

Healthy Educational Lifestyles Program (HELP)

HELP Program Available to Students

This healthy lifestyle promotion and drug prevention program is available to students at the school through referral and application. Based on the Early Intervention Program from the Royal Ottawa Hospital, HELP provides 8 interactive sessions in a small group setting that help develop skills for making healthy choices. Focus is on the prevention of problems rather than intervention.

The non-profit community organization, ENRICH (English Network Resources in Community Health) provides a trained facilitator and resource materials. With administrative support, the school provides space and a co-facilitator to work with the selected students in small groups. Depending on the need, multiple groups can operate simultaneously during the school year.

Following HELP program presentations to staff and the student body, students are normally referred by teachers, counselors, social workers, administration and/or by self-referral. Through an application and interview process, students are selected for the program who show strong motivation and interest. They commit one hour of class time per week over the 8-week period. Students agree to complete any class work and assignments missed during that hour. If needed the period of the program can be extended.

The peer group sessions using discussion and other teaching strategies work on increasing problem solving and communication abilities. Topics include but are not limited to: anger management, peer pressure, stress management, the family, communication, problem solving, drug and alcohol information, and assertiveness. The dynamics of this small group setting usually allows students to develop a support network through the normal stages of group development.

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Who provides the HELP program?

The 'Healthy Lifestyle Program' is sponsored by ENRICH (English Network Resources in Community Health). ENRICH is a non-profit community organization working in the area of health and social services in the Outaouais. The program is funded and supported by the Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services through the Outaouais Health and Social Services Agency.

Where does the program come from?

HELP is based on the Early Intervention Program developed by the Royal Ottawa Hospital. It is running in approximately 40 schools in Ottawa and has been available for over 14 years. It is offered at 3 schools of the Western Quebec School Board and started in 1999.

Who is the HELP program for?

The program is aimed at youth between the ages of 12 and 18 and it has demonstrated success in helping youth develop skills for making healthy lifestyle choices. The focus is on the prevention of problems before they develop, rather than intervening after problems have become 'full-blown'.

Is the program just for youth with problems?

In putting together groups, youth are selected who will benefit from increasing their problem solving and communication skills. Also youth are selected who have skills in these areas which they can employ in a group situation to support their peers. Above all, youth are selected who show strong interest and motivation to participate in a peer group focused on healthy lifestyles.

How do you participate in the HELP program?

Following HELP program presentations by ENRICH facilitators, students are referred by teachers, counsellors, social workers, administrators and/or by self-referral. Students then go through an application and interview process to ensure their suitability for the program. Students under 14 must provide signed parental consent forms.

How does the HELP program operate in the school?

ENRICH provides a facilitator and the program materials. The school with administrative support provides a co-facilitator and the space for the program. Over an 12-15 week period, students commit one period of class time per week to the program. Students agree to complete any class work and assignments missed during that period. It is recommended that students buddy up with another student in their class to ensure that they receive missed information. It is not always the same class subject that is missed due to the rotating student schedules. Depending on need, multiple groups can operate simultaneously and for longer periods during the school year.

What happens in the HELP sessions?

Using discussion and other teaching strategies students work on increasing problem solving and communication abilities. Groups include a balance of opportunities to talk, to receive information and to participate in hands-on activities. Topics include but are not limited to: anger management, peer pressure, stress management, the family, drug and alcohol information, assertiveness, body image and bullying/harassment. The dynamics of the small group setting usually allows student to develop a support network through the normal stages of group development. Small groups (6-10) create an atmosphere where a member's experience is validated. They provide a sense of belonging, a safe place to open up and a place to try out new behaviours.

What are the benefits of the program?

A sample of anecdotal responses from exit interviews of recent participants (2007-08) speak for themselves. The question was: 'What is one good thing that has happened to or how have you changed since participating in Healthy Lifestyles?'

- 1 I feel like I've learned to communicate a lot better with my friends and family.*
- 2 I deal with my anger better and I know how to relieve stress really well.*
- 3 I have a healthier relationship with my mom.*
- 4 I started to take school more seriously.*
- 5 I have learned it is good to talk about your problems.*
- 6 I look at my life differently now that I know people have worse problems than me.*
- 7 I think more about my actions.*

What about privacy and confidentiality issues?

Ensuring confidentiality is crucial for people to develop a sense of trust. To ensure healthy trust in the group, members are not able to discuss what others said or did in group, but they are able to talk about the issues discussed (e.g. stress, peer pressure). In fact, we encourage group members to talk to their parents about these issues. If however, we know or suspect that a group member is being hurt or at risk of being hurt, we are obliged to break confidentiality to ensure the student's safety.

Where can I get more information?

Contact the school office. They can put you in touch with the HELP coordinator, Mr. Chris Anka and/or supply an application form.

ENRICH can also be contacted at: enrich.ed@sympatico.ca or (819) 210-3442