

SECTION 2

CREATING AND

MAINTAINING

EFFECTIVE ACTION

(general principles)



PRINCIPLES AND RELATED ACTIONS

Our challenge is to present messages about health issues to other young people which will:

- inform them;
- challenge them;
- encourage them to ask questions and seek additional information;
- stimulate them to discuss the relevance of these issues to their lives;
- help them choose healthy and non-risky behaviours.

The following general principles are designed to help the reader develop information and educational materials to convey key messages in a way that will have maximum impact and relevance to young people's lives.

The principles document an approach to developing health education materials that reflects the language, style, concerns and values of young people around the Commonwealth.

PRINCIPLE 1: YOUNG PEOPLE AS AN ACTION FORCE

Young people are an action force, not a target group. Because we have a unique understanding of the health issues affecting us, we must be involved in all aspects of the design and development of initiatives that are aimed at us.

We have the necessary insights and particular skills to make a significant contribution to promoting our own mental, physical and spiritual health.

We are realistic about the problems we are facing.

We can be role models to other young people to give them clear messages about their health.

We have the initiative, energy and ideas, and can organise ourselves to take action.

We understand the behaviours of young people which put us at risk and we recognise what will motivate us to change.

We understand the styles and trends that need to be reflected in any programmes directed at us.

Since young people are often those most affected by health issues, such as HIV/AIDS, drug use and unwanted pregnancies, we have a vested interest in doing something to protect ourselves, our friends and our families.

As peers, we can be among the most powerful influences on other young people.

Principles in action

Positive and living squads (PALS) Zambia

This group is based in Lusaka and has been in existence since 1992. It involves young people who are HIV positive and have decided to use their sero-status to help themselves and others to live with hope.

The network was established by young people in recognition both that we are often those most vulnerable and most affected by HIV/AIDS, and of the need for co-ordinated effort in support of HIV/AIDS programmes for youth. The PALS network concentrates on projects that generate income for its members, and on education, psychological support and human rights issues.

Although being HIV positive may be stigmatising, the group found that it brought them together. Since its inception, PALS has helped reduce the stigma of being HIV positive in Zambia. The network has allowed the young people involved to formulate strategies, and implement, monitor and evaluate their own programmes to ensure success.

Thinking about your situation

What are some ways you can think of to draw together groups of young people who may be interested in tackling particular youth health issues in your community?

issue	young people who may be interested/involved	strategies for involving them
Examples		
unwanted teenage pregnancies	young single mothers who have unintentionally become pregnant	form a support group of these young mothers and plan education talks to young men and women in schools about the problems of being a young mother
smoking	young people involved in local sporting activities	get the young people in a sports team to promote the benefits of not smoking and having a healthy, sporting lifestyle.

Now you add two examples of what might be appropriate in your local community...

issue	young people who may be interested/involved	strategies for involving them
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PRINCIPLE 2: SPECIAL PERSPECTIVE ON OUR HEALTH

As young people we have an informed perspective on our own health needs.

We are less vulnerable to the diseases that affect the very young and the very old. Our health problems are often a result of exploratory and experimental behaviours, which are a part of normal human development like sex.

As we do not generally have a history of health-damaging habits, such as smoking and other substance use, our health problems are largely related to our behaviour and the situations in which we find ourselves.

At a time when young people are experimenting, we need to be given information and advice about how to minimise the risks to ourselves rather than be told simply not to do it, as this may often have the reverse effect.

We often experiment with sex and drugs at a time of strain with parents and elders. This can make it difficult to discuss these behaviours. It is important to develop materials which address sensitive issues, such as sexual behaviour and alcohol and other drug use, while respecting cultural traditions.

Many of the problems we face are exaggerated by our lack of experience in the wider world. Sometimes our impulsive sexual behaviour and non-use of contraceptives is complicated by our use of alcohol and other drugs.

Principles in action

Young people's views on a particular issue may differ from that of their elders or parents. It is important to understand how both groups may view an issue or problem differently.

issue	the adult view	young people's view
HIV/AIDS	a moral problem	a practical prevention problem
	a fear to be used to stop unacceptable behaviour	a threat to fun
	brought on by the immoral behaviours of today's youth	unfair, as our parents didn't experience it
alcohol	an everyday substance	helps relaxation and excitement
	something they have learned to handle	important part of social scene
	a phase they went through	proves adult status
sex	something young people (particularly their own children) should delay as long as possible	experiencing new desires and feelings

Thinking about your situation

Think of some other issues that young people in your community may view differently from their parents and elders. Make a list of these, and write down what the parents'/elders' view might be and what the young people's view might be.

issue	the adult view	young people's view
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PRINCIPLE 3: COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY

It is important to communicate messages to young people in a style and language that is attractive and accessible to us. This is more likely to capture our attention, interest and motivate us, and so convey the message effectively.

Using the language that young people use often means using words that older people find difficult to accept. However, to address health problems realistically it is important to communicate effectively.

Using young people's language will help to us to relate to the message better, rather than dismiss it as dull, boring and patronising.

Language is always changing and it's important to keep updating our messages. The language we use should be persuasive and involving rather than directing and commanding.

Adults sometimes use language that is offensive to young people, by calling us delinquents, and so on. These words should be avoided.

Young people often use language popular among ourselves, but adjust when we go home. This can make it difficult for adults to understand what is important to us.

Principles in action

These are two different ways of presenting information that may be particularly appealing to young people.

