

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 9, 2016

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A child's first eight years critical for substance abuse prevention

NIH releases summary of research on early childhood risk and protective factors

An online guide about interventions in early childhood that can help prevent drug use and other unhealthy behaviors was launched today by the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), part of the National Institutes of Health. The guide offers research-based principles that affect a child's self-control and overall mental health, starting during pregnancy through the eighth year of life. It recognizes that while substance use generally begins during the teen years, it has known biological, psychological, social, and environmental roots that begin even before birth.

Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention for
Early Childhood
A Research-Based Guide



“Thanks to more than three decades of research into what makes a young child able to cope with life's inevitable stresses, we now have unique opportunities to intervene very early in life to prevent substance use disorders,” said NIDA Director Nora D. Volkow, M.D. “We now know that early intervention can set the stage for more positive self-regulation as children prepare for their school years.”

[Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention for Early Childhood](#) addresses the major influences on a child's early development such as lack of school readiness skills, insecure attachment issues, and signs of uncontrolled aggression in childhood behaviors. Special attention is given to a child's most vulnerable periods during sensitive transitions, such as a parents' divorce, moving to a new home, or starting school. There is strong evidence that a stable home environment, adequate nutrition, physical and cognitive stimulation, and supportive parenting can lead to good developmental outcomes.

Two supplemental sections for policymakers and practitioners go into greater detail on how early childhood interventions are designed and how to select the right strategies for a community's specific needs. “This guide is important reading for anyone who has an influence over a child's life, from early development through the transition to elementary school,” added Volkow.

[Principles of Substance Abuse Prevention for Early Childhood](#) is the fourth in a series of evidence-based principles produced by NIDA, including: [Principles of Drug Addiction Treatment](#); [Principles of Adolescent Substance Use Disorder Treatment](#); and [Principles of Drug Abuse Treatment for Criminal Justice Populations](#). The guide concludes with a list of selected resources with information on research-based early childhood drug use prevention programs.

Read NIDA Director Dr. Nora Volkow blog post [here](#).

About the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA): The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) is a component of the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIDA supports most of the world's research on the health aspects of drug use and addiction. The Institute carries out a large variety of programs to inform policy, improve practice, and advance addiction science. Fact sheets on the health effects of drugs and information on NIDA research and other activities can be found at www.drugabuse.gov, which is now compatible with your smartphone, iPad or tablet. To order publications in English or Spanish, call NIDA's DrugPubs research dissemination center at 1-877-NIDA-NIH or 240-645-0228 (TDD) or email requests to drugpubs@nida.nih.gov. Online ordering is available at drugpubs.drugabuse.gov. NIDA's media guide can be found at www.drugabuse.gov/publications/media-guide/dear-journalist, and its easy-to-read website can be found at www.easyread.drugabuse.gov. You can follow NIDA on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#).

About the National Institutes of Health (NIH): NIH, the nation's medical research agency, includes 27 Institutes and Centers and is a component of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH is the primary federal agency conducting and supporting basic, clinical, and translational medical research, and is investigating the causes, treatments, and cures for both common and rare diseases. For more information about NIH and its programs, visit www.nih.gov.

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