

Prevention and early intervention

Prevention and early intervention in drug crimes.

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4 mins read

The value of a public health approach to tackling crime problems is increasingly recognised by policing stakeholders (see [our approach to public health](#)).

Preventing harmful drug use is central to a public health approach. It emphasises tackling the root causes of health and social harms and dependence. Drug prevention tackles the risk factors that increase the likelihood of someone suffering harm.

Effectiveness of prevention and early intervention

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has undertaken a review of existing systematic reviews (UNODC, 2018). This is to inform the development of international standards on drug use prevention.

The review suggests the following factors and types of intervention are linked to positive outcomes.

- Early interventions – particularly generic pre-school programmes improving literacy and numeracy – have a long-term effect.
- Personal and social skills education.
- Links to school interventions – including environment improvement programmes, positive ethos, disaffection, truancy, participation, academic and social-emotional learning.
- A focus on 'risk and resilience' factors.
- Multi-component programmes involving parenting interventions and support for individuals and families.

- Qualified staff who are competent to deliver the interventions they provide.

The following result in no, or negative, outcomes:

- Scare tactics and images.
- Knowledge-only approaches.
- Ex-users and the police as drug educators, where their input is not part of a wider prevention programme.
- Peer mentoring schemes that are not evidence-based.

Example of relevant practice

Police in classrooms (National Police Chiefs' Council and PSHE Association)

Police officers from several forces across the UK were trained to deliver a 'Drugs and the law' session in a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) class at various schools.

The lesson plan included three activities designed to encourage young people to consider the typical police deliberations on, and responses to, young people who appear to be using drugs.

The activities were design based on procedurally just principles. That is, fair decision-making and respectful treatment. They were designed to:

- start a discussion and explain how the police would treat young people suspected of using drugs
- outline which laws and procedures the police would follow
- encourage the pupils to consider the perspective of young people, the police and the community

- give pupils a chance to ask questions and voice their concerns about police conduct

Other interventions that work

Specific interventions that work from the [crime reduction toolkit](#) include:

- [mentoring](#)
- [drug courts](#)
- [therapeutic communities](#)
- [halfway houses](#)

Mentoring

Mentoring involves interactions between two individuals over an extended period of time. The idea is that the mentee is in a position to imitate and benefit from the knowledge, skill, ability, or experience of the mentor. The mentor may provide practical assistance, such as:

- with job applications
- teaching or training
- emotional support for the mentee to help increase self-esteem and confidence

Mentoring may be between a youth and an adult, or between peers.

Drug courts

Drug courts are for offenders who are drug users or drug addicts. They're an alternative to processing them through the normal court system.

Using a system of supervision, reward and punishment, a judge and the drug court team support the participant throughout the process.

Drug courts can oversee an offender for as little as three months or for over a year.

Successful participants who do not offend over the course of the programme either have their original charges dismissed or reduced.

Unsuccessful participants may continue through the traditional legal system or face additional sanctions.

Therapeutic communities

Therapeutic communities are participative, group-based approaches to treat the effects of mental illness and substance abuse. They're used for both adults and juveniles.

Through the involvement of professionals and former drug users, they aim to promote behavioural change and encourage the development of positive social identities.

Therapeutic communities can take place both in and outside custodial settings. They can be day or residential programmes.

Halfway houses

Halfway houses are community-based offender programmes. They provide support to offenders as part of a primary sentence or licence conditions.

The use of halfway houses aims to support offenders to reintegrate into the community after they leave prison. They can also offer an alternative to imprisonment.

Services offered by halfway houses may include:

- access to employment and education
- substance misuse treatment and counselling

Tags

Evidence-based policing Crime reduction