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## Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E): Special Consideration for Students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

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# **DRUG ABUSE RESISTANCE EDUCATION (D.A.R.E.): SPECIAL CONSIDERATION FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING**

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## **Abstract**

Prevention programming in the area of alcohol and other drug abuse had made significant progress in the past several years. From the scare tactics and testimonials of recovering addicts we have progressed to efforts aimed at building self esteem and teaching refusal skills. Students who are deaf or hard of hearing often continue to experience a lack of quality prevention services. Because information from the media is often inaccessible to these students and because school and community based programs often do not take into account the special cultural and communication considerations of this population, their knowledge and skill base often lag behind that of their hearing peers. This project is an attempt to make one proactive prevention program accessible, meaningful and beneficial for students who are deaf or hard of hearing.

District. The program was designed to use uniformed law enforcement officers to teach a formal substance use prevention curriculum to students in a classroom setting. The D.A.R.E. program is meant to equip elementary children with the skills for resisting peer pressure to experiment with tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Since its inception in Los Angeles, the program has come into wide use across the United States and has acquired an excellent reputation as a quality prevention program.

In November, 1989, two officers from the Faribault, Minnesota Police Department attended the 80 hour D.A.R.E. officer training course in Los Angeles. Upon their return, the officers made plans to implement the curriculum in the Faribault Public Schools. Detective Roger Johnson approached the administration at the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf with a proposal to offer the D.A.R.E. program to a class at the Academy. After consultation with staff at the Academy, the program was offered to Academy students at the sixth grade level just as it is being taught in the district. Katherine Sandberg, then a classroom teacher and Chemical Health Specialist at the Academy, was selected to assist Johnson in implementation of the program. Sessions were

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## **History of the D.A.R.E. Program**

The Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Program was developed in 1983 as a cooperative effort by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles Unified School

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held with the sixth grade classroom teachers and the Reading Language Specialist to plan for the incorporation of D.A.R.E. vocabulary and concepts into the language curriculum. The seventeen week core curriculum was first implemented in January, 1990.

The D.A.R.E. curriculum has now been used for three years at the Minnesota State Academy for the Deaf and has also been used with hearing impaired mainstream students in the Faribault Public Schools. In all cases the full 17 week core curriculum as originally presented to the students by Officer Johnson is used. Ms. Sandberg served as educational consultant and also as interpreter at the Academy. The regular classroom interpreter was used in the mainstream setting which Ms. Sandberg observed. The lessons of the core curriculum include:

- Introduction/Practices for Personal Safety
- Drug Use and Misuse
- Consequences
- Resisting Pressure to Use Drugs
- Resistance Techniques—Ways to Say No
- Building Self Esteem
- Assertiveness: A Response Style
- Managing Stress Without Taking Drugs
- Media Influences on Drug Use
- Decision Making and Risk Taking
- Alternatives to Drug Use
- Role Modeling
- Forming a Support System
- Ways to Deal with Pressure from Gangs
- Taking a Stand
- Culmination

The integrity of the D.A.R.E. curriculum was maintained but modifications were made to accommodate the communication needs, social skills and reading abilities of the students in the groups. Each different group of students presented some unique characteristics and special challenges. At times, there was wide variation in reading and language abilities. Some students

demonstrated additional educational impediments such as vision problems including Usher's syndrome, learning difficulties or behavior concerns. The program had to meet the needs of a wide range of children in each of the classes.

Care was taken to ensure consistency of signs used within the D.A.R.E. program. In cases where students knew, used and understood a particular sign, that sign was used. In cases of unfamiliar words or concepts, students were taught what sign would be used and the meaning of the sign. There was also regular communication with classroom teachers about what signs were being used in the program. That way the same signs could be used when vocabulary and concepts were reinforced in language lessons or other contexts.

As is often the case, vocabulary sometimes presented problems in D.A.R.E. lessons. New vocabulary and concepts were taught before beginning lessons. In addition to providing definitions, in depth exploration of the vocabulary helped ensure genuine understanding of the word and concept. At times, work that was designed to be done independently was done as a group. The use of overhead transparencies or posters was helpful in presenting vocabulary. Pictures or examples on posters served to enhance understanding.

A variety of seating arrangements was tried. Important considerations in choosing seating arrangements were: sufficient room for comfort; a writing surface is necessary; a clear line of vision to the instructor, interpreter and each other is needed for full benefit. Large tables and chairs arranged in a "U" shape proved to be the most accommodating.

Emphasis was put on covering the most important concepts of the lesson. At times, it was not possible to cover the entire lesson as printed in the manual. By screening the lesson and prioritizing items which met the needs of the students, decisions were made about what to

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present. Classroom teachers also assisted in completing written work although out of class work was kept to a minimum. Preference was given to a hands-on approach whenever possible. This was most appealing to students and proved most effective.

Group size needs to take into account a number of factors. The space in the room and the furniture accommodations are important considerations. The number of adult helpers available and the degree of student diversity regarding social skills, academic ability and communication proficiency also influence group size.

The D.A.R.E. program at the Minnesota Academy for the Deaf invited teachers to participate in the sessions. Teachers were kept informed of D.A.R.E. lessons through written memos and verbal communication. The inclusion of classroom teachers in the process has two important benefits. First, teachers become familiar with the program allowing for integration of D.A.R.E. concepts into the daily routine. Secondly, more adults are available for monitoring behavior, assisting students and demonstrating role playing in the mainstream setting.

The completion of the D.A.R.E. program with a culmination activity helped to recognize students for their accomplishments. Students performed skits featuring the eight ways to say no to drugs as a part of the culmination. One class presented ways that they could resist the pressure to use drugs. Local and state government and business representative were welcomed to the ceremony in addition to parents, staff and fellow students.

In these experiences, the D.A.R.E. program was felt to be a very workable and beneficial

program for student who are deaf or hard of hearing. The hands-on approach of the curriculum is compatible with the learning styles of the students. The kinds of adaptations needed could be made without compromising the integrity of a curriculum. The students and teachers felt the experience to be fun and of value. The opportunity for the students to interact with a law enforcement official and member of the community was unique. With good cooperative effort on the part of the school and the law enforcement agency, it is possible to give students who are deaf or hard of hearing access to a quality substance use prevention program.

### Training

The experiences described above led to the development of a training package which can provide trained D.A.R.E. officers with information and skills to conduct a quality D.A.R.E. program for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The package consists of a three day training in which officers learn about deafness and its implications for teaching D.A.R.E. In the training, officers learn about culture, communication, and educational strategies. Roles and responsibilities, program recommendations and lesson by lesson modifications are covered in the training and in the accompanying manual. Notes about each lesson in the manual provide suggestions for modification, alternative approaches and teaching techniques. Recently, the curriculum received the approval of the National D.A.R.E. Training Center Policy Advisory Board which authorizes the use of the adapted curriculum.