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Introduction to Evidence-Based Programs

Evidence-Based Programs 101

Chances are you've heard of evidence-based programs (EBPs) before, but you may not be as clear as to what they are or why EBPs can be a valuable investment for districts that make adolescent sexual health a priority. Let's take a look at a few common questions regarding EBPs...

Are EBPs really that different from other programs?

What is different about EBPs is that they are grounded in strong research methods, are rigorously evaluated, and they **produce positive adolescent behavior change**. In practical terms, the benefits of using an EBP are:

- ▶ They provide a maximum return on investment and are a more efficient use of limited resources. ¹
- ▶ There are many available EBPs shown to work for adolescent sexual health, many evaluated with a diverse range of adolescent populations.
- ▶ They can be **adapted** for your district with the help of program developers and adaptation kits.

What does it mean for a program to be "rigorously evaluated"?

Characteristics of a rigorously evaluated evidence-based program include the following:

- ▶ **Strong research methods were used to evaluate the program, this means:**
 - The program was evaluated using a rigorous study design that included a comparison or control group—that is, one group of youth received the program and the other group did not to allow for comparisons of behavior change across the groups over time.
 - The program evaluation included a sufficient number of youth to test for changes in sexual behavior and recruited and retained a sufficient number of youth to represent the population.
- ▶ **Published in a peer-reviewed journal, this means:**
 - Experts in the field, aside from the program developers, have examined the program's methods, design and outcomes, and found them to be scientifically valid.



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- ▶ **Produced positive behavior changes at least 3 months post-implementation, this means:**
 - The program evaluation demonstrated a positive impact on behaviors such as sexual initiation, number of sexual partners, and condom use that are related to reducing teen pregnancy and HIV or STIs.

Why do resources for identifying EBPs differ on which programs are effective?

Resources for evidence-based programs use different criteria for selecting effective programs. These criteria may differ by:

- ▶ The type of program that may be included
- ▶ The scientific rigor in the evaluation design and methods used
- ▶ The strength of the evaluation results

However, you can trust that the programs listed in the **iCHAMPSS Selection Guide** and in the resources from **Helpful Links: National Lists of EBPs** are effective, evidence-based adolescent sexual health programs.

How do I select an EBP that will work for my school district?

The **SELECT Step** of iCHAMPSS can guide you in selecting an EBP, however, in general:

- ▶ Aim for programs with behavioral and health objectives that reflect your community's needs and values
- ▶ Look for programs that were effective in a population similar to your community
- ▶ Consider the resources you have available, such as staffing, technological resources, and funding
- ▶ Talk with the program developers if you would like more information or have questions on how a specific program can work in your community



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A note on “evidence-informed” programs

You may have come across programs identified as being evidence-informed, rather than evidence-based. Evidence-informed programs are typically based on up-to-date research but have not yet been rigorously evaluated and/or found to elicit behavioral changes in adolescents. Districts should carefully consider whether this type of program can meet their needs.

1. Healthy Teen Network, ETR Associates. Weaving Science and Practice: Frequently Asked Questions About Science-Based Approaches. Baltimore, MD: Healthy Teen Network; 2009. Retrieved from https://rhyclearinghouse.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/docs/19663-Weaving_science_and_practice.pdf