

Step 3 Best Practices

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Focus question

Which evidence-based programs can help you reach your goals and desired outcomes?

Step 3 Best Practices introduces you to evidence-based teen pregnancy prevention programs (EBPs). An EBP is a program that research has shown to effectively change at least one key behavior related to teen pregnancy. The needs and resources assessment aided your process of articulating initial health goals and desired outcomes for your program. The logic model helped you to specify what you want to accomplish. Now, we begin to explore ways to achieve your goals. This step introduces you to important information about effective curriculum-based programs that will help you to:

- Examine the key characteristics of successful EBPs.
- Review EBPs that you could adopt.
- Select 2-4 candidate programs to explore further.

Step 3 guides you through a process of finding and selecting EBPs whose goals and desired outcomes match yours. This effort will help focus your work and increase your prospects for success.



Take note

Although implementing EBPs increases the likelihood that you will achieve your desired outcomes, it does not guarantee success. You still need to carefully plan, implement, and evaluate your program to verify the desired outcomes.

Materials

- Completed Step 1 tool, **Data Catalog**
- Completed Step 2 tool, **BDI Logic Model**
- Any existing information you have on specific evidence-based programs
- Extra copies as needed of the tip sheet **17 Characteristics of Curriculum-Based Programs**, p. 3-10.
- Copies of the Step 3 tool, **Checklist for Programs**



Step 3 Checklist

Whether you're planning a new program, improving, or expanding an existing one, you'll be checking off the following items before you proceed to Step 4 Fit.

- Grasp the key characteristics of evidence-based programs (EBPs).
- Find potential EBPs for achieving your goals and desired outcomes.
- Consider whether you can use an existing EBP or adapt one to your needs.
- Select 2-4 candidate programs for further research, or use the **17 Characteristics of Curriculum-Based Programs** tip sheet to identify ways to improve an existing program.
- If you have an existing program, find ways to strengthen it, using the features of EBPs.



Fayetteville Youth Network (FYN) takes on Step 3

With their health goal and outcomes in mind, the FYN work group reviewed the HHS list of Evidence-based Teen Pregnancy Prevention Programs (EBPs) to find some programs that address the behaviors and determinants they wanted to change. The group reviewed and identified a few EBPs that could possibly meet their needs, particularly Becoming a Responsible Teen (BART) and Making Proud Choices! (MPC). Both programs share the same desired behavior outcomes among similar youth populations, although MPC was centered more on middle school youth as compared to BART, which focused on African American high school students in the original research.

Next, the group obtained copies of the programs and reviewed information about the curricula and evaluations. They also discussed advantages and disadvantages of replicating an existing program in their community. As they reviewed the programs, the group considered that the community already had a good infrastructure of existing programs: community capacity enhanced by long-time cross-agency collaboration and a high value placed on working together. They also noted that a primary advantage of using an EBP is the rigorous testing it has already undergone.

Reasons for identifying best practices

Many programs aimed at preventing teen pregnancy and reducing adolescent sexual risk behaviors have been evaluated and shown to change sexual behaviors and determinants. Using proven effective programs increases the likelihood of success and support:

Use what is already known to focus planning and increase program success.

Increase confidence among partners. You can counter partner concerns or resistance and tackle uneasy subjects while furthering an understanding of how a program should work to meet your goals by using a program with demonstrated effectiveness.

Clarify appropriate adaptations. It's possible that no EBP will meet all of your needs as is. Understanding what can and cannot be adapted will help you to maintain program fidelity and enhance effectiveness.

Spend resources wisely. Adopting an EBP that has been shown to be effective can help you feel more confident about your investment.

Use limited project staff wisely. It can take as much time to implement a program without a proven track record as to implement one that does.

Reassure funders that your program is evidence-based and shown to work, enhancing your prospects of making a difference in teen pregnancy.

Taking some time to learn more about existing EBPs can help focus your program planning and avoid wasting resources on ineffective interventions. Finding out what works in the field can also help you overcome barriers that you encounter when trying to implement programs.



Key point

Involving staff in the whole process creates a safe environment where concerns are openly expressed or changes made. It also promotes better adherence to the program design and builds greater confidence in the program as well as skill building for later implementation.

