



# The Purpose of Awareness Campaigns

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## *HOW TO GUIDE*





# THE PURPOSE OF AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS AND HOW TO PARTICIPATE

## INTRODUCTION

Virginia ABC offers alcohol education and prevention programming and resources through the lifespan. Virginia ABC's youth programs are designed for elementary, middle and high school students, staff and parents. Our programs provide organizations with skills, resources and tools to prevent youth substance use paired with role modeling of healthy behaviors. Virginia ABC's middle school program, Being Outstanding Leaders Together Against Drugs and Alcohol (BOLT) provides drug and alcohol prevention knowledge and skills to middle school students through free online trainings, resources and materials.

There are many different awareness campaigns that a school may choose to participate in, but *The Purpose of Awareness Campaigns and How to Participate* guide is designed to coach middle school personnel responsible for substance use prevention on what substance use awareness campaigns there are and how their school can participate in them. This guide paired with the *Prevention 101 for Middle School Personnel* online training and the *How to Promote Your Education and Prevention Project* toolkit can assist your school with year-long prevention planning.

School personnel most commonly involved with substance use prevention awareness campaign planning and implementation are: club advisors, health and physical education teachers, counselors and psychologists, student assistance program coordinators, resource officers, nurses and other school administration and leadership.

## WHAT ARE AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS?

Awareness campaigns are set times (often a specific day, week or month) throughout the year designed to educate and increase public awareness of a particular philanthropic cause, medical condition, organization or topic. Some awareness campaigns include fundraising efforts designed to raise money to support medical research or to financially assist individuals. Awareness campaigns are often organized by a company, group or organization that is directly affected by the cause or is responsible for funding and research.

Most often we recognize awareness campaigns by the awareness ribbon symbol. Different causes have different colored ribbons. One of the most well-known awareness campaigns is Breast Cancer Awareness Month celebrated each October to increase awareness of the disease.

Individuals wear pink ribbons to show their support and engage others in education about breast cancer awareness. This campaign is usually paired with fundraising efforts for research.

Awareness campaigns are most valuable when they start conversations. While it is important to know that a cause "exists," knowing what action someone should take after their involvement and participation in the awareness campaign is more important.



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## HOW DO I KNOW IF YOUR SCHOOL SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN?

To determine if your school should participate in an awareness campaign consider asking yourself these questions:

- Are you wanting your school and community to be more aware of a specific substance use problem? *If the answer is yes, then you should begin to identify which awareness campaign is appropriate for your school to participate in.*
- Are you looking for something to start off your school's year-long substance use prevention efforts? *If the answer is yes, then you should begin to identify which awareness campaign aligns with your prevention needs and can become a strategy of a larger plan.*
- Are you looking for a fun week of activities including spirit days and a pep rally? *If the answer is yes, an awareness campaign may not be what you're looking for. While awareness campaigns can include activities such as spirit days and pep rallies, they need to include educational pieces and continued prevention activities, efforts or strategies.*
- Are you looking to involve the community and parents? *If the answer is yes, an awareness campaign may be what you're looking for. While awareness campaign activities may occur in the school building, sharing information with community members and with students' parents is essential to continuing the conversation and preventing underage substance use at home.*

## SETTING GOALS FOR YOUR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

Goal setting will look different for every community and organization; however, all prevention activities should work to accomplish the goal(s) and each goal should have a purpose. When developing your prevention goals keep in mind that they should relate back to what you hope to accomplish throughout your awareness campaign.

To make sure your goals are clear and reachable each one should fit into the SMART acronym. SMART goals help you focus your efforts and increase the chances of achieving your goal. This method of goal development pushes you further than you may have on your own, maps out the direction of your prevention efforts and helps you stay organized in planning.

**S**  
**M**  
**A**  
**R**  
**T**

**SPECIFIC** - Goals are well defined, clear and unambiguous.

**MEASURABLE** - There is a specific criteria within your goal that measures your progress.

**ACHIEVABLE** - The goal is attainable for you and you group and is not too far fetched.

**REALISTIC** - The goal is relevant to the purpose of your activities.

**TIME BOUND** - There is a clear and defined timeline to reach the goal in.



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## STEPS TO IMPLEMENTING AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

1

### MEET WITH YOUR TEAM

If you're implementing a year-long prevention initiative, your Team is the group of stakeholders you have assembled to work on your plan. When you meet you will need to discuss how future plans might fit into your overarching prevention plans.

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### IDENTIFY YOUR GOAL

When identifying your goal it is important to understand how an awareness campaign will accomplish reaching your goal or what part it plays in reaching your prevention goals. It is important to note that participation in an awareness campaign alone may not help you reach your goals. Incorporating it into a larger prevention initiative will help.

