervision
    - Youth group meetings on Zoom
    - Virtual meetings with providers working in telehealth

- o   Telephone, Zoom, TikTok, Hangout, Kahoot or other connections with youth
- o   "Business as usual (100% remote). Conducting needs assessment activities, virtual coalition/partnership meetings"

- Using social media
  - o   Updating websites, social media pages (Instagram, Facebook)
  - o   Online media campaigns, such as media campaigns to increase awareness and reduce stigma surrounding addiction, student-created social norms misperception campaigns
  - o   "Students are working on PSA projects at home"
  - o   "We are creating an online pledge for high school students to promise they won't vape"
  - o   Generally focusing on environmental strategies
  - o   "Since DEA take-back was cancelled, we have used social media to promote safe storage and disposal at home, using kitty litter or coffee grounds"

- Providing virtual coalition classes
  - o   Adapting in-person trainings for online
  - o   Using platforms to keep users engaged (e.g., online quizzes [Kahoot], Google Hangout)
  - o   Created virtual lessons of Botvin's *Life Skills Training* program to provide on google classroom to continue grant-funded program
  - o   Provided *Families in Transition* and *Incredible Years* classes through online video conferences

- New activities
  - o   Outreach to families via telephone for wellness checks; "Help get services if families are in need."
  - o   "Working out of the group homes, doing groups and such."
  - o   "Hoping to offer prevention counseling from remote locations (waiting on approval from funder)"
  - o   Working with educators associated with the coalition
    - ▪   "Schools are partners in getting prevention on their on-line classrooms"
    - ▪   Technical support as capable

- Providing prevention education resources for teachers
- "Working with schools to get work packets out to students if they are not using technology to home school their students"
  - "Activity bags for youth prevention"
  - "Book outreach re: prevention messaging"
  - "Coloring pages, youth activities, ATOD information for youth or parents sent home with free lunches"
  - "Provided partners (schools and coalitions) with a list of resources for coping with the crisis and indoor activities for children."
  - "Attempting to use apps that appeal to youth to keep them engaged (e.g., TikTok"
  - "We were planning a community 5k event in order to promote drug-free lifestyles. Our community event is still happening but now it's a virtual run!"

Keeping in Touch with Coalition Members and Key Stakeholders

- Using a variety of technologies to stay in touch with coalition members/stakeholders: email, video conferencing (Zoom), and conference calls
- Video Conferencing tools, from most to least used: Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangout, WebEx, Skype, and Go To Meeting; some participants are using Free Conference Call.com
- Google Suite platforms were commonly used depending on need: Duo, Meetings, and Google Classroom
- Texting-based communication was also identified as a useful: Microsoft Teams, regular texting, Slack
- Canva for collaborative graphic design for social media posts
- Constant Contact for mailing lists
- Coalitions are creative in their use of Facebook (e.g., using Facebook Live for presentations, video conferencing on private FB page, regular posting to the public)

Challenges to Staying Connected

- Reduced access to community members, overall
- Time
- Health/distancing requirements

- Miscommunications
- Shifting priorities: Multiple coalitions recognized that prevention may not be a priority in their communities right now
    - "Triaging level of need"
    - "Prioritizing our efforts"
    - "Putting ourselves in our partner's shoes so we can understand where they're at in dealing with this crisis before we reach out."
    - Front-line health care workers (pharmacists, public health nurses) are occupied with other things
    - Connecting with schools is challenging as their priority has shifted to online learning
    - "Struggling to not over inundate folks with messages as parents and communities are receiving a lot of correspondence from school/teachers/admin as it is"

- Technology (e.g., capacity, cost, norms)
    - Identifying and managing new platforms (e.g., video conference, conference call)
    - Limited capacity (within organization and among partners)
    - Technology comes with tech glitches (fading in and out, not sharing platforms, unreliable connections) and different tech norms (who's talking, leading meeting, etc)
    - Limited capacity to connect with members who have no tech connection
    - Concern about data security and PHI appropriateness of online platforms
    - Cost
    - Appropriateness of using funds for virtual events that were budgeted for in-person events

Innovative Ways to Work Online

- Using Google Classroom (or other online education platforms such as Blackboard)
    - Challenges in integrating this with educational resources students are already receiving from school
    - Integrating other resources: YouTube videos, home-made videos, other google platform
- Using social media

- o Using YouTube to share educational resources and informative videos
- o Posting on TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook
- Frequent check ins via text, email and zoom—for clients or students.
- Collaborating via Google docs
- To address HIPAA concerns/interventions:
  - o Using doxy.me to communicate with patients
  - o Setting aside physical space in their home for HIPAA sensitive information