Information to get you started

An EBP is a program that rigorous evaluation research has shown to effectively change at least one key behavior related to teen pregnancy. The change could be delayed sexual initiation, reduced frequency of sexual intercourse, reduced number of sexual partners, or increased use of condoms and other contraceptives. To qualify as evidence based, the program must be medically accurate, scientifically valid, and rigorously tested. In 2010, the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS)/Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) released the results of a systematic review of the evidence base on programs to reduce teen pregnancy, STIs, and associated sexual risk behaviors. In 2013, 2015, and 2016, HHS/OAH released an update to the review with new research findings and newly identified EBPs. For information and program summaries, see Lists of Effective Programs on p. 3-6 or [the OAH website](#).

Keep two questions in mind as you research potential programs:

Can we use an existing EBP with fidelity; that is, “as -is”?

Do we need to adapt (change) an EBP in some way to make it fit more appropriately with our target population?

It may not be possible to simply replicate all components of an existing program. A program proven effective for inner-city African American teens will not automatically translate into success in a rural community. It may need to be adapted. If changes must be made, you need to understand how to make them without undermining the effectiveness of the program.



Key point

The first standard is to implement with fidelity to the original intent and the core components of a program.

Potential EBPs

Whether you are starting a new program or are looking to improve your current one, you need to find EBPs that you could use. Be sure to examine them to see what could work for your participants, and that will help you reach the goals and outcomes that you have selected. The steps in this guide will help you filter your choices to 2-4 possible programs.

Keep a copy of your **BDI Logic Model** tool on hand to use as a touchstone, reminding you of the goals, desired outcomes, and potential participants that you have selected. Your examination will reveal successful programs that have reached similar goals and outcomes with similar youth.



Lists of Effective Programs

In fiscal year 2010, Congress funded the President's Teen Pregnancy Prevention Initiative. A majority of the funding was made available to replicate programs that have been proven effective through rigorous evaluation. The remaining funds were made available to pay for demonstration programs to develop and test additional models and innovative strategies.

Under a contract with HHS, Mathematica Policy Research conducted an independent, systematic review of the evidence base for programs to prevent teen pregnancy, STIs, and associated sexual risk behaviors. This review defined the criteria for the quality of an evaluation study and the strength of evidence for a particular intervention. Based on these criteria, HHS defined a set of rigorous standards which an evaluation must meet in order for a program to be considered effective and therefore eligible for funding as an evidence-based program.

To learn more about these standards and to see a list of programs meeting the review's criteria with evidence of effectiveness, go to:

http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/teen_pregnancy/db/index.html

Some communities may wish to address HIV/STIs as well. In this case, CDC's Diffusion of Effective Behavioral Interventions (DEBI) project was designed to bring evidence-based, community-, group-, and individual-level HIV prevention

interventions to community-based service providers and state and local health departments. The DEBI project provides a list of effective HIV/STI programs.

To learn more about the DEBI project and to see a list of behavioral interventions supported by CDC for HIV/STI prevention, go to:

www.effectiveinterventions.org

Recognize appropriate programming

As you review the lists of EBPs, you stand the best chance of selecting appropriate programming if you methodically *find out all you can* about each program under consideration. For a detailed summary of the program's purpose, activities, delivery setting, staffing requirements, etc., go to:

<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/oah-initiatives/tpp/programs.html>

You may also try contacting the program developer or publisher if the information is not available online.

Also, *make as close a match as possible*. Focus on programs that best match the age, ethnicity, sex, and gender identity of your intended participants. Be sure to choose a program that has been shown to be effective in achieving the goals and desired outcomes that are similar to yours. The question you need to answer when encountering a partial match is:

Will you need to make a lot of changes to the program or just a few in order to make the program work for your staff and participants?



Key points

A good sense of core components and activities in each program you're considering helps you understand what it would take to implement it.

Taking the time to find the best program fit will make it easier to achieve your goals and desired outcomes with available resources. The next steps will help you systematically consider these aspects before making your final selection.

