
TIP SHEET

FIDELITY AND ADAPTATIONS

FIDELITY AND ADAPTATIONS OVERVIEW

Balancing the concepts of fidelity and adaptation when implementing programs can be challenging. To properly deliver this program you need a solid understanding of these concepts and a plan for adhering to program fidelity and making purposeful adaptations. **Fidelity is defined as the degree to which a program is implemented according to its design.** Rigorous evaluation studies of model programs indicate that implementing the program according to the program design will produce predictable outcomes. Delivering the program exactly as it is intended shows a high degree of fidelity. Implementing programs with a high degree of fidelity allows you to demonstrate accountability and predict the effectiveness of the program.

Implementing a curriculum is like a recipe; to get the best results, you need to do the following:

- ▶ Deliver curriculum as prescribed.
- ▶ Teach at least one lesson per week until all lessons are complete.
- ▶ Teach lessons sequentially.
- ▶ Use interactive teaching strategies included in the lessons.
- ▶ Teach lessons the entire length of the time.
- ▶ Use all materials corresponding with the lessons.

Adaptation is a process of making changes to an evidence-based program (EBP) so that it is more suitable for a particular population or an organization's setting or program structure without compromising its core components. Sometimes it is necessary to make changes to the program to fit the needs of a particular situation or the needs of the target population. Changes that make the program more relevant to student culture and the geographic setting can help create a better fit with the community. Adaptations can deteriorate program effectiveness and should be made with caution.

Striking a balance that addresses both the need for fidelity to the original model program and the demonstrated need for local adaptation is an essential task for professionals in order to deliver well-run programs.

CULTURAL ADAPTATIONS

Consider the cultural, social and environmental influence within the community.

There is currently a lack of EBP culturally responsive prevention interventions for some populations. Adaptations may be necessary to better serve your community population's needs.

Surface-Structure Cultural Adaptation involves minor adaptations to wording or images. These adaptations do not change the core components or goals of a program. For example, changing names to be more reflective of the culture or community or selecting breakout groups for activities by methods other than gender identification.

Deep-Structure Cultural Adaption involves substantial adaptations to structure, design and content, for example, adding culturally relevant activities to a youth prevention education program. Changes at this level should reinforce learning to address youth substance use risk and protective factors and should not dilute the core messages of the program or make the program too long. Consult the program developer or a strategy expert before making these types of adaptations.

STRATEGIES TO BALANCE FIDELITY AND ADAPTATION

Understand the theory behind the program.

Prevention curricula is strongly rooted in theories of behavior change, including the theories of reasoned action and social learning theory. The activities in the program target protective factors such as normative beliefs, commitment, idealism, bonding and parental attentiveness that have been found to prevent substance abuse, violence, and premature sexual activity among youth. Understand how the sessions are set up. Consult your manual for session information.

Assess fidelity/adaptation concerns for the setting.

Determine which adaptations must be made to suit the need of the population or setting. Weigh the potential change against the goals and objectives of the program and ensure that the program effectiveness will not deteriorate as a result of the change.

Consult the program developer.

Curriculum developers are committed to the continued success of the program and offer guidance for making necessary adaptations. Curriculum developers can offer input on successful adaptations and suggestions based on programs being implemented in similar situations.

Consult with the school or organization where the program will be used.

Communication about the importance of fidelity and required adaptations is necessary to garner sustained support for the program. These conversations can evoke valuable input on changes made in this particular setting that have been successful.

HELPFUL HINTS AND CONSIDERATIONS

Create a strong linkage agreement.

Strong linkage agreements allow for schools to know the details about the implementation requirements of the curriculum. A strong linkage agreement allows for you to detail the number of classroom lessons required, length of sessions, and any other necessary requirements to implement the program with fidelity. A strong linkage agreement also allows for the school and the prevention provider to list and acknowledge shared expectations and roles and responsibilities.

Always have a backup plan.

School schedules can oftentimes be unpredictable. Weather emergencies, school emergencies, practice evacuation drills, field trips, testing, and other planned and unplanned situations can occur in a school day that may shorten your class lesson or cancel your lesson altogether. It is a good idea to have an agreement with the school ahead of time, and include that agreement in your linkage agreement, as to how you will make up shortened or cancelled lessons.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Learn more about cultural adaptations for Youth Prevention Education in the [Delivering Culturally Responsive Prevention Resource Guide](#).

For more information about technical assistance or the services we offer, please contact providerservices@prevention.org or call 312-909-9768.