Adapting Prevention Programs: Decision Flowchart

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Background

Who might find this document useful?

This flowchart is designed to support projects that are looking to adapt a youth dating violence prevention **program**. By program, we mean a structured intervention that is designed to be implemented in a way that is replicable (i.e., is implemented in roughly the same way over time). The Fourth R program is an example of a youth dating violence prevention program. All Fourth R programs have a standard, structured curriculum, where the purpose of the curriculum is that different facilitators in different settings can implement the program in roughly the same way over time. This adaptation guide can be used to help you adapt a youth dating violence prevention program.
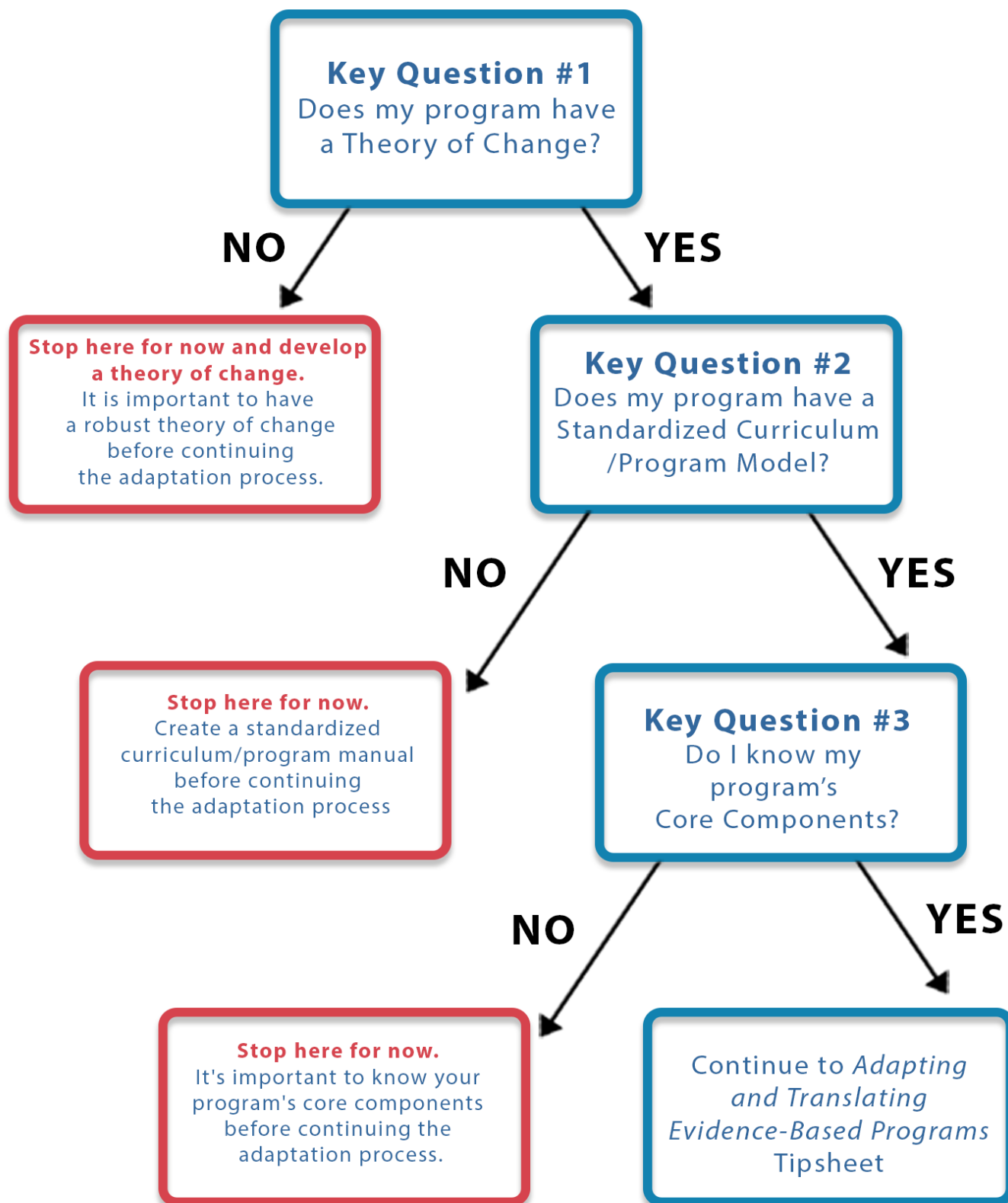
Who might not find this document useful?

