

20 Booster Ideas to Reinforce Sexual Abstinence Programs

by Nicole Anderson, MS

Throughout the world of prevention programs that reduce risky behaviors in adolescents, boosters have been used to sustain and reinforce impact for programs preventing teen tobacco use (Elder et al., 1993), teen drug and alcohol use (Botvin, Baker, Dusenbury, Tortu, & Botvin, 1990), and teen sex (Wu et al., 2003; Thomas & Dimitrov, 2007; Weed et al., 2007). From these studies, it is unclear exactly what role boosters played in the overall program effect. Some studies have increased methodological rigor, comparing program groups where the only difference is the presence or absence of the booster, and have found better improvement with participants given the program plus the booster than those participants given only the program (Botvin, Renick, & Baker, 1983; Dijkstra, Mesters, DeVries, van Breukelen, & Parcel, 1999; Tolman, Gormon-Smith, Henry, & Schoeny, 2009).

Negative cultural influences counteract prevention messages and make boosters necessary; this should be particularly true of sexual abstinence programs, as adolescents (and adults) live in a sexually saturated society that is constantly undermining a sexual abstinence message. This review compiles 20 different methods for reinforcing and maintaining the main intervention of school-based sexual abstinence programs¹. They have been grouped into five categories: 1) in-school boosters, 2) events, 3) other teen venues, 4) methods to reach parents, and 5) visual/ material reminders. Abstinence programs may choose to use one or several different boosters, as they each contribute something unique in supporting the abstinence message and many are relatively easy to employ.

In-School Boosters. In-school boosters reinforce the program in the same environment in which it was administered.

- 1) **Short-Duration Interventions.** Some interventions have employed short-duration interventions a few months after the primary intervention, to reinforce main concepts learned during the primary intervention.
- 2) **After-School / Teen Leader Clubs.** Abstinence clubs have been created that continue to meet on the school campus once a week or month after the program has ended. Motivated

¹ These booster ideas were provided by abstinence programs in Arkansas as found in a study by Weed et al. (2007). Programs contributing booster ideas include Abstinence by Choice, Inc.; Earle School District Abstinence Education Program; Excel Upwards, Healthy Kids, Inc.; Lee County Family Resource Center; Prim N Proper, Inc.; Reality Check, Inc.; Youth Empowered to Succeed (YES) Program; and Tree of Life Preventative Health Maintenance, Inc.

students who self-select into these clubs can then plan methods to spread the abstinence message to their peers.

- 3) **In-School Clubs / Support Groups.** Programs have used clubs that meet monthly during lunch at each school district. They are not leadership groups, but are peer support groups for students that may be struggling with issues such as alcohol, drugs and sex and they want to make better choices. Students that are making good choices in these areas are members too. Each meeting programs use abstinence reinforcement activities and stories to encourage them to continue with their abstinence pledges.
- 4) **Assemblies.** Assemblies can reinforce a classroom intervention, using program personnel or teen leaders, to present information, perform skits and raps, etc.
- 5) **Mentoring Programs.** Mentoring programs can match adult and high school students with a younger student. Mentors meet weekly on the school campus with the student that has been recommended by teachers, counselors, and parents as being at-risk. Additional times can be scheduled for group outings, meetings for parents, students and mentors to mix and mingle and special college days where students are given an opportunity to visit local colleges with their mentors to see the benefits and the opportunities of abstaining from sexual behavior.

Events. Some programs participate in or host events that have an abstinence message present and are often publicized.

