

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 290 976

CG 020 508

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TITLE Self-Protection: A New Approach to 4-H Health.
PUB DATE 12 Nov 87
NOTE 9p.; Paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Minnesota Council on Family Relations (St. Paul, MN, November 5, 1987).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; Child Welfare; Drug Abuse; *Health; *Prevention; Program Development; Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; *Self Destructive Behavior; Sexuality; State Surveys; *Student Attitudes; Suicide; Violence
IDENTIFIERS *4 H Programs; *Minnesota

ABSTRACT

This document introduces the issue of self-protection as the Minnesota 4-H Youth Development response to self-destructive behavior among adolescents. It presents findings from a statewide survey of over 36,000 secondary school students using the Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey. Responses are given in the areas of health, school attitudes, sexual activity, worries and concerns, substance abuse, mental health, body image and eating behavior, adults and family relationships, abuse, and help seeking. Health programs sponsored by the Minnesota 4-H and guided by the survey findings are described. The prevention theory used in the programs is explained, the need for youth involvement in the Self-Protection programs is stressed, and training for the adolescents is discussed. The need to start early and the importance of adult guidance are noted. Comprehensive, community-wide programs are briefly reviewed and Minnesota 4-H relations with state agencies and with universities and other health and youth organizations are described. Nine programs which were developed in the first phase of the Self-Protection program are described. The programs presented deal with issues of alcohol and drinking and driving; stress, depression, and suicide; sexuality; and violence in relationships. (NB)

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SELF-PROTECTION: A NEW APPROACH TO 4-H HEALTH

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November 12, 1987

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SELF-PROTECTION: A NEW APPROACH TO 4-H HEALTH

4-H ISSUES

Minnesota 4-H Youth Development is committed to developing and implementing educational programs which deal with relevant, critical needs of youth throughout the state. The four issues which have been identified in 1987 are Global Awareness, Career Development, Youth Connectedness, and Self-Protection.

SELF-PROTECTION

Self-Protection is the Minnesota 4-H response to the issue of self-destructive behavior among adolescents. The Adolescent Health Survey has confirmed that Minnesota youth are engaging in a wide variety of activities which are self-destructive and have long term negative affects on both physical and mental health. In 1987, the Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey was given to over 36,000 students in grades 7 through 12 in school districts throughout the state. Conducted by the Adolescent Health Program, University of Minnesota. The survey questions dealt with health perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes. The purpose was to guide University staff and Minnesota 4-H in developing medical and educational programs relevant to health issues of adolescents.

Minnesota Adolescent Health Survey Responses

Youth surveyed were fairly evenly distributed among grades 7 through 12 and were 50% each male and female. By racial breakdown, they were similar to the state population: 94% white, 2.5% Black, 1% Indian, 1.8% Asian, and .6% Hispanic. of the 36,284 youth surveyed, 23,585 were from the 7 county metropolitan area plus Duluth. Twelve thousand, six hundred ninety-nine were from greater Minnesota (the rest of the state).

Average family size was 5.4. Seventy-eight percent live in 2 parent families and 19% live in single parent families. Ninety-two percent of mothers and 88% of fathers have at least a high school education and 93% of fathers and 76% of mothers work at least part time. Eighty-eight percent and 50% respectively, work full time.

Health: 90% of males, 85% of females report being in good or excellent health.
90% report being as healthy or healthier than peers.
77% of males and 51% of females exercise strenuously 3 times per week.

School 93% report school performance as average or above average.
80% like school much or somewhat.

