

Butterfly Wings

a Youth Initiative Magazine



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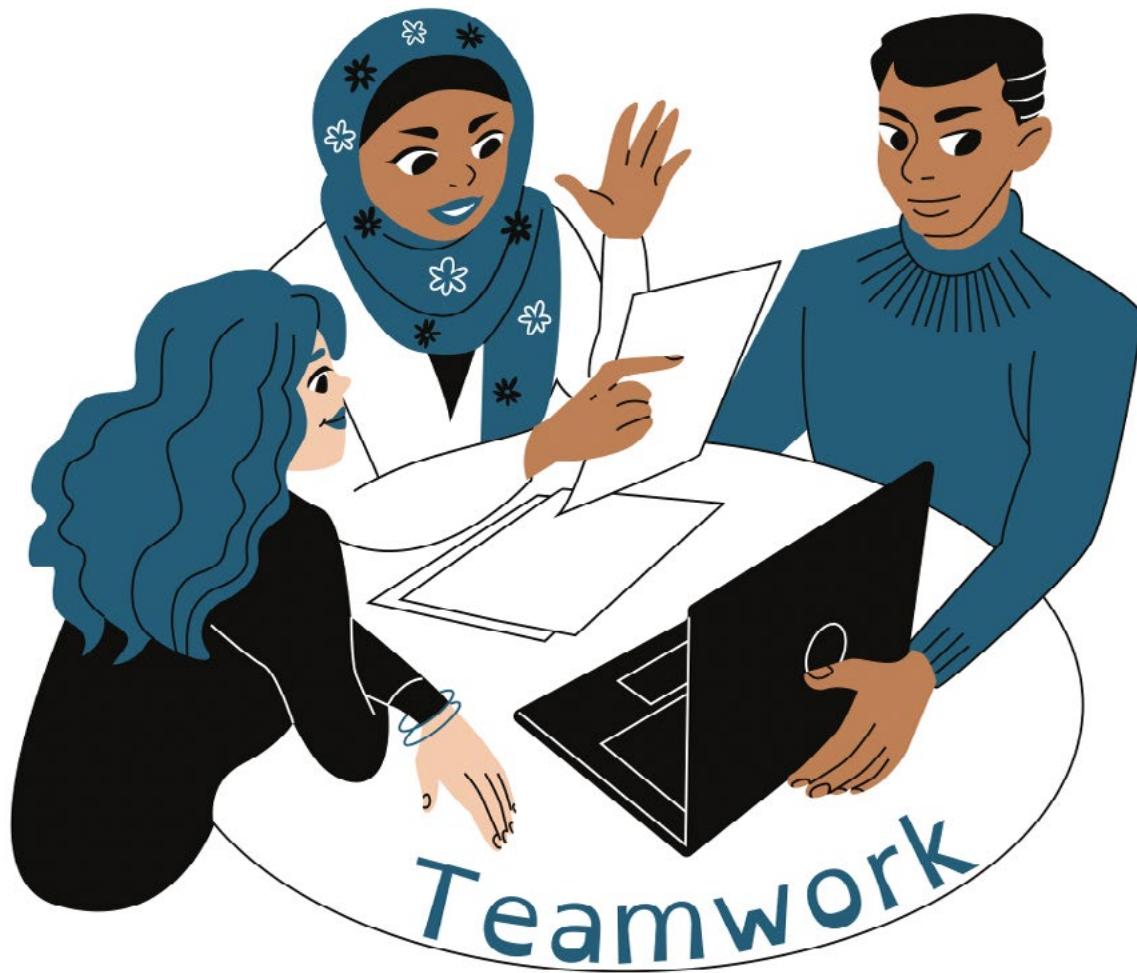
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Unfold Your Wings & *Fly Off into the Future*

WRITTEN BY NUR AISHAH JASMINE MOHD NASIR

Greetings, fellow Butterflies!

From far and wide, we have united once more to encourage everyone through our creative writing to take preventative action now in order to pave the path to a brighter future for us and the generations that follow.

In the 4th edition of the Butterfly Wings, we, the UNODC Youth Forum Alumni, would like to emphasise the significance of:

- Nurturing children's support system and psychosocial developmental needs.
- Fostering an environment that promotes positive growth through compassion and kindness.
- Adopting healthy coping skills that can propel one to greater heights.
- Empowering and enabling youths to steer themselves as well as the next generation toward a promising future.

Nurturing a Caterpillar

Children are like caterpillars ready to hatch out as beautiful butterflies. It is essential for a child's healthy growth and development that they receive optimum nurturing care in order to reach their full potential. The article from this section highlights the benefit of nurturing care in children since it stimulates their physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development as well as act as a protective factor from the harshest negative repercussions of stress, such as feeling the need to use harmful coping mechanisms. Furthermore, the article in this section aims to highlight that when children receive nurturing care during the stage where the brain is most susceptible to social influences like from the time of conception until early childhood, it carries positive consequences on their productivity, health, and social cohesiveness that last a lifetime and even transcend generations. In light of this, we urge families and societies to embrace children and nurture the relationship with children, especially during the caterpillar stage, in order to raise stunning butterflies that can usher in a wave of substantial positive changes for the community.

Creating a Chrysalis

Did you know that not all caterpillars will develop into butterflies? A chrysalis is the middle stage of a butterfly's metamorphosis, between the larvae (caterpillar) and the adult stage (butterfly). The chrysalis is the tough outer covering that caterpillars create as a layer of defence while undergoing the butterfly metamorphosis. A pupa can be any of two distinct types: chrysalis or cocoon. The kind of insect that emerges from each is what distinguishes a cocoon from a chrysalis. A chrysalis develops a butterfly, whereas a cocoon develops a moth. A chrysalis can be viewed as the environment in which the caterpillar grows in to transform into a butterfly. Following this metaphor, the article in this section seeks to draw attention to how crucial it is to create an environment

that fosters kindness and compassion, since these qualities enable children to develop significantly. In fact, building an environment that fosters early childhood development is one of the finest investments a nation can make to give ground to future economic progress, advance peaceful and sustainable communities, and end extreme community disparity. The key contributors to a child's ideal chrysalis are parents, families, and other primary caregivers that can provide their requirements for security, safety, opportunity for early learning, and responsive care. Therefore, we advocate for the establishment of policies, programmes, and services that will facilitate the developmental growth of children and their communities. We implore the community to create an environment that enables children to evolve into magnificent butterflies, realizing their full potential.

