



## Research Snapshot

# Increasing peer resistance skills through a school-based intervention



### What you need to know:

#### What is this research about?

The Fourth R is an evidence-based intervention in schools that teaches youth how to have healthy relationships. Students who participate in the program learn strategies that can reduce their likelihood of engaging in peer pressure scenarios. In addition to a randomized control trial (RCT), observational data were collected three months after the Fourth R was completed with 196 9th graders. Students participated in role-play scenarios with older student actors. The frequency of peer resistance skills used by students was recorded to compare Fourth R and non-Fourth R students. Results indicated the program was effective in teaching students the skills required to reduce negative behaviour in peer groups.

*“The Fourth R instructs students in positive relationship skills, such as negotiation and delay, for navigating challenging peer and dating scenarios...Students who received the intervention were more likely to demonstrate negotiation skills and less likely to yield to negative pressure.”*

#### What did the researchers do?

Students from six schools that were part of a larger RCT participated in role-play scenarios. 196 grade 9 students participated (56% female). Role-play scenarios were designed to elicit peer resistant behaviour to peer pressure scenarios.

The research team examined youths' peer resistance skills after exposure to a healthy relationships curriculum. Through the use of role-play, trained observers recorded the frequency of participation in peer resistance skills. Results indicated that youth who participated in the healthy relationships program were more likely to demonstrate peer resistance skills when pressured to use drugs or alcohol, have unsafe sex, or witness peer violence perpetration at a higher rate than students who had not participated in the curriculum.

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The frequency of skills taught within the Fourth R were coded by researchers who did not know which youth had participated in the Fourth R or not. In addition, a panel of teachers rated the overall effectiveness of youths' interpersonal communication and peer resistance skills.

#### What are peer resistance skills?

Peer resistance skills refer to tactics used by adolescents when confronted with peer pressure scenarios. Positive peer resistance skills tend to lead to positive peer resistance outcomes, whereas negative resistance skills do not.

There are three positive peer resistance skills youth are taught in the Fourth R that assist youth in overcoming peer pressure: delay, avoiding participation in the situation or changing the topic with the peer; refusal, just saying “no”; and negotiation, compromising on the activity they will engage in together. There are two negative peer resistance skills youth are taught which are generally not effective at producing positive outcomes in peer resistance scenarios: yielding, caving into the peer pressure; and compliance, simply agreeing with the peer and going along with what was discussed.

### What did the researchers find?

Youth who participated in the Fourth R were seven times more likely to use delay and twice as likely to use negotiation tactics to remove themselves from a peer pressure situation. Girls were more likely to use delay tactics than boys and an equal numbers of girls and boys used negotiation tactics. Youth in the control and intervention groups both used refusal skills just as much as one another. The teacher panel rated the Fourth R youth as more effective in every area.

Most students are taught in the school environment to deal with peer pressure by just saying no. Thus, the researchers suggest that it makes sense that all students would attempt to use refusal when presented with peer pressure. Control students were more likely to yield to the peer pressure when only using refusal skills than their intervention group counterparts.

### How can you use this research?

Youth can be taught peer resistance skills. Teaching students to just say no does not appear to be sufficient for them to navigate peer pressure effectively. In order to reduce the

risk of unhealthy sexual behaviour, peer violence, and substance abuse, more resistance skills need to be taught to youth. In the Fourth R, students were taught multiple avenues to navigate unsafe peer scenarios. It appears that negotiation is more effective than just saying no. It also appears that having more than one tool to utilize in a peer pressure situation is more effective as well.

### Original Research Article:

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Wolfe, D.A., Crooks, C.V., Chiodo, D., Hughes, R., & Ellis, W. (2012). Observations of adolescent peer resistance skills following a classroom-based healthy relationship program: A post-intervention comparison. *Prevention Science*, 13, 196-205.

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