

Introduction

Youth and the March of Dimes Mission

The March of Dimes is a national voluntary health agency whose mission is to improve the health of babies by preventing birth defects, premature birth, and infant mortality. Founded in 1938, the March of Dimes funds programs of research, community services, education, and advocacy to save babies and in 2003 launched a campaign to address the increasing rate of premature birth. Youth play a critical role in achieving this mission by raising funds and by educating themselves and their peers about important health messages that can affect the outcome of pregnancies in the future. Teens today are the parents of tomorrow.

Youth and the Prematurity Campaign

Every year in the US, 1 in 8 babies arrive too soon amounting to more than 500,000 babies a year. Premature birth is the leading cause of death in the first month of life and is the most common, serious and costly infant health problem facing our nation. In response to the alarming increase in the rate of preterm birth in recent years, the March of Dimes initiated a Prematurity Campaign in 2003 to (1) raise awareness about the problem of prematurity and (2) to reduce the rate of premature births. Educating teens who are of childbearing age is one of the most important ways to achieve these goals.

Pregnant teens are at greater risk for having a preterm birth in part because teens often have poor eating habits, neglect to take their vitamins, and are less likely to be of adequate pre-pregnancy weight or to gain an adequate amount of weight during pregnancy. Preconception care – taking care of your body before becoming pregnant – is one of the most important known strategies for avoiding problems of pregnancy, including preterm birth. Just as teens need to focus on school work now to develop skills they will need to join the workforce in the future, teens need to take care of their bodies now to increase their chances of having healthy children of their own in the future.

Purpose of Curriculum

The purpose of this curriculum is to elaborate on the messages in the *Teen-2-Teen* youth health education videos and to help Presenters reinforce the messages among teens. The curriculum was designed to be a resource for both teen peer educators as well as adult educators, whether in a structured classroom setting or outside of school.

About Peer Educators

Studies have shown that trained peer educators are a more credible source of information for some youth than are adult educators because they communicate in readily understandable ways and serve as positive role models while dispelling misperceptions about the desirability of risk behaviors such as smoking, drinking, use of street drugs, and sex. (Advocates for Youth, 2003) Adolescents who are counseled by their peers are often more likely to engage in interactive discussion than when counseled by adult health care providers because they feel safer are less likely to feel judged. (Gainesville Chain Reaction Peer Education Program, 2005)

About Youth and Volunteerism

The curriculum focuses not only on important health messages for teens, but also on the importance of volunteerism. Studies have shown that youth who volunteer do better in school and are less likely to abuse alcohol and drugs. (Search Institute, 1995). Volunteering also teaches teens things they may not learn in the classroom. Teens say the benefits received from volunteering are: learning to respect others; learning to be helpful and kind; learning to understand people who are different from them; developing leadership skills, becoming more patient, and better understanding of good citizenship. (Independent Sector/Gallup, 1996)

Increasingly, schools are requiring students to participate in community service activities, and to take service-learning courses. Between 1990 and 2000, the number of High School students involved in service learning increased from less than 100,000 to more than 3 million (US Department of Education).

Summary

Whether you are a novice peer educator or an experienced adult teacher, we hope this curriculum provides you with the information and references that help you achieve your objectives. We are eager to hear your thoughts about the curriculum so please take a few minutes to complete and submit a brief survey enclosed in the curriculum after you have used the materials. Everyone who submits a completed survey should check the March of Dimes Team Youth Web site (www.marchofdimes.com/youth) for potential opportunities for free health education materials and to learn about the availability of grants.

The March of Dimes National Youth Program

Overview

Teen-2-Teen Videos

The *Teen-2-Teen* videos feature teens talking to each other about the March of Dimes mission and how their knowledge, attitudes, behaviors and involvement can promote their health now and increase the chance that future babies will be born healthy. Video Content includes:

Segment (length)	Topics Addressed
You Matter (8:42 minutes)	What is the March of Dimes? The Power of Youth Involvement
Truth and Consequences (10:19 minutes)	Alcohol Smoking Drugs
Healthy Lifestyles (7:52 minutes)	Eat Right Exercise Think Ahead

Curriculum

The Presenter's Guide provides the following components to facilitate discussion of the videos:

For Each Segment

- Learning Objectives (3 segments total)
- Key Messages (9 topics total)
- Sources of Data
- References for Teens
- References for Parents and Professionals
- Excerpts from Videos (talking points)
- Activities
- Pre-Test/Post-Test for each of the 9 topics, followed by answers
- Handouts (summary of key messages and references to copy and distribute)

For All Segments

- Template Letter to Parents explaining the information that will be discussed
- Participant Evaluation Form (to copy and distribute at end of presentation – this form can be modified by presenter to include different or additional questions)

Presenters and Audience

For use by teens and/or adults: High school students may use the videos to educate middle school students or other peers about the topics. Teachers, youth organization leaders, religious leaders, student activities directors, and community directors may use the videos in a classroom or other educational setting.

How to Present

Each video segment can be presented alone, or all three can be presented at once. While the total running time for the videos combined is less than 30 minutes, it is recommended that the segments be presented separately so that there is time for discussion and the exercises contained in this Guide. Suggested formats for presentation of the full content of the videos include:

- 9 presentations of 30-45 minutes each, focusing on each of the 9 topics separately
- 3 presentations of 60-75 minutes each, focusing on each of the 3 segments separately
- 1 presentation of 3.5 hours total length minimum, with 1 hour for each of the 3 segments, including at least one 30-minute break

Presenters should assess the needs and interests of their audience. In some cases, individual topics or an entire segment may be shortened or even skipped in exchange for emphasis on other topics and segments of greater interest or relevance. The order of the segments can be varied as well. For example, the first segment, which addresses volunteerism and fundraising, may be more appropriate to present after the mission education segments. For all segments, including a healthy snack as part of each presentation helps reinforce the message about the importance of nutrition.

Note: If the presenter is asked a question that he or she is unable to answer comfortably or correctly, the presenter should refer to one of the references cited in the Guide.

Self Esteem, Peer Pressure, and Stress Management

This chapter addresses topics that are integral to other segments, especially the Truth and Consequences and Healthy Lifestyles segments. The messages and exercises can be presented separately or can be integrated into the discussion of other topics.

Sensitive Issues and Parental Notification

A major risk factor for problematic outcomes in pregnancy is unintended pregnancy. The United States has the highest rate of teen pregnancy among all industrialized nations. Sections of the video address how risky behaviors can lead to unintended pregnancy. The intent of the videos and the activities in this Guide is to empower teens to make responsible decisions. Any discussion of pregnancy and youth is a sensitive topic and youth should have the ability to opt out of the discussion if they – or their parents – are uncomfortable with the discussion. Alternatively, presenters may agree to skip topics which involve discussion about sexuality and/or refer students to their parents or other parent-approved resources when issues related to sexuality arise in the discussion of other topics. This guide includes a template letter that can be sent to parents to notify them about the sensitive issues that may arise during discussion.