Sexual Activity

- increases from 7th to 12th grade: males: 14% to 63% have had intercourse
females: 6% to 64% have had intercourse
- average starting age is 14.6 years for females, 14 for males
- of those sexually active, approximately 17% NEVER use birth control
- 4% have been pregnant: 3.2% once, .8% twice or more

Worries and Concerns

In decreasing order of frequency, the following were expressed as concerns:

1. appearance
2. school performance
3. being liked by others
4. losing a best friend
5. death of a parent
6. how friends treat them
7. getting a job in the future

Substance Abuse

- Tobacco
- 12% smoke cigarettes daily
 - more females than males smoke cigarettes
 - 7% of males use chewing tobacco regularly

- Alcohol
- over 60% of youth have used alcohol
 - 1.3% use daily
 - greatest increase is between 9th and 10th grades
 - 70% have been drunk in the past year
 - drunk in last month: 25% of 7th & 8th graders
44% of 9th & 10th graders
54% of 11th & 12th graders
 - 24% drink and drive
 - more drinking in metro than greater Minnesota
 - more drinking and driving in greater Minnesota than in metro
(Traffic accidents are the leading cause of deaths among 15-24 year olds in Minnesota. Half of these fatalities involve alcohol.)

Marijuana, Crack, & Cocaine

Have ever used: marijuana (25%), cocaine (4%), crack (1.3%)
Use marijuana daily: 1.4%

Mental Health

- 20% report negative feelings in past month
- 19% report feeling depressed in past month
- 7% of males and 14% of females have ever made suicide attempts
- 3% of males and 6% of females have made suicide attempts in past year

Body Image/Eating Behavior

- 71% of males, 28% of females are proud of their bodies
- 42% of females, 18% of males feel overweight
- 6% of females, 9% of males actually are overweight
- 13% of females have dieted 10 or more times in the past year
- 13% of females vomit to control weight

Adults and Family

- 90% report that their parents care about them
- 70% report that adults care about them
- 44% report that church people care about them
- 42% report that school people care about them
- 80% report that their families have high expectations for them
- 46% report that they have fun with their families

Males generally report more positive feelings about families caring and understanding and being fun than do females.

Abuse

- 14% of females, 5% of males report physical abuse
- 14% of females, 2% of males report sexual abuse

Help Seeking

Youth go to friends and parents for help with problems of depression, chemicals, and relationships. Youth also go to medical professionals for general physical problems and information on contraception and sexually transmitted diseases.

- 33% of males report seeking help from no one on contraception
- 19% of males report seeking help from no one when dealing with depression
- 6-7% report going to school counselors; .6% to chemical dependency counselor

Prevention Theory

Minnesota 4-H is responding to the issue of self-destructive behavior among adolescents with health programs which provide information, build self-esteem and teach kids "life skills" necessary for self-protection. Whether the issue is drug and alcohol abuse, too early sexual activity, teen pregnancy, stress and depression, or delinquency; the most effective prevention programs incorporate:

1. providing information about the problem,
2. building self-esteem, and
3. teaching and providing opportunities for practicing "life skills"

This is based on the belief that when kids are equipped to communicate effectively, to cope with stress, to problem solve, to be assertive, to refuse and to choose friends, they are better able to resist pressures to adopt unhealthy behaviors. They are better able to make wise decisions about their health and their lifestyle - to take responsibility for themselves.

Youth Involvement

An important component of the Self-Protection programs is the involvement of youth as both recipients and providers of information and skills for prevention. Young people benefit from activities and programs in which they can serve others. Adolescents have time, energy, and skills to share. Involvement in service projects can help them understand that they can make contributions, receive recognition and affect their communities. It can also challenge them to expand their knowledge and skills and to carry responsibility. Community service experiences have been shown to benefit youths in terms of decreased delinquency and improved academic achievement and self-esteem as well as through exposure to career opportunities.

Training for the teens is critical. They need to know about early adolescent development and behavior and the learning process. They need to learn appropriate methods for teaching and working with younger children. In the process of being trained to teach younger children, the teens receive information about the particular issue and practice skills they need to make wise decisions for themselves. In addition, they develop teaching and organizing skills and confidence which enable them to conduct prevention programs in their high schools, youth organizations, and communities.