Growing a Pair of Wings

By simply adding wings to caterpillars does not create butterflies. Can you imagine? Adding wings to caterpillars would just create awkward and dysfunctional caterpillars. Butterflies are created through transformation. A butterfly receives its wings of transformation through effort, struggle and patience. Following this analogy, the article in this section seeks to illustrate the significance of developing healthy coping mechanisms, as if developing a pair of wings. Everybody experiences emotional stress at any point in their lives. It is common to experience stress, which may negatively impact your mood and make life feel challenging. Examples include losing a job or a loved one, having relationship difficulties, or having financial difficulties. But by developing healthy coping mechanisms, we may be better prepared for any future challenges and have the willpower to keep going. Adopting a healthy coping mechanism is analogous to developing a pair of wings since it will allow us to fly to greater heights in life.



Mend Your Garden and the Butterflies Will Come

A lovely garden filled with blossoms and greenery is an excellent place for butterflies to breed and will even entice other butterflies to the area too. The heart of youth empowerment is the notion of creating an atmosphere where young people are encouraged to accomplish extraordinary things. The articles in this section emphasise the importance of empowering youth in instilling confidence and belief by allowing them to apply and enhance their abilities in challenging situations, enabling them to make decisions, and paying attention to their voices. Youth empowerment is about providing the assistance necessary for the youth to succeed, and this support does not necessarily only mean financial support. In fact, anyone can empower youths in any way, so this obligation falls not only on the government but also on each and every one of us. A compassionate mentor,

whether a parent, caretaker, teacher, or even a peer mentor, can be a valuable ally in empowering young people. Providing encouragement and opportunities can go a long way in enabling a child or adolescent to flourish and explore new avenues to expand their experiences and skills. Young people are capable of tackling anything when they are exposed to inspiring ideas, opportunities, and tools for building their self-confidence. Youth empowerment is an investment that consistently yields a high return and only gets better with time. Youth development can lower poverty and crime rates, and build a higher standard for our future leaders, which in return benefits the nation as a whole. Therefore, mend the garden of the community and welcome the youths, so more butterflies can surely emerge.



Nur Aishah Jasmine Mohd Nasir, Malaysia

I'm currently studying Psychology and Cognitive Neuroscience as a stepping stone for me to pursue my dream career as a Clinical Neuropsychologist. Apart from that, I am an active mental health and anti-addiction advocate who aims to apply my knowledge and skills to build community-oriented solutions. I decided to become part of this leading creative writing team with the shared goal to amplify youth voices in substance prevention concerns. I believe that by simply taking small actions, ultimately, a butterfly phenomenon will emerge, resulting into a tornado of change!

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Saptadipa Mallick, India

Hello everyone! I am Saptadipa, a development professional from India. Apart from working with youth on a multi-stakeholder level for the prevention of substance use, I have been also working for marginalised welfare & children with various mental disabilities. I believe irrespective of the social intersections involved, individuals in a society have a significant role in bringing constructive behavioural change & greater mental well-being. For the same, art as medium handholds me to express these complexities in a better manner. I hope you all love reading this magazine edition as much as I loved illustrating it.

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Prevention That Does Not *Look Like Prevention*

WRITTEN BY ALEXANDRA BRAVO SCHROTH

We misunderstand substance use prevention. We think of it just as a way to protect someone or stop something. When we have that mindset, we tend to focus on avoiding the things that are harmful, saying “Stay away from it” or “Don’t do it”, for instance. Even when the intention is noble, the actions are ineffective and even tend to be counterproductive; just an order with no explanation or resources to follow, it is like trying to blindfold someone in a maze. Therefore, if we avoid something like substances, hoping people will not see or interact with it, the only consequence is that they will become more vulnerable. Avoiding bad things is impossible, we live in an imperfect



“Feeling safe and capable of facing new challenges with the support of people that care about you is also a key part of prevention, that is why learning family skills is essential for every member of the family.”

world and struggles are a part of life. That is why prevention's main focus is not only reducing potential dangers, but also preparing people to be able to cope with stressful things that happen around them. This is why most of the time, prevention does not look like “stopping something bad from happening” (Oxford University Press, 2022).

So then, what does prevention look like? Prevention looks different for everyone: it can look like caring for someone, spending time with others, expressing affection, laughing and playing, showing empathy and compassion, teaching life skills, being respectful and patient.... in short, prevention looks like love.

Prevention wants to promote the well-being of people, families and communities, and love is at its foundation. When we focus on love, we understand why most prevention activities do not seem, at first sight, like prevention activities. Effective prevention strategies focus on helping people build long lasting relationships and develop coping skills so they grow happy and healthy.

When can we do prevention? Prevention is not an activity that is done once at a certain point in life; on the contrary, prevention can be done with any age group and should be on-going. It can start even before a baby is born, with prenatal care for pregnant

women for example. Many countries are promoting this form of prevention because pregnancy is a key stage of development; it helps prevent complications, but also informs women about actions they can take to protect their infant and ensure a good pregnancy. Prenatal care for pregnant women ensures that the baby grows happy and healthy, and supports mothers in a stressful period, showing them they are not alone, giving them a safe space to share their concerns and regulate their emotions, and teaching them how to adapt to the new changes they are going through.

