

# **The Fourth R: Skills for Youth Relationships**

## **Reviewer Comments**

### **Reviewer 1 Comments:**

#### Strengths:

- Comprehensive discussion of healthy sexuality
- Strong media analysis throughout
- Youth created violence prevention action plan
- Curricula emphasizes pro-social skill development and practice

#### Limitations:

- Logical continuity
- Most of the contributing factors identified by the program exist in the external environment (violence at home, sports, media, power inequality, etc.), but the solutions focused on communication skill development. Though valuable, these skills can't impact the identified risk factors and could increase danger in a situation of unequal power. Similarly, drugs and alcohol aren't identified as a contributing factor initially, but then substance abuse info is included as a main component of the curriculum.
- Not sure that the role plays create realistic expectations for students with regard to negative peer pressure. It's great to help youth develop skills to assert, resist, and refuse, but if those aren't presented in ways that fit within their social environments, it's not reasonable to expect that they will adopt them.

### **Reviewer 2 Comments:**

**Guideline 1:** Healthy sexuality and relationships are comprehensively addressed in this curriculum. There are numerous activities in all three units to help students develop and practice skills to communicate assertively and effectively, cultivate self-efficacy, and negotiate difficult situations. These activities are supported through the two DVDs for teachers and students, Skills for Effective Relationships (communication styles and strategies) and Role-Play Examples and Debriefing (helps students understand what a role play looks like and prepares them to engage in their own role plays). While there is some focus on developing a healthy environment and cultivating social justice in the school and community (Unit 1, Lesson 7), it is primarily focused on brainstorming about strategies that could be implemented to reduce violence and abuse, rather than actually carrying out and evaluating activities.

**Guideline 2:** The lessons and activities facilitate individual self-efficacy and good relationship level skills (communication, negotiation, bystander intervention). Through the role plays, there are ample opportunities to practice these skills and different scenarios are developed depending on whether the situation is between peers/friends or dating partners. There is some emphasis on the importance of engaging the higher levels of the social ecology in violence prevention, but it is only a discussion about strategies that could be implemented in school or in the community, as opposed to opportunities for students to actually formulate and carry out activities.

**Guidelines 3 & 4:** The Fourth R's three units all build upon and reinforce each other, and many messages and skills are similar for the three topics covered.

**Guideline 5:** The Fourth R provides an opportunity for students to discuss the dynamics of the common causal foundations of violence in Unit 1, Lesson #3 (Contributors to Violence). A wide variety of hypotheses about the roots of violence are explored, giving students a valuable opportunity to dissect these complex social and cultural factors with their peers. The interventions and skill set developed reflect a response to the factors discussed in the lesson. The rationale behind the activities and lessons is theoretically sound, but the research behind it is not cited.

**Guideline 6:** Although not explicitly stated, the curriculum appears to be for a high-school audience. All content is very appropriate for this age group, and could perhaps be introduced in a modified form even at a younger age (middle school) to expose students to these messages and skills even earlier.

**Guideline 7:** All of the scenarios and lessons in The Fourth R are tailored to a mainstream audience; however, many high school students identify with non-mainstream groups and subcultures and hold different beliefs and values about violence prevention. It might be worth looking at the curriculum with the input of diverse representatives to offer culturally-appropriate adaptations for certain participant groups. In the role-playing DVD, however, several situations with same-sex couples are portrayed, which is a valuable strategy for helping LGBTQ participants feel included in the discussion.

**Guideline 8:** The Fourth R has been evaluated with a randomized controlled trial, and the study was published in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine* (Vol 163, No. 8, Aug 2009). The study's major finding was that students in the test group were less likely than those in the control group to report having perpetrated physical dating violence 2.5 years after going through the Fourth R curriculum (odds ratio 2.42, CI 1.00-6.02,  $P < 0.05$ ). (A t-test result for a significant difference in the two groups was not given in the study, only the odds ratio). The study showed that the Fourth R reduced the likelihood of boys perpetrating physical dating violence more than it did for girls, interestingly. In fact, the differences in reported perpetration

rates between the girls in the test and control groups were not significant. Although there are always issues and limitations with study methodology, to the reviewer's knowledge, The Fourth R is the only curriculum to have been evaluated for outcomes in a randomized controlled trial other than Safe Dates, and preliminary results show effectiveness. Additionally, process measures are given in the curriculum for teachers to assess student understanding of concepts and skills progress.

**Guideline 9:** The curriculum resources are excellent. The two DVDs, Skills for Effective Relationships and Role Playing Examples, are effective tools to demonstrate important concepts. The scenarios are relevant and realistic, which increases credibility with students. There are many ideas for different activities given in the lesson plans and teachers have choices as to which are most appropriate for their students. The Quiz, Quiz, Trade game is a fun and interactive method for learning.

*Reviewer 3 Comments:*

None offered