Making Proud Choices!

A Safer-Sex Approach to HIV/STDs and Teen Pregnancy Prevention

Authors

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Overview of the Curriculum

To reduce STD and pregnancy risk related sexual behaviors, young adolescents not only need an awareness of personal vulnerability, but also positive attitudes towards condom-use skills and confidence in their ability to use condoms. The Making Proud Choices! curriculum is designed to meet those needs.

Making Proud Choices! A Safer Sex Approach to STDs, Teen Pregnancy, and HIV prevention curriculum is an eight module curriculum that provides young adolescents with the knowledge, confidence and skills necessary to reduce their risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV and pregnancy by abstaining from sex or using condoms if they choose to have sex. It is based on cognitive-behavioral theories, focus groups and the authors’ extensive experience working with youth. Making Proud Choices! is an adaptation and extension of the original Be Proud! Be Responsible! curriculum in that it integrates teen pregnancy prevention along with HIV/STD prevention.

Goal of the Curriculum

The goal of Making Proud Choices! is to empower young adolescents to change their behavior in ways that will reduce their risk of an unplanned pregnancy or becoming infected with HIV and other STDs. Specifically, this curriculum emphasizes that adolescents can reduce their risk for STDs, HIV and pregnancy by using a condom, if they choose to have sex.

Curriculum Objectives

At the completion of the Making Proud Choices! curriculum, adolescents will:

- Have increased their knowledge of HIV, STDs and pregnancy prevention
- Believe in the value of safer sex, including abstinence
- Have improved their ability to negotiate abstinence/safer-sex practices
- Have increased their ability to use condoms correctly
- Have stronger intentions to use condoms if they have sex
- Have a lower incidence of HIV/STD sexual risk-taking behavior
- Take pride in choosing responsible sexual behaviors
Content Outline

*Making Proud Choices!* has four major components. One component focuses on goals, dreams and adolescent sexuality. The second component is knowledge, covering information about the etiology, transmission and prevention of STDs, HIV, and teenage pregnancy. The third component focuses on beliefs and attitudes. The fourth component focuses on skills and self-efficacy. It covers negotiation-refusal skills and condom use skills and provides time for practice, reinforcement, and support. **Please note: A required component of the curriculum has students practice both the skills of using a condom and the skills of negotiating for their use.**

- Module 1:
  Getting to Know You and Steps to Making Your Dreams Come True
- Module 2:
  The Consequences of Sex: Pregnancy
- Module 3:
  The Consequences of Sex: STDs
- Module 4:
  The Consequences of Sex: HIV Infection
- Module 5:
  Attitudes About Sex, HIV & Condom Use
- Module 6:
  Strategies for Preventing HIV Infection: Stop, Think and Act
- Module 7:
  Developing Condom Use and Negotiation Skills
- Module 8:
  Enhancing Refusal and Negotiation Skills
Implementation of the Curriculum

*Making Proud Choices!* was designed to be used with small groups ranging from 6-12 participants, but it can be implemented with larger groups as well. The curriculum can be implemented in various community settings, including schools and youth-serving agencies.

Length

The curriculum has eight hours of content divided into eight 1-hour modules. It can be implemented in eight sessions of sixty minutes each or in four 2-hour modules. In community settings, it can be implemented in a two day format (4 modules each day), four day format (2 modules each day) or an eight day format (1 module each day).

Special Considerations

The curriculum requires the use of a monitor with DVD capabilities.

Theoretical Framework Used in *Making Proud Choices!*

Research shows that curricula are most effective if they are based on a sound theoretical framework. The *Making Proud Choices!* curriculum draws upon three theories: the Social Cognitive Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action and its extension, the Theory of Planned Behavior. These theories have been shown to be of great value in understanding a wide range of health related behaviors.

