

PROJECT WIN

A New Program for Helping Youth Quit Smoking... On-line Staff Education, One-to-One Quit Coaching and Group

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The Tobacco Dependence Program of the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey-School of Public Health will be offering a new program to schools this fall. After 5 years of implementing the Youth Quit2Win Cessation Program, we recognized additional needs to be addressed in the school setting:

- 1) There is limited staff time allowed for attending out-of-school training.
- 2) There is usually only one Student Assistance Counselor (SAC) in a school and this is the staff identified to facilitate the group. This person tends to be quite overwhelmed by many other issues facing high school students, making addressing tobacco use lower on their priority list.
- 3) It is important that more than one staff is identified to help students to quit smoking.
- 4) At times it may be difficult for students to miss class to attend in-school groups.
- 5) There is a need to address students who have violated school tobacco policies.
- 6) We often found school administrators insisting violators of school smoking policies be allowed to attend the quit group sessions. These sessions are designed for youth smokers who identified themselves as motivated to quit and willing to gain support in a group setting. While merging these two different populations of smokers may be convenient, we often found it disruptive to the group process.
- 7) While reviewing school policies, we found tobacco use on school grounds was often not treated the same as other drugs of abuse. Whereas, the consequences for use of other drugs always included a counseling component, smoking on school grounds usually meant a punitive response, such as a fine and/or detention. Clearly a response must be given, but school personnel and parents need to recognize the importance of helping students with their nicotine addiction. All too often, we see school staff turn their heads or hear adults comment, "Well at least they are not doing cocaine or heroin," thereby condoning their addictive behaviors.

Project WIN (Win Independence from Nicotine) is intended to address all of these issues. An on-line training program will be made available to school professionals to utilize at their own pace. This will allow administration to encourage several staff throughout the school to become more knowledgeable about nicotine addiction through easy-to-access on-line training and



allow more staff the ability to offer one-to-one "coaching" to their students. It provides information on topics every smoker should know, along with handouts, questionnaires and activities for students to work on independently. In addition, this program will enable schools to provide education to students who have violated school tobacco policy rules as an "alternative to suspension." The program is not intended to be punitive but instead to challenge the students to think about their tobacco use. It is important for adults and especially school personnel to recognize the role tobacco use plays in the addiction process. Students who smoke learn to become dependent on a substance in order to relieve undesirable symptoms of withdrawal and/or cope with everyday life. In addition, while students are experiencing withdrawal symptoms, it makes it almost impossible for them to focus on their studies. We also know that with most other forms of drug of abuse, a student's first drug experience usually begins with tobacco or alcohol. And, most adult smokers began using tobacco before 18 years of age.

The overall goal of Project WIN is to help more staff within the school environment learn about nicotine addiction, and, in turn, to help more students quit. Staff throughout the school will stop turning their head to this deadly disease and instead aid in their student's success as a non-smoker, allowing their students to attain their lifelong dreams!