Many projects within our Community of Practice are doing highly innovative and impactful prevention work, but not through a specific standardized program. So, for example, youth support groups; youth participatory action projects; or projects that do not have a standardized curriculum may not find this flowchart useful. In these types of initiatives, adaptation is the norm (not the exception), as the initiative is constantly evolving and changing as it is implemented. Nonetheless, we encourage you to think about your initiative's theory of change using some of the tools in this document.

What do we mean when we talk about 'root causes' in this document?

By root causes, we mean things that are further 'upstream' from the problem we are seeking to address (youth dating violence). Root causes are also sometimes referred to as macro-level or structural risk factors, or distal causes. For youth dating violence, root causes are things like historical or community trauma; racism; poverty; and transphobia. Historically, dating violence prevention programs have not focused on root causes. Instead, these programs have focused on what we refer to as more proximal causes, like poor conflict negotiation skills or a lack of understanding of consent. While these proximal causes are important, without a root cause analysis, we can lose sight of where those more proximal causes stem from. So, we encourage new and existing programs to think about what the root causes of the problem in their community are, and to let this root cause analysis shape what their prevention program looks like. It is important to note, however, that it would be impossible to tackle every root cause with a single program. When thinking about root causes, we encourage you to focus on those that you think are most important for your community, and do your root cause analysis based on these factor(s). This is not to say other root causes are not important. Rather, it recognizes that we can only address so many issues with any single program. Gathering input from key community stakeholders is an important part of determining which root cause(s) to focus on.

Adapting Prevention Programs: Decision Flowchart

Key Question #1
Does my program have
a Theory of Change?

NO

YES

**Stop here for now and develop
a theory of change.**
It is important to have
a robust theory of change
before continuing
the adaptation process.

Key Question #2
Does my program have a
Standardized Curriculum
/Program Model?

NO

YES

Stop here for now.
Create a standardized
curriculum/program manual
before continuing
the adaptation process

Key Question #3
Do I know my
program's
Core Components?

NO

YES

Stop here for now.
It's important to know your
program's core components
before continuing the
adaptation process.

Continue to *Adapting
and Translating
Evidence-Based Programs*
Tipsheet

Key Question 1: Does my Program have a Theory of Change?

What is a Theory of Change?

A program theory of change is also commonly referred to as a logic model. The reason we use the phrase "theory" in this document is to highlight that this model should be grounded in a theoretical framework(s). For example, you might draw on critical race theory to build your intervention, or the transtheoretical model. Having a solid theoretical grounding is critical to building an effective program.

Note that the 'theory of change' that we refer to here is specific to **your program.** It is different than the logic model created by PHAC that applies to all projects. However, the PHAC logic model can be used as an example of a theory of change. We have also created a specific example for the community of practice, which we include at the end of this document. For more examples, see Ghate, D. (2018). Developing theories of change for social programmes: Co-producing evidence-supported quality improvement. Palgrave Communications, 4, 90 (open-access publication).

Why is it Important to Have a Theory of Change?

Your theory of change tells you how your program is expected to result in a reduction of teen dating violence. It is a systematic and visual way to present your understanding of the causes of, need for and resources required for your program, the activities you plan and the change or results you hope to achieve. Here is an example of how you might format a theory of change.