A valuable supplementary resource to use in your research is commonly known as the TAC:

Tool to Assess the Characteristics of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs (TAC) (Kirby, D, Roller, L, and Wilson, MM, 2007):

<http://www.etr.org/recapp/documents/programs/tac.pdf>

The TAC consists of an organized set of questions designed to help practitioners assess whether curriculum-based programs incorporate common characteristics of effective programs. Even if a program has been reviewed using the TAC, however, it does not necessarily mean that it is a good program. Research may have shown it to be ineffective or it may never have been formally evaluated.



Collaboration

If you need additional information or direction to find the program you need, talk with your state coalition or to national organizations for ideas or suggestions. Talking with others who have implemented a program you are considering can be very helpful practice-based information to gather.

Even when you can't find an exact match, a program could still be a good fit. While it's important to identify programs you think you can deliver with a high level of **fidelity**, your best option may be to adapt an EBP, which we will explore in Step 4 Fit. At this stage, just keep in mind that changing an activity and omitting critical program elements will likely undermine the scientific foundation and impact the program's effectiveness. You should keep several basic concepts in mind as you consider the appropriateness of prospective programs. You will want to:

Maintain program dosage. Reducing the number of sessions or prescribed session length will likely compromise the program's content and effectiveness.

Keep a consistent number of facilitators. Using fewer than the recommended number of facilitators could make it harder to achieve results in the recommended timeframe or even make the sessions less effective.

Follow the same format. A program based on interactive activities is unlikely to work as expected if it is changed to a lecture format.

Apply the program to similar priority populations. What works for one age group or ethnic community will not automatically work well for a different one (see Step 4 Fit).

Consider resource requirements. Carefully review program requirements for the number of sessions and activities, cost of materials, and special training needs to keep it feasible for your organization (see Step 5 Capacity).

See it in action if you can. Ask questions of those with first-hand experience, and find out what the program is really like. This will help you to anticipate challenges and hone in on the successes.



Tip sheet ahead

We borrowed a specific section from the *Tool to Assess the Characteristics of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs* (TAC) that describes **17 Characteristics of Effective Curriculum-Based Programs**. For our purposes, we focus on the eight curriculum characteristics highlighted in the center of the tip sheet.



17 Characteristics of Effective Curriculum-Based Programs

Process of Developing the Curriculum

1. Involve multiple people with different backgrounds in theory, research, and sex/HIV education to develop the curriculum
2. Assess relevant needs and assets of target group
3. Use a logic model approach to develop a curriculum that specifies the health goals, behaviors affecting those health goals, risk and protective factors affecting those behaviors, and activities addressing those risk and protective factors
4. Design activities consistent with community values and available resources (e.g., staff time, staff skills, facility space, and supplies)
5. Pilot-test the program

Contents of the Curriculum Itself

Curriculum Goals and Objectives

1. Focus on clear health goals—e.g., the prevention of HIV and other STIs and/or pregnancy
2. Focus narrowly on specific behaviors leading to these health goals (e.g., abstaining from sex or using condoms or other contraceptives), give clear messages about these behaviors, address situations that might lead to them, and suggest ways to avoid such situations
3. Address multiple sexual psychosocial risk and protective factors affecting sexual behaviors (e.g., knowledge, perceived risks, values, attitudes, perceived norms, and self-efficacy)

Activities and Teaching Methodologies

4. Create a safe social environment for participating youth
5. Include multiple activities to change each of the targeted risk and protective factors
6. Employ instructionally sound teaching methods that actively involve the participants, help participants personalize the information, and are designed to change each group of risk and protective factors
7. Employ activities, instructional methods, and behavioral messages that are appropriate to the youths' culture, development age, and sexual experience
8. Cover topics in a logical sequence

Implementation of the Curriculum

1. Secure at least minimal support from appropriate authorities such as ministries of health, school districts, or community organizations
2. Select educators with desired characteristics (whenever possible), train them, and provide monitoring, supervision, and support
3. If needed, implement activities to recruit and retain youth and overcome barriers to their involvement (e.g., publicize the program, offer food, or obtain consent)
4. Implement virtually all activities with reasonable fidelity

Source: *Tool to Assess the Characteristics of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs*, Healthy Teen Network & ETR Associates, February 2007



Tool

Find the **Checklist for Programs** tool and instructions for using it at <http://www.cdc.gov/teenpregnancy/index.htm> website. The FYN example illustrates the use of the checklist for prospective EBPs.

