

## Teaching Strategies

*How Project ALERT is taught is as important as what is taught.* The following strategies, drawn from research on effective learning and behavior change, are critical to successful program delivery and have been integrated into the curriculum and teacher training:

### **Resistance Self-Efficacy**

Self-efficacy is an individual's belief that he or she is capable of accomplishing a particular task. It is considered a prerequisite to adopting new and difficult behavior. If we expect students to resist drugs, we must help them feel they can do so. The curriculum offers a number of ways to increase resistance self-efficacy, including practice, reinforcement and modeling. A key mechanism is the teacher's own belief that students are capable of resisting. Teachers are trained to communicate this belief specifically and honestly (*"You really know how to say 'no'."* *"You sounded in charge."* *"I believed what you said and I would have stopped pressuring you."*).

### **Active Student Involvement and Practice**

Student participation has been built into the curriculum whenever possible. Research indicates that people learn more, remember more, and feel more effective if they actually do something that involves them in the learning process. Project ALERT activities encourage doing, responding to teachers' questions, making lists of reasons, discussing videos, performing resistance skits, rewriting ads, writing resistance responses and suggesting alternative behavior.

### **Modeling**

Demonstrating skills to be imitated is an important teaching device and a means of increasing self-efficacy. In Project ALERT, the teacher models resistance skills, as do the older teens in the videos. By relating personal examples of saying "no," they illustrate effective ways of resisting.

### **Reinforcement**

Several techniques strengthen skills. Verbal reinforcement methods include repeating correct responses and solutions, elaborating on a student's response and connecting it with other material, and directly reinforcing what the student said or did (*"That's a terrific way to say 'no' "*). Non-verbal methods include nodding or a thumbs-up sign.

**Validation**

Teachers are trained to acknowledge students' feelings, sometimes before they express them and even when they deny them. Examples include acknowledging that it is hard to identify and resist pressure, advertising is powerful, and students are not expected to know all the answers.

**Near term goals**

Each lesson begins with a statement of proximal goals, or what students will accomplish that day. Although such a beginning may seem trivial, research indicates that stating proximal goals promotes learning and self-efficacy. These goals are listed first in each lesson and should guide each activity. At the end of each lesson, the teacher reinforces the students' abilities to achieve them and concludes with a "wrap-up" activity to acknowledge that the goal has been accomplished.

**Respect**

Students who are treated with respect are more receptive and motivated. Respectful treatment includes listening carefully and acknowledging what students say. It also includes responding gently to a wrong answer by acknowledging any truth in it, validating the students' feelings ("Many people think that."), and presenting the correct answer. Project ALERT teachers increase their credibility and contribute to a climate of respect by avoiding preachy statements, acknowledging that the students ultimately make their own decision about using drugs, and clarifying that no one can make them use drugs if they don't want to.

**Enthusiasm**

Teacher enthusiasm sends students the message that the curriculum is great and they will like it. Project ALERT teachers are well aware that enthusiasm is contagious and primes students for success.