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Communicating Effectively

Strategies for Communicating Effectively

One of the most important components of getting other key stakeholders on board is to provide clear messages to which others are willing to listen and act accordingly. Framing your message is an art. It's not enough to just provide the information. You should provide it in such a way that it is compelling and meaningful but at the same time, alleviates fears so that your audience hears your message.

Here are some tips to help you communicate your message to audiences effectively.

1. **Know your audience.** Be sure you know to whom you are talking and tailor your message to them. Different audiences may require different messages. For example, parents are one of the most important and influential audiences when discussing adolescent sexual health. Messaging to parents should assure them they are the primary sexual health educators for their children and that the sex education curriculum is to supplement their teaching. On the other hand, school district staff may be most concerned about managing any controversy in their district as a result of implementing a new sexual health curriculum. Messaging to them should assure them that most parents support sexual health education in schools. Refer to the [iCHAMPSS Stakeholder Analysis Worksheet](#) to aid you in preparing for different audiences.
2. **Start with a positive message that the audience already believes.** Stress that parents are the primary sexual health educators of their children and schools are committed to partnering with parents on this issue. For example: "We all want our kids to make healthy decisions and take personal responsibility for them."
3. **Always acknowledge the point of view of others as valid.** Keep in mind that each person comes to the table with their own world view and personal history, which may impact how they feel about the given topic. Acknowledge and address their potential fears and uncertainty. Never say others are wrong. Use phrases such as, "that's a great point," "I'm glad you brought that up," and "good question" when responding to the concerns of others.
4. **Avoid blaming anyone;** adopt the attitude that we're all in this together and we need to work together to tackle the issue at hand.
Say this: Parents are the primary sexual health educators for our kids, and their involvement is important.
Not this: Parents aren't doing a good job of talking to their children about sex.



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5. **Avoid being defensive when someone challenges your point of view.** Acknowledge that you hear what they are saying, but stick to the evidence. Don't take their challenge as a personal attack on you. Often these challenges are driven by lack of understanding and/or fear of the unknown.
6. **Avoid mention of ideas and concepts that you don't want considered,** even to say you will prevent them from happening. It may unintentionally hijack your message.
Say this: We want teens to make healthy decisions for their lives.
Not this: We are trying to prevent teens from having sex.
7. **Have prepared responses for the most common misconceptions** that you hear from stakeholders. Refer to the **iCHAMPSS Sexual Health Education Common Myths** fact sheet for more information.
8. **Use one strong and compelling fact or a surprising point that arouses interest.** Use numbers that are easily remembered. For example, almost 25% is better than 23.5%. Avoid large numbers. Most people can't conceive of \$23 million taxpayer cost for Texas births but they can imagine \$8,000 per birth.
9. **Stick to the facts in the data.** Imagine what someone might criticize about the data and prepare how you would respond to their criticism. For example, some people think that the data does not represent their child's school. Acknowledge the concern and present teen birth rate and STD statistics for your school district, as well as data from the Youth Risk Behavior Survey.
10. **Be transparent in the information you share.** Don't leave out information that you fear will be controversial or not well accepted. For example, if your school district chooses a curriculum that includes information on contraception, it is important that you disclose this information in parent communication.

Q: How and where should I use these strategies?

A: Audiences for these effective communication strategies may include *parents, school administrators, community supports, media, and members of the Board of Trustees*. Communicate your messages using these approaches at *parent nights, PTA meetings, SHAC meetings, health fairs, presentations about sexual health education, and at school board meetings*. These strategies can be implemented in one-on-one conversations or in larger forums. The key is to be consistent and allow your audience to feel safe in accepting the messages.