Feeling safe and capable of facing new challenges with the support of people that care about you is also a key part of prevention, that is why learning family skills is essential for every member of the family. We often do not realize the impact something as small as a hug or meaningful conversation has on another person. Therefore, learning to show affection, spend time together, praise, listen, make decisions, among others skills, protects young people because they can learn personal, social, and communication skills from the grown-ups to face the adversities in the world. It also prevents substance use in other generations as it improves communication and relationships among family members which reduces stress, improves mental health, and gives a stronger sense of belonging.

See index for references.



Alexandra Bravo Schroth, Peru

My name is Alexandra and I am a clinical psychologist from Peru. I am interested in neuropsychology and clinical psychotherapy for individuals and family. I am passionate about the development of social prevention initiatives and love working with children, families and older adults. I believe in making science, especially the science of prevention and mental health, understandable for everyone.

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Prevention Starts *at Home*

WRITTEN BY KARTHIKA PILLAI

Family is the primary unit for providing care and support to children. Providing a safe and enabling environment at home leads to formation of good habits which are often projected throughout their adult life. Due to various stressors, oftentimes caregivers are unable to adequately tend to their younger ones effectively. Thus, by providing children with emotional security, satisfaction of basic needs and developmental stimulation among other things, families can prevent risky behaviours and mental health problems, including substance use and delinquency early on.

According to various researchers, parental and familial factors have a major role in the long-term pathways leading to substance use. While it has also been recognized that an adolescent's choice of peers is greatly affected by the relationship they have with their parents so it is coincidentally directly proportional that when adolescents have a positive relationship with their parents, they are more likely to choose peers who are a positive influence in their overall life choices.



It has been perceived that major risk factors for substance use have been due to a lack of structure of family life and a chaotic home environment. Moreover, parent-child relationships and families characterised by indifference, non-responsiveness, emotional insecurity and lack of consistency by parents in caring and comforting children during the early years of development are associated with higher risks of depression, anxiety and relationship problems among children and adults. Childhood depression has been further associated with drug use in early adolescence.

Each and every child lives in different circumstances based on the environmental and social factors they are born into. Some of the challenges could be living in underserved areas where adequate services such as safe drinking water, sanitation, electricity or access to education is low. Society puts an immense amount of pressure on caregivers to be good and rightful towards their children without providing them the necessary tools and skills. Due to unhealthy relationships they might have had with their parents, they pass on the generational trauma to the next person. To break this cycle, it is important to provide necessary assistance wherever possible. Good parents are not born overnight, they have to be made. Some days they will fail and on other days, they will sail through the storms flawlessly. Keeping in view the various needs and family dynamics one might have due to external and internal factors, programmes should be tailor made.

To build on the skills and provide tools to improve positive family relationships, family skill training programmes come into play. When family skills training programmes were compared with other prevention approaches, they were found to be the second most effective approach after in-home family support, and approximately 15 times more effective than programmes that provided youth only with information and self-esteem, and approximately three times more effective than life or social skills training.

The long-term results of family skills training programmes in parents show positive results including sustained improvement in family and child management skills (setting standards, monitoring of behaviour and consistent discipline). In fact, family skills training programmes may be more effective over time compared to youth-only skills training programmes, because family skills training programmes include training for parents as well and may therefore change the family environment in enduring ways. Adding family focused interventions to community-based interventions or school-

based interventions increases the overall effectiveness of a programme, as more risk and protective factors are addressed at the same time.

UNODC has a number of effective evidence based programmes being run for providing skill training to the families in the form of Strong Families, Family UNited and Listen First. 'Strong Families', is a selective family skills programme developed for families living in challenged and humanitarian settings (including the internally displaced, refugees, those in conflict and post conflict situations and in very rural settings) originally designed and piloted in Afghanistan, it has evolved to a global version. The findings reflect that it improved upon the caregivers confidence in family management skills, parenting skills, increased capacity to cope with stress, reduced aggressive and hostile behaviours and hence improved mental health outcomes in children and parents overall. Whereas, Family UNited is a Universal Family Skills Programme for Prevention of Negative Social Outcomes in low and middle Income Countries. Overall this Programme consists of 4 sessions (1 per week) addressing the essential core needs of parenting skills of not more than two hours.

Such programmes teach parents to be responsive by helping them recognise their strengths. Identifying the core problems in the family and community to better protect their children. Building better patterns at home pushes the caregivers to work on core issues of child-rearing, parenting style and family life and put them into practice. Moreover, It is important that parents should also connect with their inner child and heal their own wounds so that it doesn't reflect on their children and hurt them in the process. Portrayal of positive relationships and practising empathy, compassion and being good listeners have a positive response on the overall development of a child.

By appropriately expressing emotions, parents can help their children to recognize their feelings and emotions in turn. They can identify and model behaviour that corresponds to the values and norms they want to transfer to their children. Parents are just like any of us, just older versions with extra responsibility of taking care of a younger version of themselves. By healing ourselves and understanding our shortcomings, we can avoid situations that our younger selves couldn't recover from. Being kind and accepting our flaws can provide a better clarity and perspective to create a warm, safe and secure home for the children who will further develop into responsible adults.

See index for references.



Karthika Pillai, India

I am a senior programme officer for Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan, a National level Drug Demand Reduction Campaign at the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment. I firmly believe that by tapping into the inherent goodness of people we can create a society which is more inclusive and tolerant to differences.

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The Science of Listen First towards influencing *Self-Esteem among Children*

WRITTEN BY DIVAGHAR VOOTHAYAKUMAR

Self-esteem, the perception of one's own personal worth, reflects an individual's self-awareness and sense of value. Our perceptions of ourselves (the ego) are formed through the process of acting, and then reflecting on our actions and how others perceive them. Self-esteem refers to how we feel about ourselves or how much we value ourselves. In fact, self-esteem can be defined as a general assessment of oneself. Most people's perceptions of themselves are shaped in part by their daily experiences.