- 6) **Health Fairs.** If available locally, students can participate in health fairs, where there are different booths that address issues that may include teen health, sexual health, and skills for healthy marriage. Parents can attend with students and receive education that will help them be a stronger support system for the teens. The community becomes involved which also strengthens the support system, building a community that encourages and sets the standard for abstinence.
- 7) **Community Collaborative Events.** Daytime events include collaborative community events, such as a “back to school” beauty academy that offers hairstyles, manicures, etc., where workshops and entertainment focusing on healthy relationship skill building is done while students receive or are waiting for services.
- 8) **Concerts.** Artists will sometimes travel to schools to perform concerts singing songs endorsing abstinence. Culturally relevant artists can be used to reach sub-populations of students.
- 9) **“Rock-a-thons”.** These can be used to build community support and raise funds for matching. Letters are sent out to businesses, civic groups, and churches seeking sponsors for the rock-a-thon event. These sponsors are listed on the back of the t-shirt that students get for raising \$50 or more. Students from all over a county come together to rock in the rock-a-thon, which involves rocking chairs and infant simulators. They rock in shifts of 30 minutes and can be made to last from noon until 3:00pm. School groups and church youth groups make up the teams that come and rock. Previous programs have raised \$15,000.

- 10) Summer Camps.** Programs have had summer camps or retreats to provide additional inspirational dosage over the summer months when students are not in school and are probably in need of a booster.

Other Teen Venues. Other program boosters, outside of the intervention in the classroom, occur at places that students frequent.

- 11) Internet.** In the last few years, there has been an increasing trend of programs having a web presence on sites such as My Space, Facebook, and Twitter, where students can visit at their leisure and discuss their thoughts on message boards. This system has the advantage that it can post events, collect email addresses, and allow a place for students to network.

- 12) Other Media.** Some programs have used a comprehensive media campaign to inform the community about their program. They have created commercials to air on local network and cable channels, particularly stations like MTV and VH1 that attract an adolescent audience. They also use radio as a means of outreach with 30 second spots on local country, hip hop, rock, and other stations. Billboards have been particularly successful for name and face recognition of programs. Newspaper ads are highly effective when advertising a specific event or concept. All advertising avenues and publications (brochures, business cards, etc.) contain the programs' website to promote their Internet presence.

- 13) Local Malls.** Programs have rented space in the local mall during the summer. Program personnel and program materials are present to spread the abstinence message to the local community. They can offer PS2s and other games, special guests and speakers, and other means of reinforcing the abstinence message throughout the summer months.

Methods to Reach Parents. Reaching out to parents to explain the abstinence message has an effect on the parents, which will reinforce and strengthen the effect on the students.

- 14) Newsletters.** In some programs, newsletters have been mailed to the parents three or four times a year.

- 15) Displays at Parent-Teacher Conferences.** In some programs, tables have been set up at parent-teacher conferences, manned with people who were armed with program brochures.

- 16) Parent Forums.** Parental forums can be conducted occasionally to inform and educate parents on the current risk factors associated with teen sexual activities. Collaboration with local health educators, physicians and nurses can insure medical accuracy and provide a level of confidence for the implementation of the over-all promotion of the benefits associated with the abstinence until marriage message. The collaboration can include community partners from the faith community, schools and local colleges. The forums includes assemblies, break-out sessions and panel discussions to encourage parents to see and understand how abstinence is inclusive of a lifestyle that improves the whole person from academics, behavior, and strengthening positive character.

Visual / Material Reminders. Visual and material reminders are quick and easy to implement, and can reinforce all the good memories and associations students have of the abstinence program long after it is over.

- 17) **Posters.** Posters that are meant to attract the attention of students are often left on the classroom wall for the entire school year, well after the program has been completed. These visual reminders can reinforce a message that was presented in the classroom.
- 18) **Wrist-bands / T-shirts, etc.** Many programs give out wristbands, T-shirts, key chains, bags, or have students make bracelets at the conclusion of the program, which can serve as reminders of the program when the students are away from school.
- 19) **Pledge Cards.** Programs can have students sign an abstinence pledge that are cards, similar to ATM cards, that the students then carry in their wallet for the rest of the year to serve as a constant reminder of the abstinence pledge they made at the end of the program.
- 20) **Music CDs.** Programs can purchase music CDs with songs specifically promoting abstinence. Some artists will travel to schools and perform the songs live that can then be bought on CD.

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