Making A Difference!
An Abstinence Based Approach to Prevention of STDs, HIV and Teen Pregnancy

Overview of the Curriculum
Making A Difference! An Abstinence Based Approach to Prevention of STDs, HIV and Teen Pregnancy is an eight-module curriculum that provides young adolescents with the knowledge, confidence, and skills necessary to reduce their risk of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), HIV, and pregnancy by abstaining from sex. It is based on cognitive behavioral theories, focus groups, and the researchers’ extensive experience working with youth. Making A Difference! is an adaptation and extension of the original Be Proud! Be Responsible! curriculum in that it integrates STD, HIV and pregnancy prevention.

To reduce STD/HIV and pregnancy risk-related behaviors, young adolescents need not only knowledge and perception of personal vulnerability, but also positive attitudes and beliefs regarding abstinence, abstinence negotiation skills, and confidence in their ability to abstain from sex. The Making A Difference! curriculum is designed to meet those needs.

Goal of the Curriculum
The goal of Making A Difference! is to empower young adolescents to change their behavior in ways that will reduce their risk of becoming infected with HIV and other STDs and their risk for pregnancy. Specifically, this curriculum emphasizes that young adolescents should postpone sexual activity and that practicing abstinence is the only way to eliminate the risk for pregnancy and STDs, including HIV.

Target Audience
African-American, Hispanic and White adolescents, ages 11-13, who attend middle schools and youth-serving community based programs.

Implementation of the Curriculum
The Making A Difference! curriculum was designed to be used with small groups ranging from six to 12 participants, but it can be implemented with larger numbers of youth. The curriculum can be implemented in various community settings, including schools or youth-serving agencies.

Length
The curriculum has eight hours of content divided into eight 60-minute modules. It can be implemented in eight classroom sessions of 60 minutes each or in four two-module sessions. In community settings, it can be implemented in a two-day format (four modules each day), four-day format (two modules each day) or eight-day format (one module each day).

Curriculum Objectives
At the completion of the Making A Difference! curriculum, youth will have:

- increased knowledge about prevention of HIV, STDs and pregnancy;
- more positive attitudes/beliefs about abstinence;
- increased confidence in their ability to negotiate abstinence;
- increased negotiation skills;
- stronger intentions to abstain from sex;
- a lower incidence of STD/HIV risk-associated sexual behavior; and
- a stronger sense of pride and responsibility in making a difference.

Content Outline
The *Making A Difference!* curriculum has three major components. The first component focuses on goals and dreams and adolescent sexuality. The second component focuses on knowledge, including information about the etiology, transmission, and prevention of HIV, STDs, and teenage pregnancy. It also covers beliefs and attitudes about abstinence, HIV, STD, and pregnancy. The third component focuses on skills and self-efficacy. It covers negotiation and refusal skills, and provides time for practice, reinforcement, and support.

**Sessions**

**Session 1:** Getting to Know You and Making Your Dreams Come True

**Session 2:** Puberty and Adolescent Sexuality

**Session 3:** Making Abstinence Work for Me

**Session 4:** The Consequences of Sex: HIV Infection

**Session 5:** The Consequences of Sex: STD Infection

**Session 6:** The Consequences of Sex: Pregnancy

**Session 7:** Responding to Peer and Partner Pressure

**Session 8:** Role Plays: Refusal and Negotiation Skills

**Types of Activities**

The *Making A Difference!* curriculum includes a series of fun and interactive learning experiences designed to increase participation and help young adolescents understand faulty reasoning and decision making about taking risks for STD/HIV and pregnancy. Activities are designed to increase comfort with practicing abstinence, address concerns about practicing abstinence, and provide strategies for overcoming concerns and obstacles to practicing abstinence.

The activities incorporate social cognitive-behavioral skill building strategies (i.e., presentation, modeling, and the practice of abstinence negotiation skills). They involve culturally sensitive video clips, games, brainstorming, role-playing, skill-building activities and small group discussion that build group cohesion and enhance learning. Each activity lasts a brief time, and most are active exercises in which the adolescents get out of their seats and interact with each other. In this way, it is possible to maintain interest and attention that might fade if lecturing and lengthy group discussions were used.

Below is a description of the types of activities used in the *Making A Difference!* curriculum.