The characteristics of high self-esteem typically include believing in one's importance and contribution to the world, having confidence in oneself, being comfortable asking for help when needed, and trusting one's own decisions. On the contrary, individuals with low self-esteem often struggle to recognize their own worth, may anticipate humiliation from others, find it difficult to trust people, and may believe that they are not liked by others. These characteristics are generalizations and may not apply universally to every individual with high or low self-esteem. Additionally, self-esteem can be influenced by various factors and may fluctuate over time. Such a person is also likely lonely and isolated from others, and is uninterested in himself or others. Parents' attitudes and behaviours, acceptance of children, clear demands, and respecting their actions in a specific area are all determinant factors that cause children to feel valuable. There are numerous methods for increasing self-esteem. The responsiveness of parents to their children influences the development of self-confidence and self-esteem very early in life. Parental mirroring communicates acceptance, acknowledgement, and admiration throughout early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. This has a significant impact on the development of self-esteem and self-confidence. According to *The Science of Listen First* by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), research confirms that there is a link between parental style and children's behaviour. The science sheets on affection, family activities, active listening, play, patience, physical activity, praise, information, routine, and keeping busy play a significant role in establishing a strong foundation for a child's growth and also contribute to positive self-esteem in the child.

For example, *The Science of Affection* tells us that physical affection has actual health and developmental benefits that last throughout childhood and adulthood. Affection can help children grow smarter, healthier, happier, and more resilient. When babies build relationships with the adults who are accountable for them, they are laying the groundwork for later stages of life having healthy levels of self-esteem. Young children quickly learn what it means to be loved and appreciated when adults are quick to respond to their screams and smiles. Children develop a sense of being loved and accepted by others when they see the individuals they look up to, being kind and accepting themselves. Young children eventually develop a sense of being wanted, valued, and loved as they have the ability to trust that their parents and caregivers will meet their basic needs. It is not possible to measure the level of self-esteem in

children under the age of five or six. This is because prior to this age, the two components of self-esteem, competence and worthiness, function in isolation from one another.

The years between the ages of five and eight are crucial for the development of healthy self-esteem. During the early developmental stages, typically between the ages of 5 to 8, children begin to assess themselves based on various factors such as their physical appearance, social acceptance, academic achievements, athletic and creative abilities, as well as their behavior. These aspects come together to form the child's overall sense of who they are. During this stage of a child's development, their self-esteem starts to form. This happens because children can now understand how their actions affect their abilities (competence) and judge their achievements based on their own sense of value (worthiness). They begin to navigate a range of feelings and attitudes that come with this understanding, which helps shape their overall self-esteem.

As the child gets older, their circle of friends, the things they have done so far, and the expectations others have of them also expand. The youngster will gradually become more self-aware of the activities in which they excel and those in which they struggle. When a person makes an effort to defend and preserve their feeling of self-worth in the face of the pressures, difficulties, and experiences of life, their level of self-esteem will start to have an influence on their behaviour. Our performances are self-evaluated via the lens of our self-esteem, which works as a filter. In this sense, it dictates how we face upcoming responsibilities. Children who receive proper care and attention become more self-assured, experience less anxiety, and have a greater chance of achieving better health, relationships, and educational outcomes.

Everyone has the ability to cultivate healthy levels of self-esteem, but doing so takes time and effort. The development of genuine self-worth takes place throughout the course of a person's entire life, during which most of us will go through a variety of highs and lows. A parent's role is to ensure that their children are aware of their love for them and to equip them with the information and skills they require to have the confidence that they can handle the myriad of obstacles that will inevitably arise throughout their lives.

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Divaghar Voothayakumar, Malaysia

Currently a Graduate Research Assistant at the National University of Malaysia (UKM) and pursuing Masters in Philosophy. I have worked in a Non-Governmental Organisation before focusing on underprivileged/ disabled children, teenagers, refugees and senior citizens.

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The Art of Moulding

WRITTEN BY DHARSHINI G. MURTHY

“A child’s mind is like a blank book” a popular phrase once said by the late American animation film producer, Walt Disney. This phrase says everything about a child’s development. A child would paint its life with what they see and learn during their developmental phase. Walt Disney also emphasised the importance of teaching children that good can always triumph over evil, which is a very true statement; bad behaviour can be avoided or overcome with the appropriate education and guidance. A growing child needs proper guidance and education that does not lead them towards risky behavioural patterns and illegal habits such as substance use at such a young age. During the cognitive development phase, a child is curious about learning everything they see around them, and at this age, care and affection from parents and guardians can play a role in moulding and shaping the child.

It is saddening to see young children of merely 7 years old being exposed to harmful and illegal behaviours such as use of alcohol, cigarettes, different forms of drugs and even vape, which is currently seen as a trend among adolescents and young adults. With substance use, there is not one singular factor or individual that is the root cause for influencing such risky behaviour in children. This is because the factors

contributing to the initiation of substance use are multifactorial. Some common factors can be classified as behavioural, emotional, and environmental factors, which place children at risk for the initiation of substance. However, this may be remediated through prevention and intervention programs that use research-based, comprehensive, culturally relevant, social resistance skills training and normative education through interactive school-based learning settings.

Substance use in children can lead to many adverse health and safety risks for the child, family, and community. The first step in ameliorating the problem of drug use is to clearly observe and understand risk and protective factors that may affect the initiation of substance use in children. It is crucial to keep in mind that the younger a child is, in initiating alcohol and other drug use, the risk of developing serious health consequences and the substance use disorders is higher. Difficult temperament in children may exacerbate childhood troublesome behaviours and lead to insecure attachment with the child’s primary caregiver. In addition, adverse childhood experiences has also been implicated as a significant risk factor for later substance use. Other environmental factors can also range from relationships with other family members, and



exposure to mainstream media such as films, internet, and social media. A huge debate has been going on the exposure of social media and unwanted internet exposure to children as young as 3 years old. However, that is another whole new topic of its own to be discussed separately.

