Adapting and Translating Evidence-Based Programs

Adaptation is a process of making changes to an Evidence-Based Program so that it is more suitable for a particular population, setting, or program structure without compromising or deleting its main areas of service and experience, or core components. It is a planned, organized, and collaborative process where the target population is included and consulted at all stages.

This Tip Sheet is a guide for those considering program adaptations and provides information that can be utilized to implement appropriate adaptations that do not negatively impact program outcomes.

Program Adaptations

Cultural Adaption is the systematic modification of programs, services, and initiatives so that they are better suited to the population of interest. Examples could include adapting a program for LGBTQ2S+ youth, newcomers to Canada, or Indigenous youth.

Surface adaptations are alterations to the materials and messages so that observable characteristics more closely match the target population.
Examples include:
- Translation into another language
- Changing images
- Using different stories or examples

Deep structure adaptations occur when sociocultural factors are more carefully taken into consideration and used to guide changes in content. Deep adaptations adhere to the core components of the program but make planful adaptation to meet local needs.
Examples include:
- Uniting our Nations from The Fourth R

Considerations for Successful Program Adaptation

1   Know your core components

2   Look for unique risk and protective factors

3   Co-create the adaptation with stakeholders

4   Plan for an iterative process

5   Evaluate as you go

6   Look for harm

1. Know Your Core Components

Know the core components of your program and what can or cannot be changed. Examine the features or content that can be changed, and consider what your new audience needs or is looking for while keeping your core components intact.

2. Look for Unique Risk and Protective Factors

What issues, concerns, or risk factors are present? What is the local economic, religious, and political context? What is the community capacity for the program?

3. Co-create with Stakeholders

Build relationships and co-create your program from the beginning to ensure shared ownership and buy-in. Look for natural allies, opportunities, and partnerships within the community. For example, try working with an existing Gay-Straight Alliance program in a school. Gather input on whether the program components are culturally suitable, and ask how the program topic presents in the community and what concerns may be present.

4. Plan for an Iterative Process and Evaluate as you go

Consistently test and evaluate to see what's working or not working. You can start with a pilot test on a small sample, and hold focus groups with participants and key stakeholders. Explore the acceptability of the revised program and if the content is understandbale and relatable. Continue making adaptations as needed, and make deep structure adaptations as required.

5. Look for Harm

Be aware of how your program may cause tensions and harm. For example your funded mandate may be a focus on dating violence, while the community you're working with prefers to prioritize more positive frameworks, such as promoting healthy relationships. Continue to evaluate and co-create with stakeholders and participants. You can hold focus groups, speak to a participant who stopped attending, or consult with a school who chose not to implement your program.

Resources

Namy ,S., Ghebrebrhan, N., Lwambi, M., Hassan, R., Wanjiku, S., Wagman, J., Lori, M. (2019) Balancing fidelity, contextualisation, and innovation: learning from an adaption of SASA! to prevent violence against women in the Dadaab refugee camp Retrieved from: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13552074.2019.1615290?journalCode=cg-de20
Adapting Evidence-based Practices Lessons from the Fourth R | Claire Crooks, Ph.D., C.Psych Centre for School Mental Health, Western University
Best Practices for Cultural Adaptation of Violence Prevention Programs | Dr. Deinera Exner-Cortens & Marisa Van Bavel

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