Narrow the options

It's time to narrow your program choices. Unless you're absolutely confident that you've found just the right program, stay open-minded here, and widen your perspective *beyond* a single selection.

Narrow your choices to 2-4 EBPs. Pick those that seem like the best match for your goals and desired outcomes. The **Checklist for Programs: Prospective EBPs** can help you with this task.

Prioritize your selections from 1-4. Start with the first one being the one that seems most appropriate and appealing.

Consider the possibility that none may be exactly right for your organization. If you are unsure about selecting an EBP, don't automatically assume you should develop one of your own. Developing a program from the ground up is hard work. Implementing a program that has not been proven effective increases your risk of investing time and resources in a program that may not work.



Take note

You may find after reviewing your initial set of "likely" programs that none of them really fit with your youth, organization, or community. You could decide to adapt an existing EBP or come back to this step and do a little more exploration.



FYN uses the Checklist for Programs: Prospective

Because FYN is considering a program new to them, they fill out copies of the **Checklist for Programs: Prospective EBPs** for both BART and MPC. While both programs are evidence-based programs and generally FYN can answer “yes” to all the questions on the checklist for both programs, they consider the following issues when comparing BART and MPC:

- The BART curriculum is less expensive than MPC.
- MPC is more focused on younger adolescents than BART.
- MPC seems to have more content aimed at pregnancy prevention.
- Both programs can appropriately be used in community-based settings.
- While both programs target African American adolescents, MPC seems to have had broader application with other groups, including Hispanic and white adolescents
- MPC will soon be making a student workbook available as part of its materials

Because FYN wants to concentrate its initial efforts on eighth graders, they choose MPC as their leading candidate program.

Applying Step 3 when you already have a program

Although we highly encourage you to incorporate EBPs that might meet your needs since they are already proven to be effective, perhaps your organization already has a lot of time invested in a program that you have been using awhile. If you are using a program that is not considered evidence-based (e.g., not on the list of HHS list of EBPs or DEBI) or using pieces of different programs but not an entire EBP as it was intended, there is still much you can do even if you decide not to adopt an EBP at this time.

Now may be a good time to involve your stakeholders in the effort to find creative ways based on current research to improve your existing program. Incorporating as many characteristics of proven programs as possible will strengthen the infrastructure and guide the construction of sound interventions. Staff competence and confidence will also rise. You may provide a program that is more capable of producing the results you seek. It is important to remember that evaluating your existing program following Steps 7 and 8 will help you know if you are achieving your expected outcomes.

Document your program's logic

Using the Step 2 BDI logic model in which you filled in your health goal, behaviors, and determinants, add activities from your current program and link them to the appropriate determinant. Then, ask yourself the following:

Do these activities logically lead to the determinants, behaviors, outcomes we think they do? If not, why not? What can be changed?



Tip sheet

You can use the tip sheet on the **17 Characteristics of Effective Curriculum-Based Programs**. If you want to learn more than the information included in the tip sheet, a longer excerpt of the TAC can be found on the CDC Teen Pregnancy website.

Find ways to improve your program.

Review your program to identify opportunities for improvement. As noted earlier, effective EBPs contain 17 characteristics, and the *Tool to Assess the Characteristics (TAC) of Effective Sex and STD/HIV Education Programs* shows that each fits into one of three categories: (1) development; (2) content; and (3) implementation.

We recommend that you focus for now on the eight curriculum content characteristics highlighted in the center of the tip sheet since those are most applicable to existing programs and changes that could enhance such programs. Using the tip sheet as a reference, you can complete the **Checklist for Programs: Existing**, documenting your program's content and analyzing its status relative to the eight characteristics listed.



Tool

Complete the **Checklist for Programs: Existing** located on the CDC Teen Pregnancy website.

Find new ideas

To gather new ideas for improving or updating your work, review reports on preventing teen pregnancy in specific populations might be helpful (e.g., *It's a Guy Thing: Boys, Young Men, and Teen Pregnancy Prevention* or *Parent-Child Connectedness: New Interventions for Teen Pregnancy Prevention*). These resources can be found on such websites as Advocates for Youth, Healthy Teen Network, and The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy.