Key parameters
Broad type of programme, Philosophy of intervention, Level of prevention, Target population, Modality, Infrastructure

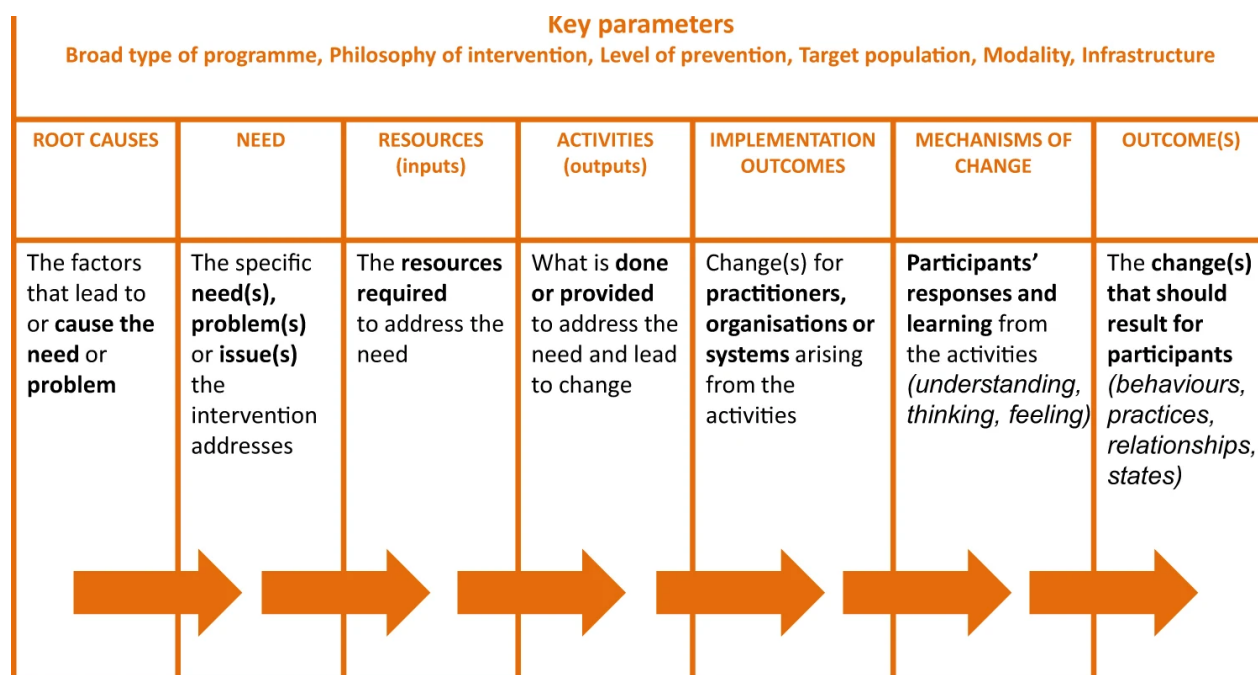| ROOT CAUSES	NEED	RESOURCES (inputs)	ACTIVITIES (outputs)	IMPLEMENTATION OUTCOMES	MECHANISMS OF CHANGE	OUTCOME(S)
The factors that lead to or **cause the need** or **problem**	The specific **need(s), problem(s)** or **issue(s)** the intervention addresses	The **resources required** to address the need	What is **done or provided** to address the need and lead to change	Change(s) for **practitioners, organisations or systems** arising from the activities	**Participants' responses and learning** from the activities *(understanding, thinking, feeling)*	The **change(s) that should result for participants** *(behaviours, practices, relationships, states)*

Image source: Ghate, D. (2018). Developing theories of change for social programmes: Co-producing evidence-supported quality improvement. Palgrave Communications, 4, 90.

From the above example, your theoretical framework will directly inform the Activities, or what your program will do to create change with participants. Your theoretical framework will also inform your proposed Mechanisms of Change, or what participants will learn and how this will result in change. The article the above figure comes from is open-access and can be found here. The article also has additional examples of ways to structure your theory of change.

How Do I Build a Theory of Change?

There are a number of ways to build your theory of change. For tips on different ways you might approach building your theory of change, check out this website. To determine what theoretical framework(s) you might use, you can start by looking at what theory/ies similar programs use (this will usually be listed in any publication on that program). You can also talk to researchers who are working in this area.

Key Question 2: Does my Program have a Standardized Curriculum/ Program Manual?

What is a Standardized Curriculum/Manual?

A standardized program curriculum (or manual) contains all the activities required to successfully implement your program. Just like a curriculum used in the K-12 classroom, youth dating violence prevention program curriculums often contain lesson plans, learning objectives and expectations, and suggested teaching and learning strategies. This curriculum could be available online, on paper, or both. Specifically, it is not the format that makes something a curriculum, but rather the content of what you are delivering (e.g., is it a structured set of activities? This would be a curriculum regardless of the format).

