

PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE PREVENTION PROGRAMS¹



Comprehensive: Strategies should include multiple components and take place in multiple settings to address a wide range of risk and protective factors across the social ecology (i.e. individual, relationship, community, societal level changes).



Varied Teaching Methods: Strategies should use varied teaching methods to address multiple learning processes, including active, skills-based components.



Sufficient Dosage: Emphasize high contact/exposure with participants within a concentrated timeframe; reinforce the key messages over time through expanded/sustained prevention strategies.



Theory-Driven: Preventive strategies should have a purposeful justification or logical rationale. "Theory" is a cohesive set of ideas about why a problem exists and how a change can be created.



Positive Relationships: Programs should foster strong, stable, positive relationships between children/youth and adults, parents and children, youth and youth, and adults and adults; and should support the development of gender equality, self-esteem, respect for others, and healthy sexuality within peer groups for children, youth and adults.



Reach People of All Ages in Developmentally Appropriate Ways: Activities should happen at a time developmentally that can have maximal impact in a participant's life (i.e. promote protective factors prior to the developmental stage in which a problem behavior typically emerges).



Socio-Culturally Relevant: Programs should be developed, implemented and evaluated in collaboration with a representative cross-section of community members to incorporate diverse cultural beliefs, practices, and community norms.



Evaluation: Include systematic methods to determine program effectiveness, promote continuous quality improvement, and demonstrate impact/outcomes. Whenever possible, it is most effective to use Evidence-based Interventions with fidelity to the model.



Well-Trained Staff and Integration with Agency Mission: Programs need to be implemented by staff members who are sensitive, competent, and have received sufficient training, support, and resources. Prevention should be part of an organization's mission and strategic plan.



Mobilizes the Community: Programs should aim to a) get people to a point of action where they act differently as a result of the program; and b) increase the numbers of people who are engaged.



Cost Effective/Sustainability Mechanisms: Programs should demonstrate that resources are spent wisely; result in positive changes in knowledge, behaviors, policies and practices; and build in ways to sustain the prevention messages and programming beyond a particular funding period.



Integrate Peer Learning and Leadership: Programs should include peer-led activities and actively support emerging constituent and community leadership, especially of underrepresented or historically marginalized populations.

¹ Principles 1-9 are adapted from Guidelines for the Primary Prevention of Sexual Violence & Intimate Partner Violence, Virginia Sexual and Domestic Violence Action Alliance (2008) and based on practitioner experience as well as earlier research by Nation, M., Crusto, C., Wandersman, A., Kumpfer, K.I., Seybolt, D., Morrissey-Kane, E.I., and Davino, K. (2002) "What works in prevention: Principles of Effective Prevention Programs." American Psychologist, 58, 449-456. Principles 10-12 are suggested additions by Transforming Communities: Technical Assistance, Training and Resource Center (TC-TAT). This list is a work in progress.

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Positive Youth and Adults: Engage youth and adults, promote gender equality, and support youth and adults.



Reach People of Developmentally Appropriate Stages: Tailor prevention strategies to the developmental stage of the target audience.



Socio-Culturally Relevant: Adapt prevention strategies to be representative of the target audience's community norms and values.



Evaluation: Include formative and summative evaluation to measure program improvement, and use evidence-based practices to inform program development.



Well-Trained Staff: Ensure staff members who are trained in prevention strategies and have the necessary skills to implement them effectively.



Mobilizes the Community: Engage the community as a result of the prevention program to create a supportive environment for behavior change.



Cost Effective/Sustainable: Prevention programs should result in positive outcomes and be sustainable through the use of prevention messages and strategies.



Integrate Peer Leadership: Engage emerging constituencies and peer leaders to reach and influence target populations.



SUFFICIENT DOSAGE

What is Proven to Lead to Behavioral Change Over Time?

Effective prevention programs emphasize high contact and exposure with participants over time. Research has shown that one-time programs focused on raising awareness rarely produce behavioral change. Also, shortening curricula and implementing it without fidelity to the model rendered programs ineffective.^{1,2}

Effective prevention programs reinforce key messages over time. We know that programs that lead to the highest level of behavioral change had clear goals and consisted of longer programs. Those shown to be most effective had many sessions (12 or more) and multiple sessions over multiple years.^{1,3}

¹ Kirby, D., Rolleri, L. & Wilson, M.M. (2007). Tool to Assess the Characteristics of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs. ETR and Healthy Teen Network.

² Kirby, D., Laris, BA, & Rolleri, I. (2006) Sex and HIV Education Programs for Youth: Their Impact and Important Characteristics. Washington, DC. Healthy Teen Network

³ Degue, S., Valle, L. A., Holt, M. K., Massetti, G. M., Matjasko, J. L., & Tharp, A. T. (2014). A systematic review of primary prevention strategies for sexual violence perpetration. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 19*(4), 346–362. <http://doi.org/10.1016/j.avb.2014.05.004>

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