Online

Advocates for Youth: www.advocatesforyouth.org

Healthy Teen Network: www.healthyteennetwork.org/

The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy:
www.thenationalcampaign.org/

Resource Center for Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention:
www.etr.org/recapp/

Evaluate your work

Regardless of whether your program is an EBP, take steps to have it evaluated or use the materials in this guide to find ways to begin evaluating your program. This may be most important for programs with little or no evaluation data. You want to know if your program achieves the desired outcomes. If it does not, you want to determine how to modify and strengthen the program so it does work or you will need to change your direction. If the program does work, be sure to document its success and share the results! See Steps 7 and 8 for guidance on evaluating your program.

CQI and sustainability at this stage

Taking the time now to find a proven EBP that meets the needs of your participants saves time later on. If you clearly identify the needs you're trying to address and then compose succinct goals and desired outcomes that will indicate when you meet those needs, you will have an easier time spotlighting potential EBPs to use. If you can find one that closely matches your participants' needs, and it later turns out to be effective, then there will be less fine-tuning necessary down the road in Step 9 Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI).

If you find a proven EBP that works for you and implement it with fidelity, you will increase your chances of replicating the EBP's success and thus your own. The foundation of sustainability is documenting the achievement of your goals and outcomes.

Lessons learned

Later on when you get to Step 9 CQI, we'll help you determine whether your selected program is still meeting your needs. In Step 10 Sustainability, we'll demonstrate the importance of continually being aware of the evolving evidence base for your work. The following questions will help you think through any lessons learned during the selection of candidate EBPs, and they may help you later on.

Have we brought community knowledge into our decision-making process?

While there is now more solid evidence for teen pregnancy prevention programming, the field is still growing. You may be considering a candidate EBP that has been successful among a population with needs and characteristics similar to those of your target youth, but even small changes can have unintended consequences if not done sensitively. The deep knowledge of those living in diverse communities—their experiences, perspectives, and insights—may be useful in interpreting existing data from Step 1 or filling in gaps. Community members you invite to participate and with whom you build relationships or partnerships can become allies and champions in many aspects of your work. The knowledge and skills they bring with them can enhance your work in many ways.

Do we have some creative new ideas?

There are still opportunities for demonstration programs to develop and test innovative models and strategies. You may have some new ideas for enhancing or strengthening aspects of the EBP you've selected, such as going deeper to engage youth in the leadership, implementation, and evaluation of the program. You might even have ideas percolating from your experience and the experience of others in the community about an entirely new approach you hope to try out some day. Document your thoughts and experiences. They might help you enhance your evaluation approaches or make discoveries about how to fine-tune your work later on in the PSBA-GTO-TPP process.

What else do we want to learn?

Science is always changing as we learn more. It may be that right now you're focused on working through the PSBA-GTO-TPP steps so you can launch your program, but CQI and sustainability both involve continuous learning. Staying current on evolving evidence base can contribute to making informed choices about changes and improvements. Learning and sharing information among staff, administrators, and volunteers within your organization helps build knowledge about and support for EBPs. Infusing that knowledge more deeply into your organization helps build longevity for your program by increasing management awareness and support while ensuring that even if program staff leave, the knowledge about what you're doing lives on in the organization.



Save it

Keep making notes about your findings in the Lessons Learned tool.

Getting ready for Step 4



Now you are ready to move on to Step 4 Fit, which ensures that your program fits your participants, your organization, and your community. You may already have chosen effective programs to explore further with fit in mind, or you may have been implementing a program for a while and already know what it takes to make sure there's a good fit between the young people in your community and the activities that you offer.

Step 4 Fit and Step 5 Capacity help you refine your work in a way that maximizes your resources and increases your chances of success. Spending time finding the right program and making sure it's likely to yield the results you're after also makes it easier to plan your program implementation and evaluation.

Step 4 will help you determine if there is a good fit between each potential program you have selected and your participants and community. We will also provide more information on ways to adapt a program.

Step 5 will help you assess your organizational capacity to deliver your candidate programs in order to narrow your list of choices to the best one.