Why is it important to have a standardized curriculum/manual before adapting?

Having a standardized program curriculum means that your program can be implemented with fidelity (or, how it is intended) by anyone who implements the program. Even with a standardized curriculum, new facilitators will still need training to implement the program, but the standardized curriculum is an important tool for them to have during the implementation process. Having this curriculum ensures that all facilitators are delivering the program the way it was designed to be delivered.

How do I create a standardized curriculum/manual?

If you are starting from scratch, the best way to create your curriculum is with a team that may include researchers, a curriculum expert (i.e., someone who has experience and expertise in the area of curriculum development), practitioners and other key stakeholders (e.g., youth). Often, this team includes someone with training in K-12 education, or someone with a certificate in Curriculum Development. This person will be able to help you properly structure your activities into an effective scope and sequence. Best practice is also to develop the manual in consultation with key stakeholders to ensure that the program meets their needs.

Key Question 3: Do I Know my Program's Core Components?

What is a Core Component?

A core component is the "parts, features, attributes, or characteristics of a program that a range of research techniques show influence its success when implemented effectively."[1] In other words, core components are the parts of your program that the program will not work (i.e., will not achieve its intended outcomes) without.

Why is it Important to Know my Program's Core Components?

Having an idea of what your core components are is critical before starting to adapt a program.[2] Core components are the things that make your program what it is. Because of this, if the core components were to be changed, your program would no longer be recognizable as your program. When you are making an adaptation, core components are the things you want to make sure stay the same across adaptations.

Here is an example. A core component of a program called Let's Talk Health! is positive sexuality discussions and activities. The developers are asked to adapt Let's Talk Health! for implementation in a Catholic school, but the people at the school tell them that for Let's Talk Health! to be implemented, the developers need to drop positive sexuality discussions/activities and focus on abstinence only. This request is a violation of a core component of the program, and so Let's Talk Health! cannot be adapted to accommodate this request (this is not to say the developers may not choose to go ahead and develop something new for the Catholic school setting. But, because it drops the core component of positive sexuality discussions/activities, that program would no longer be Let's Talk Health!).

[1] *Office of Human Services Policy. Advancing the use of core components of effective programs: Suggestions for researchers. Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/pdf/263931/ASPE-Brief-Core-Components.pdf*

[2] *Ferber, T., Wiggins, M. E., & Sileo, A. (2019, October). Advancing the use of core components of effective programs. The Forum for Youth Investment. https://forumfyi.org/knowledge-center/advancing-core-components/*

How do I Determine What my Core Components are?

There is no one way to determine core components. Ideally, programs should use rigorous multi-arm outcome and process evaluations to determine what the program's core components are. However, many programs do not have the funding or capacity to conduct these types of evaluations, and even if they do, these types of evaluations can take multiple years.

In the absence of this empirical evidence, they are a few other ways to hypothesize about what your program's core components might be. Morgan and colleagues[3] provide a list of key questions and response options to start with when trying to assess core components. They have also divided these questions up into something they call 'component categories.' These categories refer to the different aspects of the program (e.g., what is taught; how it is delivered; what supports are provided; and what might contribute to/hinder sustainability).
The categories below also help us remember that core components are more than just the content that is being delivered. For example, core components can also include the program's underlying theoretical model(s).

[3]*Morgan, N. R., Davis, K. D., Richardson, C., & Perkins, D. F. (2018). Common components analysis: An adapted approach for evaluating programs. Evaluation and Program Planning, 67, 1-9.*