Cartoon



Rap song by Anthony Bonea (Trinidad)

Take heed to the message
cause there is something that you missed
choices are made and
they involve risk

Understand I'm not preaching
but there is something you lacked
it's knowledge, information
and this is a fact

Yo wisdom is granted
to each boy and girl
the truth is realising that we are the world

We're the parents of tomorrow
put your life on track
always keep going forward
and never turn back

You got the power inside
so don't be affected
ignore the peer pressure
and never feel rejected

You are young in the body
and also young in the mind
use it positively
and don't waste time

There are ups and downs
there are rights and wrong
you keep on climbing
and never come down

To all the girls and boys
who are listening and willing
do things with your life
that makes the world worth living

Thinking about your situation

Make a list of some of the words young people in your community often use. What do they mean? Think about how you might incorporate them into the messages you are developing.

To start you off here is a list of Bajun words used by young people in Barbados. Write the equivalent word that young people in your community would use. Then add other words that tend to be used by young people in your community.

Bajun word	meaning	your word
bad	good	
pushing volts	looks good (woman)	
rude boy	looks good (man)	
vexx	angry	
sick	good	
rough	good	
massive	popular	
don	guy who has it all	

PRINCIPLE 4: BE RELEVANT AND CULTURALLY APPROPRIATE

The content of messages needs to be relevant to us as young people, as well as being factually correct and culturally appropriate.

Young people don't like being told what to do, so the way messages are phrased is very important for us. We must avoid ordering other young people around.

The information in our messages must be accurate so that we are able to make informed choices about our health behaviours. Exaggerating the risks is likely to be counterproductive to what we are trying to achieve.

Base the message on what we know to be important to us as young people. For example, we are very often concerned about our appearance and grooming; a message that smoking will make our breath smell bad is more likely to have an impact than telling us that we will die of lung cancer in 30 years time.

As a result of our exposure to a number of influences (including education, mass media and travel), our

perspective on culture may be different from an adult's perspective. So while it is desirable to preserve our cultures and communities, it is also important to recognise that they are changing. Health programmes relevant to us should reflect those changes.

Young people are more likely to take in messages that are presented in a humorous and colourful style. Comic strips and cartoons are especially popular. This cartoon shows one approach to preventing the spread of HIV/AIDS.



Thinking about your situation

Think about what is important to young people in your community. Use this information to form the basis of the messages you are conveying to them. The following list came from a group of young people in the Gambia.

What is important to young people in:

the Gambia	in your community
friendship	
popularity	
employment	
being recognised in society	
money	
being liked and accepted	
self confidence	
attractiveness	
having a goal in life	

PRINCIPLE 5: COMMUNICATE MESSAGES IN APPROPRIATE WAYS

The ways of communicating with young people should be particularly relevant and appealing to us. These may be different from those that appeal to the general population.

For example, we are less likely to read pamphlets. More effective ways to communicate with young people include: t-shirts, comics, magazines, posters, television, key rings, badges, stickers, youth oriented radio programmes, youth gatherings, music, drama, dance, gossip and informal discussion.

In communities where literacy levels are low it is important for us to find ways to communicate messages that don't rely on young people being able to read. Mass media has a powerful influence on our attitudes and behaviours. It may be possible to use this influence in a dynamic and interactive way to promote health issues with other young people.

In developing countries, mass media is often confined to reaching people who live in urban areas. Therefore it is important to look for ways to reach rural young people.

Traditional ways of communicating information that have been part of our cultures for a long time – such as drama, puppets, dance festivals, parades, poetry, storytelling and songs – can be very effective. These can be presented in markets, at bus stops, in school halls, and so on.

Each mode of communication is suited to different messages and to different target groups. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages according to what it is to be used for.

We need to select methods that are simple, easily available and suitable for communicating messages that meet the local needs of young people.



Principles in action

This table shows some different modes of communication and the advantages and disadvantages of each. Think about the modes that would be particularly relevant to young people in your community. Think about what their advantages and disadvantages might be.

Television

advantages

appeals to young people
colourful/flexible
influential/credible
mass audience

disadvantages

expensive
not accessible by everyone
restricted message

Theatre

advantages

appeals to young people
long life
colourful
visual

disadvantages

limited message
can be expensive

Magazine

advantages

long life
detailed information
colourful
low cost
authoritative

disadvantages

not very appealing to
young people
effort to absorb
literacy may be a problem

Poster

advantages

low cost
colourful
visual
appeals to young people

disadvantages

limited message
low impact

Radio

advantages

low cost
appeals to young people
local and friendly
easily absorbed

disadvantages

limited reach
non-visual

T-shirt

advantages

appeals to young people
mass audience
can have a detailed message
entertaining
sociable
popular

disadvantages

limited reach

Thinking about your situation

There are many ways of presenting your messages to young people that might be effective in capturing their attention. Here are some examples from groups of young people around the Commonwealth. Add two examples that might be effective in your community.

In Hong Kong, a group of young people developed a card game which conveyed messages about AIDS transmission and prevention to young people who played the game.

In the British Virgin Islands, young people who had written AIDS prevention messages approached a local disc jockey and asked him to read out the messages in between playing his records.

In Kenya, a group of young people wrote and performed songs and poems about premarital sex, and the dangers of drinking alcohol.

In Zambia, a group of young people conducted role plays with other young people to raise awareness about the use of alcohol and other drugs.

Your examples