3

### SELECT AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

When selecting which awareness campaign to participate in, it's important to link back to your goal. Will the campaign you've selected help you reach your goal? It's also important to note that your school can participate in more than one campaign.

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### PLAN FOR YOUR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

To start, you will want to visit the hosting organization's website to begin researching materials you would like to use or to download the planning guide. You don't need to duplicate work; if the host organization has materials for you to use, use those to help with your planning.

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### IMPLEMENT YOUR AWARENESS CAMPAIGN

When implementing your campaign activities, make sure the activities you've selected tie into substance use prevention and aren't just fun activities without a purpose. For example, a "wear red day" to start conversations about the campaign is an appropriate spirited activity because it involves a spirit element as well as an educational piece.

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### CONTINUE AWARENESS AND PREVENTION WORK

Don't forget that integrating the awareness campaign into a larger prevention plan is important. How will you continue to have conversations and educational opportunities throughout the school year on this topic? Remember - substance use prevention isn't a one time activity, it's a continual effort.



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## HOW TO CREATE AN AWARENESS CAMPAIGN SCHEDULE

For your awareness week you will probably have a mixture of active and passive events and initiatives. The type of event or initiative you plan will depend on the audience, your goals and the resources available to you.

### ACTIVE EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

These type of events and initiatives require involvement and participation from your audience members. They require attention and time from your audience and should have a large impact or takeaway in order to be effective. While some active initiatives may require funding, there are initiatives that do not require funds (or require minimal funds) to implement.

#### EXAMPLES OF ACTIVE EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

- ⚡ School assemblies hosting a guest speaker including a classroom discussion on the topic
- ⚡ Themed poster contest to be used on future prevention materials
- ⚡ Television or radio public service announcement (PSA) contest centered on one topic that encourages a specific action
- ⚡ Hosting an evening for parents with education and training opportunities on how to engage their children in conversations about alcohol and setting expectations
- ⚡ School-wide essay contest on varying substance use topics
- ⚡ Participate in or organize a drug take back day for your school and local community

### PASSIVE EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

While your audience may still in theory participate in passive events and initiatives, they tend to require less effort. Passive events include sharing information or awareness materials. Because of the lack of effort put into participating, passive initiatives require additional follow up.

#### EXAMPLES OF PASSIVE EVENTS AND INITIATIVES

- ⚡ Educational materials sent home with information about preventing youth substance use
- ⚡ Pinning a ribbon to a shirt or bookbag
- ⚡ Sharing images or using hashtags on social media to involve others outside of school
- ⚡ Substance-free pledge signing drives
- ⚡ Reach out to local news outlets to share prevention initiatives
- ⚡ Handing out giveaways with educational messages like t-shirts, water bottles and wrist bands
- ⚡ Host an information table on youth substance use at sporting events and other school events



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## SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION AWARENESS CAMPAIGNS

There are many substance use related awareness campaigns to participate in, but it is important to remember the audience you are working with. While there may be students who currently misuse substances, participating in an awareness campaign that focuses on substance use recovery and treatment may not be appropriate for a middle school. However, it is very important to discuss the potential dangers and long- and short-term consequences of substance misuse. Work to identify an awareness campaign that meets the direct needs of the students within your school.

### NATIONAL RED RIBBON CAMPAIGN (RED RIBBON WEEK)

**Hosting Organization:** National Family Partnership

**Timeframe:** The last week of October

**Objective:** To lead and support families and communities in nurturing the full potential of healthy, drug free youth.

### NATIONAL ALCOHOL AWARENESS MONTH

**Hosting Organization:** National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD)

**Timeframe:** The month of April

**Objective:** To increase outreach and education regarding the dangers of alcoholism and issues related to alcohol.

### NATIONAL DRUG AND ALCOHOL FACTS WEEK

**Hosting Organization:** National Institute on Drug Abuse for Teens (NIDA)

**Timeframe:** The first week of April

**Objective:** To link teens to scientists and other experts to counteract the myths about drugs and alcohol that teens get from the internet, social media, television, movies, music and friends.

### NATIONAL PREVENTION WEEK

**Hosting Organization:** Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

**Timeframe:** The second week of May

**Objective:** To involve communities in raising awareness of substance use and mental health issues and implementing prevention strategies, showcasing the effectiveness of evidence based prevention programs.

**Looking at the timeframe of each of these awareness campaigns, do any line up with pre-existing activities, programs or prevention efforts your school is hosting? Think about how you might be able to combine initiatives so students aren't over programmed and additional activities aren't cutting into academic time.**



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