- The goals and dreams activity focuses on having the adolescents consider their goals for the future and how participating in sexual activity at their current age might thwart the attainment of their goals. It makes clear that their best strategy is abstaining from sex.
- Videos are used to depict young adolescents in various situations. These videos evoke feelings, thoughts, attitudes, beliefs, and stereotypes about HIV/STD and pregnancy, and the importance of practicing abstinence.
- The role-play scenarios are designed to provide participants with the confidence and skills to negotiate abstinence and delay sexual involvement. These realistic role-play scenarios provide young adolescents with a variety of ways in which they could use the negotiation-refusal skills that they learn in this program.
- The curriculum incorporates the "Make a Difference! Be Proud! Be Responsible!" theme that encourages the participants to make a difference and abstain from sex, to be proud of themselves, their family, and their community, and to behave responsibly for the sake of themselves, their families, and their communities.
**Curriculum Components**
The curriculum consists of the facilitation guide manual, which provides detailed description of program activities, activities/games packet, and video clips. The curriculum requires the use of a TV monitor and VCR.

**Theoretical Framework**
Research shows that curricula are most effective if they are based on sound theoretical framework. The *Making A Difference!* curriculum draws upon three theories: the Social Cognitive Theory, the Theory of Reasoned Action, and its extension, the Theory of Planned Behavior. These theories have been shown to be of great value in understanding a wide range of health-related behaviors.

There are two major concepts of these theories:

1. **self-efficacy** or perceived behavioral control beliefs, which is defined as a person’s confidence in his or her ability to do the behavior, i.e. abstain from sex; and

2. **outcome expectancies** or behavioral beliefs, which are beliefs about the consequences of the behavior.

Both concepts are included in *Making A Difference!*

Below is a description of the three types of outcome expectancies or behavioral beliefs emphasized in the *Making A Difference!* curriculum:

1. **Goals and Dreams Beliefs** — the belief that sexual involvement might interfere with one’s goals and dreams for education and a career. In Session 1, the participants engage in a goals and dreams activity and discuss obstacles to goals and dreams. Having sex is listed and discussed as an obstacle. This belief is incorporated throughout the curriculum.

2. **Prevention Beliefs** — the belief that abstinence can eliminate the risk of pregnancy, STDs and HIV/AIDS. This belief is incorporated throughout the curriculum.

3. **Partner-Reaction Beliefs** — the belief that one’s boyfriend/girlfriend would not approve of abstinence behaviors and react negatively to it, which may prevent a person from negotiating abstinence. In Sessions 7 and 8, participants learn how to get out of a risky situation, set physical limits, and use negotiation and refusal skills to communicate with their partners about abstinence.

**Unique Features of the Curriculum**
Three overriding themes provide the *Making A Difference!* curriculum with a unique approach that has proved to be successful with young adolescents:

- **The community and family approach:** An important component is the strong emphasis on family and community. The *Making A Difference!* curriculum emphasizes how HIV/AIDS, sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), and unintended adolescent pregnancy have affected their community. It addresses the importance of protecting the family and community as a motive to change individual behavior.

The focus on the implications for the family and community to motivate change is different from the traditional exclusive focus on individualistic HIV/AIDS knowledge and individualistic attitudes toward risky behavior. In this connection, the intervention incorporates the "Make a Difference! Be Proud! Be Responsible!" theme to encourage the adolescent to be proud of themselves and to abstain from sex as a way to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV, not only for their own sake, but for the sake of their families and community.
• **The role of sexual responsibility and accountability:** Many young adolescents do not express their sexual feelings in a responsible or accountable way. This is evidenced by the high incidence of STDs and pregnancy among adolescents. It is also evidenced by their self-reports of poor condom use and multiple sexual partners. Therefore, young adolescents need to learn ways to be responsible and accountable in preventing the spread of sexually transmitted HIV infection.

The *Making A Difference!* curriculum teaches participants to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior, respect themselves and others, and appreciate the importance of developing a positive image. They learn that by being responsible and abstaining from sex, they will be able to reach their goals and dreams. Participants discuss what constitutes sexual responsibility, such as abstinence, and learn to make responsible decisions regarding their sexual behavior.

• **The role of pride and making a difference with abstinence as their choice:** Adolescence is a difficult period of development. Adolescents are faced with a time of confusion, mixed emotions, and uncertainty. They are bombarded with sexual messages from various sources, including TV, music, magazines, friends, and their boyfriends/girlfriends. They receive pressure from their peers and boyfriends/girlfriends to have sex. They struggle with issues around self-esteem, self-respect, and self-pride. Therefore, they need to feel good about themselves, their decision to abstain from sex, and their behavior.

The *Making A Difference!* curriculum addresses these feelings by emphasizing that adolescents can feel proud and responsible and make a difference with abstinence as their choice. Their sense of pride, self-confidence, and self-respect regarding making abstinence their choice is encouraged and reinforced during the role plays and other skill building activities.