Challenges to Doing Prevention Work Online

- Target audiences are not always reachable or interested
  - o Youth-specific issues
    - ▪ "Not being allowed to contact students"
    - ▪ "We don't have access to many of our youth participants online"
    - ▪ "Not all students are connected to internet"
    - ▪ "Kids with self-esteem issues not feeling comfortable showing their face or home"
  - o Participants not interested in engaging virtually
  - o Schools are not uniform and have different responses
    - ▪ "Schools are not online yet"
    - ▪ "School district/school is connecting with students differently"
    - ▪ "Schools are prioritizing other subjects therefore we can't come to an agreement on how to virtually meet with them"
    - ▪ "Prevention efforts are not yet a first-tier concern for schools at this time."
- Ensuring confidentiality between member students and/or clients, especially those that are under 18
- Maintaining community place/fidelity
  - o "We don't know what is going to happen to our funding so we're hesitant to spend any money right now."
  - o "Our concern is if we move things or the majority of things to an online base, how will that affect our classroom visits in the future?"
  - o "Getting permission from our funding source to continue to work"

- Coalition members also talked about their own boundaries; trying to set up a work/life balance, potentially with their own children at home

Strategies for Engaging with Youth Remotely

- Engaging with social media
    - Reposting posts from coalition
    - Young people making their own posts
    - "Presenting all of our prevention materials in a relatable manner, such as through Instagram challenges and quizzes"
    - "Engaging youth to take part in video posts during Drug and Alcohol Facts Week."
    - "Engaging youth to participate in social media challenges as that's popular right now"
    - Quizzes, trivia, questions on Instagram

- Using Google classroom to keep students engaged
    - "Interactive PowerPoint lessons that include YouTube videos to help make it more interactive. Giving the kids ideas on how to pass the time while spending so much time at home"

- Involving students in planning and promotion
    - Zoom coalition meetings OR talking by phone
    - "Small groups of leaders first, then using those youth to reach others"
    - "Sending online training opportunities geared to youth, details to engage in a broader state initiative, preparing for Mental Health Awareness Month"

- Checking in with students
    - "I'm trying to balance check-ins for the sake of seeing how they're doing and seeing if they're ready to jump back into prevention now that they've had a bit of time to adjust to being stuck at home."
    - "Group me constant chat—offered ideas how they can use social media to connect (e.g., Zoom for lunch with your normal lunch group friends)"

- "Facilitate [online] groups that were normally run at Program"

- "Not yet, trying to get program materials online first. Have to convert workbooks to an online format"

Challenges to Engaging with Youth Remotely

- Youth aren't as engaged as they were in person
    - "Apathy"
    - **"**We are finding it hard to access the youth we usually access through social media, etc."
    - **"**Families working from home limits the time youth have to reply and be involved at this time—at least in PA"
    - "My youth are very active in our in-person meetings but have always struggled with being responsive to texts and working with one another between meetings. COVID-19 is exacerbating this."

- Limited or no access
    - "I have reached out to individual students via their school email account. Have to be careful of confidentiality so have left it up to them to contact me in return. No success yet!"
    - "Not yet having access to students. Teachers (our partners) feeling overwhelmed. Students/parents/teachers trying to figure out this new distance learning"

- Prevention activities aren't a priority for youth right now
    - "Youth have so much to do already"
    - **"**Students are just trying to cope with new virtual learning. Hard to engage them in anything else right now."
    - "Here in NY LOTS of people are sick. Self -care is critical right now."
    - **"**My students are grieving the cancellation of all of their spring activities, including graduation for the seniors, so 'nothing seems real' or 'nothing matters' right now to some of them."

Interesting Topics for Substance Misuse Prevention during COVID-19

- Workshops on using technology

- o Specific social media focus
- o Plusses and minuses of specific online platforms for workshops, learning or meetings
- o Adapting technology for distance learning
- o Other tools to help navigate technology options
- o Using technology to engage community members
- o How to maintain confidentiality in a virtual environments
- Alcohol and cannabis
- Relationship of COVID-19 to vaping and/or smoking
- Mental health, coping, and support
  - o How to support young people
  - o Technology burnout/balancing with mental health
  - o Promoting coping mechanisms other than using substances
  - o Ways to address mental health, substance misuse and addiction
  - o Relationship between "coping", "free-time" and substance use
- Effects of COVID-19 epidemic on opioid epidemic/availability of treatment
- How to avoid normalizing substance use during this time
- How to transform DEA take-back days
- Innovating prevention ideas