

Tips for Parents: HIV Education

Why do we need AIDS education?

AIDS education offers young people the best chance of avoiding HIV infection. Despite the worldwide explosion of HIV infection and AIDS deaths, AIDS education still isn't given the importance it must be to protect our children. AIDS education, among minority and low-income students in particular, is alarmingly deficient. School administrators just aren't recognizing the important role that education must play in combating this deadly virus.

Over two-thirds of our high school students are sexually active. This means that over two-thirds will have a chance of becoming HIV positive. Unfortunately, too many school administrators still think AIDS is not their problem.

Why the reluctance to provide comprehensive AIDS education?

Public demand for higher educational standards has been heard in our schools. Consequently, school administrators are preoccupied with trying to boost test scores and are reluctant to devote the time needed to implement effective AIDS-education programs. There is also the fear of offending community members who feel that any program advocating the use of condoms is somehow supporting premarital promiscuity.

AIDS education that works

What's needed is an intensive educational effort that has a chance of influencing the sex-related and drug-related behaviors that place young people at risk of becoming infected with HIV. With few exceptions, young people infected with the virus report that they received only minimal instruction about AIDS and HIV in school

Is your school's AIDS education program effective?

To be effective, the program must provide students with three things:

1. **Relevant, useful knowledge.** Although it's important for students to know how HIV is transmitted, the only information your people really need regarding HIV and AIDS is how to avoid becoming infected or, if already infected, how to avoid infecting others.
2. **Interpersonal skills.** Students need skills in dealing with other students so that they can avoid risky situations, escape risky situations they might find themselves in, and either protect themselves or choose abstinence. The primary risky situations that students need to know about are unprotected vaginal and anal sexual intercourse and needle-sharing by drug users.
3. **Motivation to use the knowledge and skills.** Unfortunately, most teenagers feel that they are invulnerable to death or illness. Thus, there is a need to motivate teens to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired. Motivation is crucial to the educational

process. A presentation by HIV-positive teenagers who share the consequences of their sexual activity can have enormous impact on other teenagers.

Peer support

Students must be made to feel vulnerable. Teenagers will usually listen to other teens. In carefully structured same-sex groups led by peers, girls and boys can support one another about remaining abstinent, or, if sexually active, using condoms.

For more information:

Web article:

National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion’s “Guidelines for Effective School Health Education to Prevent the Spread of AIDS”

<http://www.cdc.gov/HealthyYouth/sexualbehaviors/guidelines/guidelines.htm>

Publications:

United Nation’s “Young People: Partners in HIV/AIDS Prevention.” 2004.

World Bank’s “HIV/Aids: A Window of Hope.” 2002

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