Two major concepts derive from these theories that are included in *Making Proud Choices!:

Unique Features of the *Making Proud Choices!* curriculum

- The goals and dreams activity focuses on having the adolescents consider their goals for the future and how participating in unsafe sex might thwart the attainment of their goals.
- Video clips are used to depict young adolescents in various situations. These clips evoke feelings, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about HIV/STDs, sexual involvement, and HIV/STDs prevention skills.
- The role-play scenarios are designed to provide participants with the confidence and skills to negotiate condom use. These realistic role-play scenarios provide adolescents with a variety of ways in which they could use the prevention skills that they learn in this program.
- The curriculum incorporates the “Making Proud Choices! Be Proud! Be Responsible!” theme, which encourages the participants to be proud and behave responsibly for themselves, their family, and their community.
Recommended Training

Educators knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, STDs and adolescent sexuality that have experience implementing an STD/HIV prevention curriculum with youth need approximately 6-8 hours of training. The training should include reviewing the curriculum, discussing various issues in the curriculum, its implementation and what is unique, different and reasons for it. In addition, selected lessons should be modeled and the participants should have an opportunity to practice them and receive feedback.

If the educators are not knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS, STDs, adolescent sexuality and have no experience implementing an STD/HIV prevention curriculum with youth, then 24 hours of training are needed. During the training, HIV/AIDS, STD and adolescent pregnancy knowledge and prevention skills should be reviewed and reinforced. Implementation strategies, training issues and the trainees’ comfort level with adolescent sexuality should be discussed. The content of the curriculum should be reviewed and the trainer should walk the educators through the curriculum, as through they were students. A question-and-answer period should be held afterwards. Lastly, the trainee should practice the curriculum and receive performance feedback.

Types of Activities

Making Proud Choices! includes a series of fun and interactive learning experiences designed to increase participation and help adolescents understand the faulty reasoning and decision-making that puts them at risk for STDs, HIV and unplanned pregnancies. Activities are designed to increase comfort with practicing condom use, address concerns about negative effects of practicing safer sex and build skills in condom use and negotiation.

The activities incorporate social cognitive-behavioral skill-building strategies (i.e., presentation, modeling, and the practice of condom use negotiation skills). The curriculum involves culturally sensitive video clips, games, brainstorming, role-playing, skill-building activities and small group discussions that build group cohesion and enhance learning. Each activity lasts only a brief time and involves adolescents getting out of their seats and interacting with each other. In this way, it is possible to maintain interest and attention that might fade during a lecture or lengthy group discussion. Below is a description of the types of activities used in the Making Proud Choices! curriculum.

Three overriding themes provide the Making Proud Choices! curriculum with a unique approach that has proven to be successful with young adolescents:

- The Community and Family Approach

An important component of our approach is the strong emphasis on family and community. Making Proud Choices! emphasizes how HIV/AIDS, STDs, and unintended adolescent pregnancy have affected their community, while addressing the significance of protecting the family and community as a motive to
change individual behavior. The focus on the implications for the family and community to motivate change is different from the traditional exclusive focus on individualistic HIV/AIDS knowledge and individualistic attitudes toward risky behavior. In this connection, the intervention incorporates the “Making Proud Choices! Be Proud! Be Responsible!” theme to encourage the adolescents to be proud of themselves and to use condoms to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of their families and community.

- The Role of Sexual Responsibility and Accountability

Many young adolescents do not express their sexual feelings in a responsible or accountable way. This is evident by the high incidence of STDs and pregnancy among adolescents. It is also illuminated by their self-reports of inconsistent condom use and multiple sexual partners. Young adolescents need to learn how to become sexually responsible and accountable. The Making Proud Choices! curriculum teaches participants to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior, to respect themselves and others, and the importance of developing a positive image. Participants discuss what constitutes sexual responsibility, such as condom use and learn to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior (i.e. that abstinence is the best way to prevent HIV, STD and teen pregnancy, however, if they choose to have sex, they must use a condom).

- The Role of Pride

Adolescence is a difficult period of development. It is a time of confusion, mixed emotions and uncertainty. Adolescents are bombarded with sexual messages from various sources, like TV, music, magazines, friends and their boyfriends/girlfriends. They receive pressure from their peers and boyfriends/girlfriends to have sex. They struggle with issues of self-esteem, self-respect and self-pride. Therefore they need to feel good about themselves, their decisions to practice safer sex and their behaviors. The Making Proud Choices! Curriculum addresses these feelings by emphasizing that one can feel proud and responsible in making safer sex choices. The adolescents’ sense of pride, self-confidence and self-respect regarding their choice to practice safer sex is encouraged and reinforced during the role-plays and other skill-building activities.