Children grow and develop cognitively based on their surroundings and how the caregivers mould them in every aspect, and this can be leveraged as a protective factor. Protective factors are characteristics within the individual, the family, and the environment that advance one's ability to resist risky behaviours. Protective factors in children include growing up in a nurturing home with open communication with parents, and having positive parental support. Teacher dedication to teaching and low disparities can also be advantageous in moulding children in a desired manner. Positive self-esteem, self-concept, self-control, assertiveness, social competence, and academic achievement can all contribute to building resistance against drug use. In addition, regular religious practices and a sense of morality can also be protective against drug use. Protective factors instil the individual with resiliency, which helps the individual overcome negativities, stressors, and difficult situations throughout life.

Moving on, the second step is to initiate and develop prevention initiatives or programmes that target children. An effective prevention method for children would be school-based programs. Schools could establish a program that helps both parents and children, where the school invites a paediatric health care provider to be a consultant for parents as well as for the school, and the community on topics related to cognitive development and substance use in children. Sports activity can be used as the medium to develop social and emotional skills, and creative educational methods and programs for children can be implemented in the school curriculum. Examples of creative projects could include stage drama with elements on morals, weekly quizzes and other educational activities on substance use prevention, using music and song creation to deliver prevention messaging and awareness in children. Music can ignite all areas of child development and skills for school readiness, including intellectual, social-emotional, motor, language, and overall literacy.

There should also be involvement at community level: local authorities should produce effective community-based programs in partnership with the central government and NGOs that are child-focused and can support caregivers; this

could include having team-bonding games/activities, family day in the neighbourhood to promote healthy and substance-free lifestyle. In addition to forming neighbourhood associations to support the care of children and adolescents in the community, residents and local authorities could collaborate on initiatives to observe daily activities and frequently visited places to facilitate the identification of support needs, and foster partnerships with government agencies to enhance access to support services. Furthermore, these collaborations could contribute to the development of sustainable healthcare practices and promote a well-informed community.

The final step is to implement the developed strategies and programs effectively and evaluating it in order to have continuous implementation and progress. Teachers in schools should make sure there is an interactive approach in teaching and learning, where they can use assertion training or role-playing new skills and behaviour to stimulate the active participation of all students. These activities can also be done in smaller groups to promote active communication between students and the teacher. Schools and parents should make use of available materials that are science and evidence based. A great reference that can be used by caregivers and schools to educate children and themselves are the "Listen First" materials by UNODC, which is an evidence-informed initiative that supports parenting and caregiving for the healthy and safe development of children and youth, and thereby contributing to substance use prevention.

The educational approach is one of the best methods available in promoting substance-free lifestyle to children. Teaching children from small with creative and interactive activities and programs will create a direct and indirect awareness in children as they develop their personalities and intrapersonal skills. Schools and parents should set goals and focus when helping children learn how to identify a problem or risky situations and make decisions based on firmly held values, cope with peer influences, and assert their ideas at young age. Children become what they learn and see. It's our responsibility to create a better environment for children and the upcoming generation by educating ourselves, our family and friends and the community. Let's together mould our children beautifully with proper and accurate education, and help them grow healthy and safe. It is never too late to start educating our children because prevention is always better than cure.

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Dharshini G Murthy from Malaysia

Greetings! I'm Dharshini G Murthy, currently holding Marketing Communication position in a Corporate and Automotive company.

I'm also an active youth that work with communities in making the importance of science of prevention understandable along side with women's right and mental health leading towards a healthy, more developed and well-informed community. Together we can make a difference!

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The Importance of Prevention *in Migrant Youth & Children*

WRITTEN BY LIZETH JIMENEZ PAREDES

“Let us empower the community with prevention activities, teach with cultural sensitivity, create leaders in the same community, adapt to the group with which you are working, connect with your group, change people’s lives, and improve generations.”

The developmental stage of childhood or youth exposes individuals to vulnerabilities that may stem from their yet underdeveloped autonomy and reliance on external sources or people for support, which may heighten susceptibility to risks such as substance use. Many of them are encountered through the child’s process of discovering the world, how the world works, and the child’s desire to be part of it not excluded. But, what about situations that drive you away from the social and cultural environment that you are born into or used to, your efforts of trying to fit in don’t seem to work, and you feel that you are not enough to be in a certain social circle? This can create considerable stress and anxiety in a person.



Due to extraordinary situations, many children can be exposed to vulnerable situations, for example, leaving their place of origin, and even more so if they are unaccompanied minors. A person's temperament or personality traits, family issues, factors related to school or community, including accessibility to illicit drugs, can significantly influence their susceptibility to substance use and risky behaviours. These circumstances affect young people's development, day-to-day lives, relationships with family, friends and peers and self-image (UNODC, 2012).

Young migrants face numerous challenges during migration, including various stressors that heighten their vulnerability. Moreover, having irregular or undocumented legal status exacerbates their vulnerability, earning them the term "vulnerable among the vulnerable" (Rosas, 2021). This vulnerability, especially when unaccompanied, exposes them to multiple risks, characterized by their limited ability to act or react in the short term.

Migration can generate big stress and frustration, which can come from the necessity to leave their friends, change schools and countries; and it can generate cultural pressure and lead to adverse mental health (Vida Pourmand, Kendall A. Lawley, Barbara J Lehman, 2021). This can be related to the transition of migrating between countries, the reasons that forced them to leave their home, or the situations they faced during their migration route. Generally, people are more vulnerable and exposed to risk during periods of transition. For young people moving from one cultural context to another very different culture, the transition can be particularly risky. Normal adolescent issues can be further entangled by the need and difficulties in adapting to new cultures and approaches to belonging and acting in culturally appropriate ways in the new environment. This could possibly trigger stressors in young migrants, rendering them at higher risk of using substances as a way to escape from the reality in which they live.

