



Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills

Program Description

Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) is a school-based prevention program for youth in grades 9 through 12 (ages 14–18) at risk for potential school dropout. These youth may exhibit multiple behavioral problems, such as substance abuse, aggression, depression, or suicide-risk behaviors. RY uses a partnership model involving peers, parents, and school personnel to deliver interventions that address the three central program goals of Reconnecting Youth:

- Increased school performance
- Decreased drug involvement
- Increased mood management

Students work toward these goals by participating in a comprehensive, sustained, semester-long high school class that integrates small-group work and life-skills training models to effectively enhance the personal and social protective factors of high-risk youth. RY students learn, practice, and apply self-esteem enhancement strategies, decision-making skills, personal control strategies, and interpersonal communication techniques.

Target Audience

High school-aged youth who are at risk of potential high school dropout, in grades 9 through 12 (ages 14–18) in both suburban and urban areas

Special Audiences/Program Adaptations

RY is classified as an indicated prevention program that is intended for high-risk youth and is designed for multicultural groups from diverse racial/ethnic populations. It was adapted in the early 1990's to address youth at suicide-risk as well as those at risk for potential dropout and drug involvement. Efficacy tests showed that RY worked to decrease suicide-risk factors, drug involvement and poor school performance.

RY has been adapted by others for use in alternative high schools and middle schools; however, no rigorous process or outcome evaluations of these efforts have been made available to the developers, indicating that it is unknown if RY is effective in these settings.

Program Components

There are four major components of RY:

- The **RY Class**—A daily (or block scheduled), semester-long class, taken for credit, and covering 5 units: Getting Started, Self-Esteem Enhancement, Decision Making, Personal Control, and Interpersonal Communication. Teachers administer the 90-session curriculum to a class of 10 students. A separate student workbook includes over 250 pages of activities, examples and worksheets.
- The **Social Bonding Component**—Strategies for establishing drug-free activities and friendships and for improving a teenager's bonding to school. School-based as well as community-based activities are used to encourage and support students' bonding to healthy, safe behaviors and lifestyles.

- **Parent Involvement Component**—Connects RY students, parents, and school., Parents are essential for providing support at home for day-to-day life skills learned in RY. Parent support is encouraged through on-going contact between the RY teacher/program staff and the parents.
- **A School System Crisis Response Team**—A detailed plan with team responsibilities and timelines for school-based suicide prevention and post-suicide intervention; this is geared toward identifying and countering high risk behaviors such as suicide and suicidal attempts.

Program Costs

The cost of the RY curriculum is \$300.00 +shipping/handling for each teacher and program staff; the RY student notebook is \$24.95 (of 211.95 for a pack of 10) plus shipping/handling. Additional direct and indirect costs associated with implementing RY include: *Staff Costs*—i.e., .2 FTE for each RY teacher/class, and 1.0 FTE for an RY coordinator; *Training Costs* for the RY teacher, coordinator and administrator (Trainer fee/8 trainees plus travel and per diem costs and training manuals/participants—contact RY office: (425) 861-1177); the School Bonding Activities costs, classroom supplies and materials (variable depending on cost of living index and activities chosen).

Training & Technical Assistance

Program implementation depends heavily on the classroom teacher, coordinator and administration who are required to undergo training to administer the curriculum and provide assistance to participating youth. The classroom teacher is aided by a supportive administration and a full-time RY coordinator who provides in-class support through observation and bi-monthly supervision meetings. The RY classroom teacher must undergo four days of initial training; the RY coordinator takes the same 4-day initial training plus 1-2 days additional training in teacher supervision, supportive motivation, and how to coordinate the implementation of RY components and monitor implementation fidelity. After the initial training, optional training is conducted twice a year (e.g., 1-2 days/six months). Additional training and consultation is available if requested.

In addition to the RY Coordinator and the classroom teacher, there is also a need to involve key personnel in the implementation of the program. They include: administrative staff (e.g., principals, assistant-principals, district personnel), school support personnel (e.g., attendance, student support), and parents. While there are no formal training requirements from these parties, program implementation requires that the parties meet frequently to discuss implementation.

Evaluation Results

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was used to test the efficacy of the RY indicated preventive intervention. Relative to controls, high-risk youth participating in RY demonstrated the following results:

- 18% improvement of grades (Grade-Point Average) in all classes
- 7.5% increase in credits earned per semester
- 54% decrease in hard drug use
- 48% decrease in anger-control and aggression problems
- 32% decline in perceived stress
- 23% increase in self-efficacy (sense of personal control)

Recommended Evaluation Components

PROCESS EVALUATION—To Assess:

1. Is the RY leader delivering the class as designed?
Measures:
 - **Group Building Behaviors Checklist** (weekly)
 - **Life Skills Training Behaviors Checklist** (weekly)
 - **Group and Leader Social Support Checklists** (at 2 wks and monthly at the end of each unit)
2. Is implementation of the curriculum on schedule? What portion of total time was spent on each of the 5 modules? What percent of each module was covered?
Measure: Daily Session History Log (completed daily)

OUTCOME EVALUATION

1. How well did the students do in achieving program goals?
 - a) Measures to assess School Achievement:
 - **School Records**—to assess school achievement (last semester, mid present semester, at exit, at follow-up—i.e., end of next semester)
 - **Student Outcomes Inventory (SOI) or High School Questionnaire (HSQ)** (at pre-intervention at invitation, Wks 3, 9,13, end of RY semester and end of following semester)
 - b) Measures to assess Drug Involvement:
 - **Drug Involvement Scale for Adolescents** in the SOI or HSQ (pre-intervention at invitation, Wks 8,9,13, end of RY semester and end of following semester)
 - c) Measures to assess Mood Management:
 - **SOI—Moods and Experiences** scale score or single items OR
 - **HSQ—Individual Scales** for anger control problems, depression, hopelessness, perceived stress, suicide-risk behaviors and other moods and life experiences (pre-intervention at invitation, Wks 8,9,13, end of RY semester and end of following semester).
2. What were the immediate intervention outcomes (the mediators)?
 - a) Measure of personal competencies (skills) are assessed with the **Personal and Social Skills Inventory (PSSI)**: pre-intervention, at invitation, at Wks 3, 9, 13, end of semester and end of following semester).
 - b) Measures of social support resources are assessed with the **Group Social Support Checklist, Leader Social Support Checklist or HSQ—Individual Scales** for school bonding, support for school from multiple sources, family support, along with other scales measuring the amount and perceived sense of support in the RY High School Questionnaire (measured at same times as the PSSI above).

Agency/Institution Recognition

- Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) Model Program
- Mihalic & Aultman-Bettridge (2004) Favorable Program
- National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) Effective Program
- Title V (OJJDP) Effective Program

Contact Information

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Copies of the RY curriculum and Student Workbook may be obtained from the publisher:
National Educational Service
304 West Kirkwood Avenue, Suite 2
Bloomington, IN 47404-5132
Phone: (800) 733-6786
Fax: (812) 336-7790
Website: www.nesonline.com

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