Start Early

If 4-H is sincere about dealing with health issues, then programs in alcohol and chemicals; safety; sexuality; nutrition and eating behaviors; physical and sexual abuse, and stress and depression, must begin at an early age. Research shows, for example, that kids begin experimenting with alcohol at about age 11; 14 is the average age at which teens begin to be sexually active; and body image is an issue with . . . before they even reach junior high school.

Adult Guidance

These topics may not be appropriately taught via a member manual with do-it-yourself instructions. They need careful and sensitive planning and instruction by caring adults and/or teens who have been trained in the subject matter, as well as in educational principles and teaching strategies.

Both pre-teens and teens need opportunities to think and talk about the changes occurring as part of their physical, intellectual, sexual and emotional maturation. They need to be able to talk to trusted adults and peers and to be part of a comfortable social group. They need to be able to interact with peers and to see positive role models among other youths and adults. They need to learn and practice some of the decision making skills in safe environments with guidance of adults and other teens. Youths need to feel a sense of power, of being trusted to lead, to take responsibility, and to be held accountable and to be rewarded.

Comprehensive, Community-Wide Programs

Comprehensive and intensive educational programs which employ networks of agencies and resources at the state, county, and community levels can provide a support base for youth. By working cooperatively, parents, teachers, 4-H leaders, doctors, clergy, and peers can develop programs which touch many aspects of adolescents' lives and provide them with information and resources they need. They can provide teens with consistent positive messages of support in the decisions they have to make in all sorts of health and lifestyle issues.

At the state level, Minnesota 4-H has established working relationships not only with University departments such as Adolescent Health, Home Economics, the Medical School, and the Center for Youth Development and Research; but also with state agencies:

- MN Department of Public Safety
- State Department of Health
- State Department of Education
- State Planning Agency

and other health and youth organizations:

- Hazelden Health Promotion Services
- March of Dimes
- American Lung
- Indian Health Board of Minneapolis, Inc.
- Face-to-Face Health & Counseling Service, Inc.
- Children's Medical Center, Teenage Medical Service
- The Minnesota Prevention Resource Center

Collaborative efforts allow Minnesota 4-H to offer a wider variety of health programs and materials than would otherwise be possible. They also connect 4-H with related diagnostic, counseling, clinical, medical, and religious services which other agencies can more appropriately provide. This makes it possible to offer truly comprehensive prevention programs which simultaneously support intellectual, emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual needs of youth in the community.

Collaborative projects at the state level model for counties the advantages of networking not only for expanding existing program services, but also for efficient and economical sharing of staff, resources, and time as well as for support for funding and future programming. A number of state agencies and organizations have regional offices and staff people who can and are eager to serve extension districts across the state.

Minnesota 4-H Self-Protection Programs

Self-Protection is the theme for comprehensive and intensive educational programs which address critical health issues and employ networks of agencies and resources at the state, county, and community levels to provide a support base for youth. Programs developed in the first phase of the Self-Protection program deal with issues of: 1) alcohol and drinking and driving, 2) stress, depression and suicide, 3) sexuality, and 4) violence in relationships.

Alcohol Decisions: Teen Training Workshops utilize materials and resources from Cornell University and the Minnesota Prevention Resource Center to train teenagers to teach elementary age children about the effects of alcohol and drinking and driving and riding. In the process of being trained to teach younger children, the teens receive information about alcohol, and practice skills they need to make wise decisions for themselves. In addition, they develop teaching and organizing skills and confidence to enable them to conduct prevention programs in their high schools, youth organizations, and communities. The program was initiated under a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety which provides grants for county traffic safety programs.

Since March 1987, 90 teens have been trained and about 100 elementary students have been reached. Programs are being initiated in 12 additional counties. A three-hour elementary classroom curriculum developed by a team of teens and a training video and material are currently being produced.

Stress, Depression and Suicide Education

Since 1985, Minnesota 4-H has been involved in research and educational programs on the topic of adolescent stress, depression and suicide attempts. Seminars, conferences and a satellite video teleconference have focused on educating professionals who work with youth. Two new products are now available for teaching parents and young people to recognize the signs of stress and depression and take effective action.