All of these circumstances create situations of stress in young people, and it is very important to support migrant youth and children, in order to bring out the potential and protect the life goals of the youth and children who have had to leave their homes. It should be taken into account that the primary objective

of substance use prevention is to help people to improve quality of life, particularly young people, and prevention contributes to the safe development of children and youth to realize their capabilities and become active members of their community. However, there are subsets of young people who receive guidance on prevention strategies. These strategies aid individuals in enhancing their lives by providing interpersonal tools. Prevention strategies help a child or adult to be a better person, with more self-confidence, relate to others in a positive way, creating interpersonal skills that will help them throughout their lives.

Additionally, we must also take into account that prevention in vulnerable groups must be driven in a context-specific way. It is very important when starting prevention programs to have cultural sympathy, because there may be problems associated with age, gender, ethnicity or being related to the workplace, which need to be dealt with delicately. It is also useful to incorporate culture into programs; this may include paying attention to language, designs and symbols that have specific meanings within the culture or using community leaders or role models in media promotion.

Service provision and programs need to be flexible to meet the needs of the people, understanding and respecting their culture, communicating in their language, and fostering social leaders from within their community through creative and flexible strategies such as music, forums, debates, and focus group sessions to discuss their experiences and emotions.

Another important aspect is to encourage youth participation (Drug abuse prevention among youth from ethnic and indigenous minorities, 2004). And the most important, is to have empathy with others, the ability to understand the feelings and emotions of others, based on the recognition of the other as similar (López, M. Filippetti, V. Richaud, María, 2014).

So, let us empower the community with prevention activities, teach with cultural sensitivity, create leaders in the same community, adapt to the group with which you are working, connect with your group, change people's lives, and improve generations.

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Lizeth Jiménez Paredes, Mexico

Hello, everyone, my name is Lizeth, you can call me Liz, I am a lawyer and I work in the criminal justice system, at the same time I am a youth legislator specializing in migration issues, supporting vulnerable groups is my passion, I believe that we should all have the same opportunities regardless of our place of origin.

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Developing *Skills*

WRITTEN BY YOMNA ELDIB

The foundation for efficient stress management and the display of good behavior lies in possessing life skills. The term "life skills" holds a broad range of social, psychological, and interpersonal capabilities that enable individuals to make well-informed decisions, communicate effectively, enhance their interactions and self-management abilities, and maintain an active and healthy lifestyle. These skills serve as the building blocks for effectively managing stress and presenting oneself with positive behavior, encompassing crucial aspects of personal growth and social competence.



“A good life skills training program can have a profound and positive impact on the future of our lives and can help us succeed in other areas of life such as jobs or relationships.”

Developing skills necessary to prevent substance use can include those such as decision making; it is crucial to learn how to make decisions within a short period under various circumstances. Individuals must learn to analyze the benefits and drawbacks of possible options before making a decision. This ability will enable individuals to say 'No' to drugs, even if it seems to be a quick fix to their difficulties. Self-management is also an important talent to cultivate, since it aids better understanding of our emotions, including rejection, loneliness, and tension. Academic stress, relationship problems, and social isolation are some of the chief reasons why adolescents may resort to substance use. One should know how to recognize emotions, how they influence behavior and action, and how to appropriately handle these emotions.

Social skills are often underestimated in relation to the effect they can have on substance use, but they are very much required because they help young people create healthy and mutually supportive, positive relationships while avoiding toxic, abusive, or codependent relationships. It can also help people communicate clearly when they need help.

Developing the life-needed skills can help save people from substance use. Life skills can go a long way in helping to say no to substance use and thereby avoid drug use disorders. A good life skills training program can have a profound and positive impact on the future of our lives and can help us succeed in other areas of life such as jobs or relationships.

See index for references.



Yomna ElDib, Egypt

Hi! My name is Yomna ElDib from Egypt, currently studying Computer Science at Alexandria University. As a youth activist and a former participant at the UNODC youth forum, I had the chance to learn more about drug abuse and prevention. I'm excited and passionate to share my thoughts with everyone. I hope this article help make a difference.

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Standing still in a tornado of life **an article about stress & coping mechanisms**

WRITTEN BY MIA REBERNIK

Stop for a moment. We are in the 21st century and the times we live in, are safe to say crazy. In the past couple of years, I realized that the only thing we know for sure, is we don't know anything. This world is unpredictable, and tables can turn at any moment. Most people nowadays live a fast-paced life: They get up, go to work, eat fast food, scroll through social media and go to sleep. That cycle repeats again, and again, and again... Just like they're on a hamster wheel. Sometimes, I have that feeling, too. The feeling of running, but also being stuck at the same time. And if you ask me how I feel at that time, I would say I'm stressed.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as the body's reaction to situations that demand attention or action, encompassing any change that induces physical, emotional, or psychological strain. Let me ask you a question: have you been under stress recently? If you answered yes, you are like most of the world's population. Surprisingly, 7 out of 10 participants I interviewed on the street a few days ago for a public health study in my city (Split, Croatia) said that they aren't experiencing any type of stress. But when they were asked follow-up questions to elaborate on their initial statement, 5 out of 7 people who previously answered "No" changed their minds. The conclusion I came to after that is, people usually

aren't fully aware they are experiencing stress because they are used to it and consider chronic stress as a normal part of their lives. Stress is normal though, and, necessary for our survival and well-being.

It is important to differentiate the types of stress we may experience. Good stress or eustress is the most common type and it is believed to be necessary for healthy development. This type of stress typically does not persist for an extended duration, and there is no evidence to suggest it will have a lasting negative impact on us. We may experience eustress, for example, before an important meeting. It is good because it doesn't last long to cause damage, but it teaches your brain how to respond to stressful situations healthily.

