The Fourth R
Teaching healthy relationship skills to reduce youth risk behaviors

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Theoretical overview
Early- to mid-adolescence: A key window of opportunity

- Autonomy / transition / experimentation
- Pressure to conform
- Gender-role rigidity returns (with a vengeance)
- Patrolling the borders: Gay-baiting, homophobia, and peer violence
- Signaling intimacy: Confusing abuse as signs of love and caring
Principles of universal prevention

- Proper dosage, timing, delivery, content, and setting
- All youths need:
  - education about healthy, non-violent relationships
  - Accurate information without a scare message
  - Personal values clarification, and limit/boundary setting
The Adolescent Risk Triad: The Relationship Connection

Peer and dating violence

Substance misuse

Unhealthy sexual behavior

Relationships
The Adolescent Risk Triad: *Connection to Mental Health and Well-Being*

- Peer and dating violence
- Substance misuse
- Unhealthy sexual behavior

Mental Health

Relationships

Mental Wellbeing

Western Centre for School Mental Health
Approach

- Help youth strengthen relationship skills to assist in making safe, responsible choices
- Address the common elements of multiple risk behaviors (re: goals of adolescence)
- Counteract pro-abuse messages from peer culture (gender, race, sexual orientation)
- Emphasize positive message of safety and harm reduction (prepare, not scare)
- Provide opportunities to develop assets and strengths (build youth connections)
Approach

- Match content and skills with curriculum requirements (usually health and phys ed):
  - Peer and dating violence
  - Substance use & abuse
  - Healthy growth and sexuality
- Involve not only youth but teachers, parents and community
- Integrate skill development and role play
- Process issues with peers and the teacher through partner, small group and whole class discussions
Current Resources

**School-based**
- Grade 7, 8 and 9 Health
- Catholic and French
- Grade 9, 10, 11, 12 English
- Healthy Relationships Plus Program

**Community-based**
Healthy Relationships Plus Program
Parents

• Media violence / literacy workshops
• Fourth R workshops
• Parent webinars
• Parent / child homework assignments
Plus…

- We have American versions (where we take out the ‘U’ out of behaviour… neighbour…colour…)
We recognize the importance of all youth seeing themselves reflected in the curriculum and include same sex relationship myths and facts and examples.
Video Example
Evidence to date

- Committed to importance of establishing evidence base – published RCT with 1700 youth in 20 schools to look at longitudinal impacts of programming (2009)
Evidence


The Grade 9 Fourth R decreases dating violence and increases condom use
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Downward extension of evidence to grade 7 and 8

Deeper understanding of the benefits of Grade 9 Program


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Identification of implementation and scale up processes and challenges


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Assessing the costs and benefits of the Fourth R
Findings of Cost/Benefit Analysis

• Based on reductions in dating violence and violent delinquency – cost savings of $1778.73 per student

• Program cost differed based on geography and phase
  • NT adaptation and capacity building - $126
  • NT implementation - $38
  • AB implementation - $18
  • TVDSB sustainability - $5

• Tremendous return on investment – even most expensive case was 14:1 and 0.5% of annual education budget per student
Summary

• Fourth R has grown from a single grade 9 program to menu of options for different stakeholders

• Principles remain same, but increased attention to mental health/well-being and new opportunities for LGBTQ+ considerations

• Continue to grow the evidence-base (NIH RCT in Houston now underway)

• Shift from focusing on effectiveness to implementation and sustainability
Contact Information

THE FOURTH R

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