

10 Characteristics of Effective Sexuality and HIV Education Programs

Research has identified a range of curricula that have been shown to delay the initiation of sexual activity, decrease the frequency of sexual activity, and/or increase the use of contraception ultimately lowering rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. While each of the curricula is unique and they each target different populations of youth, there are common characteristics which they all share. These characteristics can be used, where appropriate, to help programmers design effective interventions for the population they are serving.

The first option in selecting an intervention should always be to implement, with fidelity, a **science based approach** that has been demonstrated to be effective with a similar population. If this is not possible, the following characteristics may be a helpful guide for selecting alternate programs or designing new interventions.

- 1) Effective programs focus on reducing one or more sexual behaviors that lead to unintended pregnancy or HIV/STD infection.
- 2) Effective programs are based on theoretical approaches that have been demonstrated to be effective in influencing other health-related risky behavior.
- 3) Effective programs give a clear message about sexual activity and condom or contraceptive use and continually reinforce that message.
- 4) Effective programs provide basic accurate information about the risks of teen sexual activity and about methods of avoiding intercourse or using protection against pregnancy and STDs.
- 5) Effective programs include activities that address social pressures that influence sexual behavior.
- 6) Effective programs provide modeling of and practice with communication, negotiation, and refusal skills.
- 7) Effective programs employ a variety of teaching methods designed to involve participants and have them personalize the information.
- 8) Effective programs incorporate behavioral goals, teaching methods, and materials that are appropriate to the age, sexual experience, and culture of the students.
- 9) Effective programs last a sufficient length of time to complete important activities adequately.
- 10) Effective programs select teachers or peer leaders who believe in the program they are implementing and then provide training for them.

Source: Kirby, D. (2001)

For assistance incorporating the 10 Characteristics of Effective Sexuality and HIV Education Programs into your prevention program, please contact Forrest L. Alton, Associate Director, at falton@teenpregnancysc.org, or Erin Johnson, CDC Project Coordinator, at ejohnson@teenpregnancysc.org.