On the other hand, distress is a bad type of stress, and it is potentially harmful to us. Distress can be acute or chronic. Acute distress (e. g. breakup, loss of a loved one, conflicts, etc.) may have a negative impact on the brain if we have bad coping mechanisms and lack support from others in our surroundings. It is important to interact with supportive people who will guide us through that rough period in life.



Last but not least, some people may experience chronic distress. Chronic stress is also known as toxic stress because it is the most harmful to our minds and bodies. It can leave permanent scars by translating into physical and mental issues. Examples of chronic stress are emotional, physical, or sexual abuse, neglect, addiction, and so on. This type of stress can actually rewire our brain and change the way it communicates to itself and the rest of the body.

It is quite shocking how chronic stress affects the brain. Scientists experimented on young rats who were put inside a cage with two older rats. The young rats were often attacked by the older two and their stress hormones were six times higher than the unstressed rats. Seven days later, after observing rats' brains under a microscope, they found out that neurogenesis (creation of new brain cells) in parts of the brain responsible for processing emotions in stressed rats is the same as in the other group. However, they noticed the newly generated cells only survived for a short amount of time.

This experiment applies to humans, too. Yale researchers conducted magnetic resonance scans of 103 healthy individuals who were asked if they have been through stressful life events, for example, dismissal, divorce, loss of a loved one, etc. The team found that the brain tissue of those who had experienced a recent stressful event had visibly lower gray matter in areas of the brain responsible for self-control and regulation of emotions. So, no wonder why stress is considered to be one of the biggest risk factors for numerous conditions. There are plenty of scientific reports showing a correlation between chronic stress and risky behaviors as a way of coping. Thus, the key is to practice good and scientifically proven coping mechanisms to navigate through challenging times.

Coping strategies are classified into two major groups: active coping techniques and passive (avoidant) coping techniques. Active coping strategies are considered to be better than avoidant ones. By practicing active coping, we are changing the way we look at our stressor or maybe we may even change the stressor itself. Active coping strategies consist of planning on how to confront the stressor, taking action and trying to remove the stressor, accepting the stressful event that occurred, and aiming for positive reframing, which is making the best out of the situation we are in and looking at it more positively.

On the contrary, avoidant coping strategies can include denial

of the situation, withdrawal and/or substance use. If a person is using these mechanisms, they are trying to avoid the core of their problem by turning to quick solutions, in the belief that it will distract them, so that they don't have to confront the real problem. Of course, these behaviors can lead to much greater problems. And it's also worthy to note that socioeconomic status and culture play a big role when deciding which coping strategy to select. For instance, there are reports indicating that students in the United Kingdom commonly resort to substances as coping mechanisms, whereas some studies suggest that a significant portion of students in Nepal adopted active coping strategies. A study in Malaysia which interviewed medical students, found that males and smokers used passive coping techniques more frequently than the rest of the group and the smokers admitted having higher stress levels than non-smokers.

Considering life's unpredictability and the inevitability of stressful events, it is crucial to adopt healthy coping strategies, which will help us grow and become stronger than before. While we may not always be able to eliminate the stressor from our lives, focusing on these strategies can guide us towards a brighter future. Surround yourself with supportive people who are willing to listen. Give yourself time and analyze how you feel. Allow yourself to feel emotions, even if they are unpleasant. Don't sweep them under the carpet. Talk about them, let them out. It is not a shame to talk about feelings. After all, we are only humans made from skin and bones, so permit yourself not to pretend you are fine if you are not.

Another piece of advice is to eat a healthy diet. There is a famous proverb that says: "You are what you eat," and it exists for a reason. Food does not only affect our physical health, but it also affects our mood. Moreover, it is important to have a healthy sleep cycle and to do physical activities such as walking, jogging or any kind of sport. It is recommended to make to-do lists and plan your day and week. In your free time, it is good to practice relaxation techniques like deep breaths, yoga or meditation. Don't forget to focus on the good things in your life, and even remind yourself of things you are grateful for. There is always a sunny side to life, and if you cannot see it right now, that doesn't mean it doesn't exist. So, keep your head up, find time for yourself and remember: what doesn't kill you makes you stronger!

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Mia Rebernik, Croatia

Hi there! My name is Mia. I'm just a teen from Croatia who loves reading and is trying to write something that makes sense. I participated in Youth Forum 2022 and am currently attending nursing school. In my free time, I like to take long walks, hang out with people and cats, learn new things every day and try to be the best version of myself.

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Substance Use Prevention Through the Lens of *Youth Empowerment*

WRITTEN BY CARLOS ARTURO ARAUJO

"The power of youth is the commonwealth for the entire world. The faces of young people are the faces of our past, our present and our future. No segment in the society can match with the power, idealism, enthusiasm and courage of the young people."

This quote by Kailash Satyarthi, underscores the powerful force that young individuals embody, emphasizing their pivotal role in shaping the world's trajectory. While youth empowerment is crucial, it's equally vital for individuals of all ages to contribute to a fulfilling life and engage in social commitment. 'Social commitment' serves as a common ground that transcends



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KAILASH SATYARTHI

generational boundaries, aligning with our innate desire to foster well-being for both ourselves and others. As defined by “Fundación PRO Humana (Chile),” it encapsulates the responsibility shared by humans, institutions, and corporations to ensure the collective welfare of local and global society. By nurturing the potential of young people and fostering a culture of social responsibility, we pave the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for all. Social commitment is an inherent aspect that permeates every facet of our daily lives; it is ingrained within our nature and predominantly the young leaders are the representation and main actors of it. Awareness forms the foundation of our culture, our well-being, and our humanity. We cannot progress if we do not take care of the person next to us. The human by nature is totally linked to help anyone in need, it is an impulse that people have innately within themselves. And everything we do attracts something related to the action we make. This concept aligns with the Law of Attraction, which, as explained by Dr. Elizabeth Scott (PhD in psychology), refers to the idea that positive or negative actions tend to elicit corresponding responses. It applies to how humans develop themselves to reach a goal, and how actions, intentions and words take you closer to your objective. This can also be applied to social commitment: once we start practicing social commitment as a lifestyle, we surround ourselves with things that motivate us, encourage us to be helping others

and ourselves through many ways. And this is also especially so for all of us: the youth, kids, teens, young adults, the “leaders of tomorrow”. “We need, as a generation, to become not only the leaders of the future, but also the leaders of today.