Component Category	Question	Response Options *(select all that apply)*
Content	*Program content: What are the key skills taught in the program? Key skills are those that the developers believe are required to achieve program outcomes.*	☐ Problem-solving skills ☐ Coping skills ☐ Interpersonal skills (e.g., conflict negotiation) ☐ Bystander intervention skills ☐ Other, please specify: _____
Process	*Delivery method: How are the content and skills taught?*	☐ Didactic instruction ☐ Group discussion ☐ Role play (or other direct skills practice) ☐ Coaching/mentoring ☐ Behavioral modeling ☐ Other, please specify: _____
	Delivery mode: What is the mode of delivery?	☐ In-person individual ☐ In-person group ☐ Virtual (e.g., through Zoom) ☐ Social media ☐ Phone – call ☐ Phone – text ☐ Mobile app ☐ Other, please specify: _____
Barrier Reduction	*Program access: Does the program facilitate access/reduce barriers to attendance?*	☐ Direct transportation ☐ Transit vouchers ☐ Childcare ☐ Online modality (e.g., tablet) ☐ Other, please specify: _____ ☐ N/A
	Tangible support: Does the program provide tangible support to help youth attend and/or reach target outcome(s)?	☐ Scholarship for education ☐ Cash ☐ Housing ☐ Clothes ☐ Food ☐ Legal advice ☐ Other, please specify: _____ ☐ N/A
Sustainability *(refers to the likelihood of the change continuing)*	*How does the program provide ongoing support?*	☐ Support groups ☐ Referrals ☐ Helpline ☐ Booster sessions ☐ Mobile app ☐ Other, please specify: _____ ☐ N/A

Table adapted from Morgan, N. R., Davis, K. D., Richardson, C., & Perkins, D. F. (2018). Common components analysis: An adapted approach for evaluating programs. Evaluation and Program Planning, 67, Table 2.

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Another way to assess what your core components may be is to see if there is a published literature review on core components in your topic area. For example, Ruane-McAteer and colleagues (2020)[4] comprehensively reviewed all studies that focused on engaging men and boys in sexual and reproductive health promotion from 2007-2018, and came up with four key program components for gender-transformative interventions with men and boys. So, a gender-transformative program could use this review to help them identify what might be the core components of their specific program.

There are similar reviews available for other types of programs. We have provided some references below:

- **Gender-transformative interventions:** Ruane-McAteer, E., Gillespie, K., Amin, A., Aventin, I., Robinson, M., Hanratty, J., Khosla, R., & Lohan, M. (2020). Gender-transformative programming with men and boys to improve sexual and reproductive health and rights: A systematic review of intervention studies. *BMJ Global Health, 5(10)*, e002997. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002997

- **Teen dating violence prevention:** Niolon, P. H., Kearns, M., Dills, J., Rambo, K., Irving, S., Armstead, T. L., & Gilbert L. (2017). Preventing intimate partner violence across the lifespan: A technical package of programs, policies, and practices. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/ipv-technicalpackages.pdf

- **Bullying prevention:** Gaffney, H., Ttofi, M. M., & Farrington, D. P. (2021). What works in anti-bullying programs? Analysis of effective intervention components. *Journal of School Psychology, 85*, 37–56. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2020.12.002

- **Youth violence prevention:** Kovalenko, A. G., Abraham, C., Graham-Rowe, E., Levine, M., & O'Dwyer, S. (2020). What works in violence prevention among young people?: A systematic review of reviews. *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse*. https://doi.org/10.1177/1524838020939130

- **Prevention programs generally:** Nation, M., Crusto, C., Wandersman, A., Kumpfer, K. L., Seybolt, D., Morrissey-Kane, E., & Davino, K. (2003). What works in prevention: Principles of effective prevention programs. *American Psychologist, 58*(6-7), 449-456. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066x.58.6-7.449

Using this process, you should come up with a list of 4-5 core components. These components are often a mixture of content knowledge, theoretical approaches and teaching and learning strategies.

[4]*Ruane-McAteer et al. (2020). Gender-transformative programming with men and boys to improve sexual and reproductive health rights: A systematic review of intervention studies. BMJ Global Health, 5, e002997. https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjgh-2020-002997*

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Adapting & Translating Programs

Once you have developed your program's theory of change; created a standardized curriculum; and determined your core components, you are ready to adapt your program. To learn more about how to adapt your program, see PREVNet's "Adapting and Translating Evidence-Based Programs" tip sheet. Briefly, there are six key steps to adapting a program:

1. **Know your core components**
2. **Look for unique risk and protective factors in your new population**
3. **Co-create the adaptation with key-stakeholders**
4. **Plan for an iterative process**
5. **Evaluate as you go**
6. **Look for harm**

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