

## Reconnecting Youth

Website <http://www.reconnectingyouth.com/>

Reconnecting Youth: A Peer Group Approach to Building Life Skills (RY) is a school-based prevention program for high school youth at risk for potential school dropout. These youth may exhibit multiple behavioral problems, such as substance abuse, aggression, depression, or suicide-risk behaviors. RY uses a partnership model involving peers, parents, and school personnel to deliver interventions that address the three central program goals:

- Increased school performance
- Decreased drug involvement
- Increased mood management

Students work toward these goals by participating in a comprehensive, sustained, semester-long high school class that integrates small-group work and life-skills training models to effectively enhance youth's personal and social protective factors. RY students learn, practice, and apply self-esteem enhancement strategies, decision-making skills, personal control strategies, and interpersonal communication techniques.

### Target Audience

The program targets high school-age youth who are at risk of potential school dropout, in grades 9–12 (ages 14–18) in suburban, urban and rural areas, though it may also be used with middle school youth. RY is effective with multicultural groups from diverse racial/ethnic populations as well as monocultural groups. It is effective with youth at suicide risk as well as those at risk for potential dropout and drug involvement. RY has been adapted by others for use in alternative high schools, juvenile correction programs, group homes, and middle schools.

### Program Components

RY has four major components:

- The **RY Class**—a daily (or block-scheduled) semester-long class, taken for credit, and covering five units: Getting Started, Self-Esteem Enhancement, Decision Making, Personal Control, and Interpersonal Communication. Teachers administer the 90-session curriculum to classes of 10–12 students. A separate student workbook includes more than 250 pages of activities, examples, and worksheets.
- The **Social Bonding Component**—strategies for establishing drug-free activities and friendships and for improving a teenager's bond to school. Both school- and community-based activities are used to encourage and support student bonding to healthy, safe behaviors and lifestyles.
- The **Parent Involvement Component** connects RY students, parents, and the school. Parents are essential for providing support at home for day-to-day life skills learned in RY. Parent support is encouraged through ongoing contact between the RY teacher or program staff and the parents.

- The **School System Crisis Response Team**—a detailed plan with team responsibilities and timelines for school-based suicide prevention and post-suicide intervention, geared toward identifying and countering high-risk behaviors, such as suicide and suicidal attempts.

## Training and Technical Assistance

Program implementation and student outcomes depend heavily on the classroom teacher, coordinator, and administration, who are required to undergo training to administer the curriculum and provide assistance to participating youth. The classroom teacher is aided by a supportive administration and a trained RY coordinator who provides in-class support through observation and regular supervision meetings. The RY classroom teacher must undergo four days of initial training; the RY coordinator takes the same four-day training plus one or two days of additional training in teacher supervision, supportive motivation, and how to coordinate implementation of RY components and monitor implementation fidelity. Additional training and consultation is available if requested. Key personnel, including administrative staff (e.g., principals, assistant principals, district personnel), school support personnel (e.g., attendance, student support), and parents, should also be involved in program implementation. A one-day Administrator Training is available for this group and is recommended prior to implementation. All parties must meet frequently to discuss implementation. Evaluation is recommended to track implementation fidelity and student outcomes and to support sustained funding.

## Costs

The four-day training ranges from \$8,000 (for 6–8 participants) to \$14,000 (for 14–16 participants). The cost of the RY curriculum is \$299.95+S/H; the RY student notebook is \$24.95+S/H (reduced rates for bulk orders are available). Additional direct and indirect costs associated with implementing RY include staff (i.e., .2 FTE for each RY teacher/class and .2–1.0 FTE for an RY coordinator), training and evaluation, school bonding activities, classroom supplies, and materials.

## Evaluation Results

A quasi-experimental design with repeated measures was used to test the efficacy of the RY indicated preventive intervention. Relative to controls, high-risk youth participating in RY demonstrated the following:

- 18% improvement in grades in all classes
- 7.5% increase in credits earned per semester
- 54% decrease in hard drug use
- 48% decrease in anger control and aggression problems
- 32% decline in perceived stress
- 23% increase in self-efficacy (sense of personal control)