Therefore, it is vital to highlight that when we surround ourselves with awareness, messages about well-being, and health, it is easier (and it may come as a natural response) to avoid obstacles in the way to our goal. As stated by UNODC, “Good health is linked to rising income, increasing productivity, children’s education, and adult well-being” (Understanding Substance Use Prevention, 2). Social awareness and the promotion of youth activities for the global society are key elements in achieving good health by fostering community engagement, encouraging physical activity, and providing platforms for positive social interaction. By helping both others and ourselves, we cultivate a sense of focus on our goals. This dual focus allows us to develop habits of positive action while pursuing our dreams. This work does not go unnoticed, and even has a multiplier effect since, as social beings, human also have the natural tendency to imitate the actions of other people. Furthermore, turning this lifestyle into a chain of humanitarianism, positivity, and healthy messages will be key to achieving healthy and determined lives without involving substance use.

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Carlos Arturo Araujo, El Salvador

Hello everyone! My name is Carlos. I am a BA student in Culture Politics and Society at Central European University in Vienna. I am also the founder of an international initiative with social and academic purposes called “Cubre, Come to y Crece”. I participated in UNODC’s Youth Forum in 2022. It was a fantastic learning experience about topics I am passionate about, like substance use prevention and social awareness. I firmly believe that helping others is the most important aspect of our lives.

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Two-way substance use prevention: empowering youths to *lead ‘themselves’*

WRITTEN BY NATTHAPAT KACHANEMAS

Since 2012, the UNODC Youth Forum has gathered young people from around the world who are active in the fields of substance use prevention, health promotion, and youth empowerment to provide the opportunity for them to exchange ideas, visions, and different perspectives on how to better protect their peers’ health and well-being. The forum is a part of the UNODC Youth Initiative, which aims to link young people from all over the world and encourage them to become

engaged in their schools and communities, as well as in youth organisations focusing on drug use prevention and health promotion. Youth leaders can make significant contributions to our social well-being by fostering a positive environment aimed at the substance use prevention, and in doing so, they can also concurrently diminish the likelihood of risky behaviours such as criminal activities, aligning with the concept of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED).



**“I’m starting with the man in the mirror.
I’m asking him to change his ways.
And no message could’ve been any clearer.
If they wanna make the world a better place,
take a look at yourself and then make a change”.**

FROM THE SONG “MAN IN THE MIRROR” BY MICHAEL JACKSON

In addition to providing a safe environment as an approach to preventing substance use, another strategy to focus on, is enabling people to protect themselves from substance use. And to empower youths, it is also a good idea for youth leaders to help other youths in developing self-leadership, autonomy, and resilience to reduce the chance of substance use. Furthermore, it will establish a 'two-way substance use prevention' by creating a good society fit for living without drugs while enabling people to lead themselves.

It is comforting to know that youth leaders can prove to be substantial in substance use prevention in our society, helping to make the world a better place without substance use. As time passes, youths continue to grow, mature, and may live in new environments, possibly alone, owing to circumstances such as career opportunities, education, or migration. While adjusting to the new society, they might encounter something new or different from their previous society. This change in life conditions may have an impact on them.

It might be pleasant or unpleasant; we have no way of precisely anticipating what they will experience. The environment in the new society may not be as favourable compared to their previous society, and there may be exposures risk factors that may elevate the newcomer's risk of substance use.

In such situations, a possible choice of action could be to 'lead themselves' away from the harmful environmental factors and learn how to manage the unexpected problems that come into their lives. Youth leaders may help other youths through practical skill-building workshops on self-awareness, self-

management, and responsible decision-making by helping them understand vulnerabilities to substance use, recognizing triggers or risk factors that may lead to substance use, and understanding their own emotions and influence on behaviour. Skill-building and achieving autonomy in youths is crucial.

Youths can build skills through activities like time management, stress management, and, most importantly, setting life goals as it creates the strong bond between the youths and their commitment which will result in their consistent conforming behaviour.

Developing autonomy cannot be dissociated from environmental setting, which can contribute to substance use prevention. Environmental factors, according to research, have an important effect on human mentality. This highlights the young leader's role in helping to create an atmosphere that supports the development of self-leadership. People who have mastered self-leadership will be able to serve as spiritual leaders, inspiring others to become 'a leader for themselves' as well. This continuous cycle of inspiration will help our society in the long run, since more and more people will learn to handle the harmful variables that surround them.

To make the world a better place, we must not just only lead others, but also enable others to lead themselves. As a result, individuals will grow to be self-reliant, understand what is best for them, and begin to change the world by changing themselves.

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Natthapat Kachanemas, Thailand

Hello. My name is Natthapat. I am now a bachelor degree student majoring in Political Science at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok. I participated the YF in 2020. Before joining UNODC Youth Initiative, I worked as a member of local youth network against drugs (CYDOT) under the supervision of the Office of Narcotics Control Board, Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Thailand. I am also interested in criminology, victimology, criminal justice process, and law. I strongly believe that youth empowerment is important to any social changes and youth networking is another great way to make changes!

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Appendix

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Prevention and health go hand in hand and it starts with us.



Signature

**Dedicated to Youth
all around the world!**