



RECOVERY & PREVENTION
RESOURCES
of Delaware and Morrow Counties

Natural Helpers

Natural Helpers: A Peer Helping Peer Program

The Natural Helpers program is a peer helping peer program. It is based on the premise that students go to their friends for help and advice with problems. This program is designed to increase helping skills of youth who are identified as the "helpers" by their peers. Through the Natural Helpers program, "peer helpers," increase their problem solving, helping, and referral skills by completing a two-day training retreat. After the training, the Natural Helpers apply their skills when helping their friends with problems through existing informal peer helping networks in their schools. The training also strengthens peer helpers' ability to identify and refer students to adults or professionals for help in appropriate problem situations.

Research indicates that when

teens have problems, they tend to seek help first from their friends. Natural Helpers are students who are identified by their peers as someone to whom they go for help when they have a problem. An anonymous survey is distributed throughout selected grades in each participating school to identify peer helpers. Once students are identified as "helpers" by their peers, they are asked to participate in the Natural Helpers program.

The Natural Helpers program consists of an initial training retreat and ongoing training sessions during the year. At the initial two-day training event, helpers are taught skills to use with their friends. Students learn how to take care of themselves, work as a team, show

care and concern, express limits, recognize situations which require adult help, and make referrals for other help. Additional skills are taught at the on-going training sessions.

During the 2004-2005 school year, three middle schools from two school districts in Delaware County participated in Natural Helpers. 50 new Natural Helpers from the schools completed the retreat training. An additional 28 Natural Helpers who had been trained in previous years continued to be active in the program.

Natural Helpers: Peers helping peers

During the 2004-2005 school year, the helpers reported helping their peers with 449 problems. The most commonly reported problem were friend relationship issues. Other identified problem areas included sports-related problems, romantic relationships, academic pressure, and stress.

- Friend Relationships: 95 problems
- Sports-Related Problems: 56 problems
- Romantic Relationships: 55 problems

- Academic Pressures: 52 problems
- Stress: 40 problems

Serious, life threatening problems were identified by the helpers. These included: alcohol and drug abuse (18), physical abuse/violence (9), suicide (8), and sexual abuse (6). Though these problems were identified less frequently, the helpers are trained to deal with these issues at the retreat and to refer their peers to professionals and/or trusted adults.

The helpers identified using

helping skills that were taught at the retreat to help their peers. The helpers reported listening to their peers about their problems 84% of the time. They also recognized that a friend had a problem before talking with them 60% of the time.

The Natural Helpers reported improved helping skills after participating in the program. There was a significant improvement in the knowledge of these skills at the end of the school year, $p < 0.001$. 43 of the 49 participants who completed the assessment showed improvement in their helping skills.

Delaware Prevention Programs 2005 Summary Report

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PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

- The Natural Helpers reported helping their peers with 449 problems during the 2004-2005 school year.
- At the end of the school year, 88% of helpers demonstrated improvements in helping skills taught at the retreat
- Participants in the Natural Helpers Program reported significantly improved communication skills at the end of the school year.
- 50% of program participants improved decision making skills by the end of the school year.



Helpers Report Improved Communication Skills

When helping someone with a problem, good communication skills are essential. Participants in the Natural Helpers Program reported significantly improved communication skills at the end of the school year.

The Natural Helpers program focuses on the following commu-

nication skills:

- Words matching non-verbal cues.
- Speaking in a clear and specific way.
- Asking questions when something is unclear.
- Repeating what is said in

your own words to make sure you understood correctly.

58% of the participants reported improved skills at the end of the year.

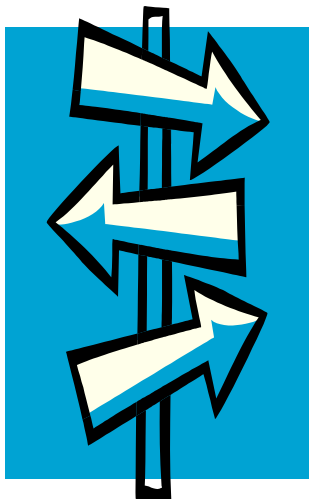
Peer Helpers Reported Improved Helping Skills at the End of the Year

The primary emphasis in the 2 day training retreat is to provide youth with the skills to help their friends/peers when they are having problems. This includes learning how to: take care of themselves, work as a team, know when friends need help, express care and concern, express limits, recognize situations which require adult help, and make referrals for other help.

At the end of the school year, 88% of the helpers reported improved helping skills. There was a significant improvement ($p < 0.001$) in knowledge of

helping skills,

At the end of the school year, the greatest increase in knowledge of helping skills was their reported ability to make sure that their friends knew about existing community resources when they have a serious problem. This was a primary focus during the training. It is extremely important that peer helpers are able to refer their friends to the appropriate people and resources if a serious problem exists.



50% of Helpers Reported Improved Decision Making Skills.

50% of the participants in the program improved decision making skills by the end of the school year.

Key steps in the decision making process include:

- Gathering all the information that is needed before making a decision.

- Thinking about the consequences of each choice before making a decision.
- Making the best choice based on all the information available.

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Funded in part by:

Ohio Department of
Alcohol and Drug
Addiction Services