Fragile Time is an educational documentary about teenage depression and suicide, produced and filmed in Minnesota. It is a 30 minute documentary in 1/2" VHS format for use with adult audiences. It teaches adults to recognize young people in trouble and to intervene in high risk situations.

The video combines research data with three personal stories to give an important message: Youth at risk for depression and suicide attempts can often be identified and given support to work out their problems. The case studies involve survivors of a suicide, a young adult reflecting on her adolescent suicide attempt, and a teenager and his mother discussing a successful intervention following a suicide threat.

Tackling Tough Stuff is a curriculum of activities and experiences to teach young people to recognize stress and depression and to take positive steps for self-protection for themselves and their friends. It is an experiential curriculum designed for use with young people 12-17 years old.

Leader background and a video accompany the lessons. The activities are grouped into 7 lessons:

1. Recognize Stress
2. Understand Loss and Conflict
3. Understand Depression
4. Cope Constructively
5. Communicate Effectively
6. Problem-Solve Creatively
7. Build Support Systems

Seminars for Parents: Communicating With Our Children developed by the March of Dimes, is being used by Minnesota 4-H to provide sexuality education to parents and adult volunteers. The seminars recognize the importance of the family as the primary vehicle for the transmission of sexual values and the difficulty which parents have in discussing sexuality with their children. In the supportive setting of an adult group, parents of teens and pre-teens discuss information about adolescent sexuality and work at understanding and expressing their own values.

The Power of Choice

Minnesota 4-H joined the National Council of Jewish Women and the Minnesota Coalition of Battered Women in developing a program aimed at preventing violence in relationships. The resulting video, "The Power of Choice", designed for use with junior and senior high school students, deals with dating relationships and the issue of proper use of power. The introduction focuses on power, who has it, and what it is. This is followed by 4 vignettes each showing different dating situations in which power is used and abused. After each segment a question appears on the screen and the video can be stopped for discussion to help students identify and understand key power issues in adolescent relationships. A discussion guide helps teachers and facilitators lead students through examination of their own emerging powers and exploration of their values, responsibilities, and choices. The learning objectives for the program are:

- to help teens understand and direct their emerging powers in positive ways;
- to recognize and challenge cultural norms that lead to and reinforce power abuse;
- to examine positive choices that can defuse potentially abusive situations;
- to develop peer support for responsible power sharing and prevention of dating violence and domestic abuse.

Health Choices developed by Hazelden Health Promotion Services is a health/prevention teaching package designed to help educators have a positive impact on health decisions of young people. It's six units; Self-Acceptance, Stress Management, Sexual Health, Chemical Health, Nutrition, and Safety contain 50 activities for students.

4-H agents and volunteers as well as other youth and health professionals are being trained in use of the Health Choices curriculum by Hazelden staff in state and district in-service workshops.

State Fair Health/Safety Event

In 1987, Minnesota initiated a State Fair Health/Safety Event to recognize 4-H members who developed and implemented projects around relevant health issues. Participants, selected through county fairs, conducted research, teaching and/or community service projects around such issues. Their State Fair entry was a brief report of their project to other participants and judges who considered:

- relevance of the issue
- quality of research
- teaching or application of knowledge and skills
- community service components

Youth Health Conference

Minnesota 4-H works with thirteen other agencies to sponsor day-long health conferences for youth throughout the state. Junior and senior high school students are provided with workshops drama, music, panels, speakers, and exhibits all dealing with current health issues and presented by health professionals and youths. The purpose is to provide youth with information about the issues and to give them ideas and encouragement to plan and implement health programs in their own schools and communities.

The Minnesota 4-H Self-Protection program is new. It is evolving and will continue to gather data, to search out new resources (both human and financial) to develop new programs and materials and to find new ways to involve youth in responding to critical health issues.