

Pitching Prevention National Webinar Series

Prevention in a Sentence: How We Describe Our Work

Practitioners working in the field of substance abuse prevention and behavioral health promotion often struggle to put into words what we do, and how we do it. How can we describe the important work we do with stakeholders, family members, and friends in a way they can understand? How can we explain what substance abuse prevention looks like on the ground?

This handout provides some different ways to communicate the meaning of prevention, drawing on traditional definitions and some of the more creative language that participants shared with us during the first *Pitching Prevention* national webinar, delivered July 30, 2015.

Prevention Defined

The CAPT often defines prevention according to the continuum of care model, described in the Institute of Medicine's *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People*:¹

“Delivered prior to the onset of a disorder, [prevention] interventions are intended to prevent or reduce the risk of developing a behavioral health problem, such as underage alcohol use, prescription drug misuse and abuse, and illicit drug use.”

Yet this definition, while clinically appropriate, does not always resonate with our varied audiences. So during the CAPT's first *Pitching Prevention* webinar, we asked participants to tell us how they describe prevention. Their responses were both colorful and inspiring.

According to our webinar participants, prevention is . . .

- . . . providing skills, information, and strategies to help people live healthy lives.
- . . . stopping risky behaviors before they happen.
- . . . identifying the root cause of a problem in order to develop a targeted program/solution.

¹ National Research Council and Institute of Medicine. (2009). *Preventing Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Disorders Among Young People: Progress and Possibilities*. Committee on the Prevention of Mental Disorders and Substance Abuse Among Children, Youth, and Young Adults: Research Advances and Promising Interventions. Mary Ellen O'Connell, Thomas Boat, and Kenneth E. Warner, Editors. Board on Children, Youth, and Families, Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Pitching Prevention National Webinar Series

- . . . creating conditions that support healthy lifestyles.
- . . . removing barriers for a healthier community.
- . . . educating and informing a community about strategies to prevent substance misuse.
- . . . changing a situation so there will be different outcomes.
- . . . empowering people to make healthy choices.
- . . . creating the conditions where the healthy choice is the easy choice.
- . . . helping people understand high risk choices and their outcomes.
- . . . providing youth with the skills they need to make good decisions.
- . . . reducing risk and promoting safety and wellbeing for a community.
- . . . promoting skills to build resiliency.
- . . . doing proactive work upstream.
- . . . thinking about the problem like a dirty duck in water: treatment focuses on the duck; prevention focuses on the water.

To everyone in the field, keep sharing the value of prevention with the world!