Process Evaluation: Fidelity Checklists

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Who Will Find This Document Useful?

This tip sheet is designed to support projects implementing a youth dating violence prevention **program**. By program, we mean an intervention that is designed to be implemented in a way that is replicable. The Safe Dates program is an example of a youth dating violence prevention program. All Safe Dates 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.

Why Does Implementation Matter for Dating Violence Prevention Programs?

A lot of research now shows that implementing a program with high-quality* is related to achieving intended program outcomes. For example, a paper by Durlak and DuPre[1] found that well-implemented programs were 2 to 3 times more effective than those that were poorly implemented. Importantly, they also found that 'well-implemented' did not mean perfect. Rather, they note that "positive results [in terms of program outcomes] have often been obtained with [implementation] levels around 60%; few studies have attained levels greater than 80%."[1,p331] This means that quality implementation by definition includes some adaptation.

*There are a number of ways that implementation quality is assessed, including adherence to the program (also known as fidelity), exposure or length of delivery (known as dosage), quality of delivery (i.e., how well-delivered the program is), and participant engagement in the program. In this tip sheet, we will specifically focus on one of these measures – *implementation fidelity*.

These findings also tell us that if we implement a prevention program with a similar population and with high quality , we can assume we will obtain the same outcomes with our group of youth. But, if we change the program substantially/implement with low quality, we can no longer assume it is the same program and that it will achieve the same outcomes. The table below shows the relationship between implementation quality and outcomes.

[1]Durlak J.A., & DuPre, E. P. (2008). *Implementation matters: A review of research on the influence of implementation on program outcomes and the factors affecting implementation. American Journal of Community Psychology, 41, 327-350. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-008-9165-0*

	High Implementation Quality	Low Implementation Quality
Strong Outcome Assessment[a]	Optimal situation. Program is implemented as planned and there is evidence the program works.	Less optimal situation. While there is evidence the program works, because it is not implemented as planned, cannot say that the program as implemented will achieve desired outcomes.
Weak Outcome Assessment[a]	Less optimal situation. While the program is being implemented as planned, there is not yet strong evidence that the program works.	Least optimal situation. There is not evidence that the program works, and it is not being implemented well.

[a]*This assessment can be done by another group (e.g., other researchers, the program developers).*

What is Implementation Fidelity?

Implementation fidelity is defined as "the degree to which an intervention or programme is delivered as intended."[2] In other words, fidelity is the extent to which a program is being implemented in approximately the same way over time, across different facilitators and settings. Implementation fidelity is commonly assessed as part of process evaluation (i.e., evaluation focused on the process of implementing the program).

Implementation fidelity can be measured in a variety of ways, including self-report, live observation, audio recording of facilitation and/or video recording of facilitation. Each of these methods has strengths and drawbacks. For observation and audio/video recording, a strength is that they are more objective, but a drawback is that they are time and resource intensive. For self-report, a strength is that it is quick and easy to implement, but a drawback is that facilitators might not be completely honest if they are not implementing with fidelity. However, because they are the most practical, in this tipsheet, we are focusing on fidelity checklists. If possible, it is ideal to use these checklists in combination with an observation of facilitation (either live or audio/video recorded).

For more on implementation fidelity, see PREVNet's tipsheet Maintaining Program Integrity: Strategies and Recommendations for Community-Based Programming.

[2]*Carroll, C., Patterson, M., Wood, S., Booth, A., Rick, J., & Balain, S. (2007). A conceptual framework for implementation fidelity. Implementation Science, 2, 40. https://doi.org/10.1186/1748-5908-2-40*

What are Fidelity Checklists?

Fidelity checklists are *brief* self-report tools that help program implementers know whether their program is being implemented with fidelity (i.e., as intended). These checklists are also known as fidelity assessments or program integrity checklists. The goal of fidelity checklists is to assess adherence (i.e., how close real-world implementation is to implementation as intended) and competence (e.g., how well the program is implemented in real-world settings).[3] To assess adherence and competence, fidelity checklists commonly contain:

- A checklist that lists all of the required and optional activities during the session
- Open-ended questions relevant to the quality of implementation (e.g., disruptions that occurred during the session, positive/negative reactions from participants to program content, facilitator's impression of the session, adaptations made to planned activities, etc.)

See an example checklist at the end of this document.

When Do I Use Them?

Fidelity checklists should be used at the end of every session of your program. They should be completed as soon as possible by program facilitators after the end of the session. They can be completed on paper, or programs may wish to set-up a fillable PDF or online survey form, to make completion faster.

What Do They Tell Me?

Fidelity checklists are *not* intended to be punitive. Instead, they should be used as part of reflective practice and continuous quality improvement. Understanding fidelity information also can help you put your program evaluation findings in context (e.g., can explain fidelity of implementation along with any outcome data you have collected). Fidelity information also tells you about the feasibility of implementing your program as intended with your population of youth, and can help you make decisions about whether the program requires formal adaptation.

[3]Breitenstein, S., Gross, D., Garvey ,C., Hill, C., Fogg, L., & Resnick, B. (2010). Implementation fidelity in community-based interventions. Research in Nursing & Health, 33(2), 164-173. https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20373

Example Checklist

Session date: ______________________________________

Group/site name: ___________________________________

Facilitator name(s): ________________________________

Total session length (minutes): _______________________

Number of participants in attendance: ___________________

Please indicate which activities you were able to complete during this session:

Activity Name	Completed	Approximate time taken to complete this activity (minutes)	If not completed, brief notes on why
Activity 1			
Activity 2			
Activity 3			
Activity 4 (optional)			

Did you need to make any adaptations to activities during this session? If yes, please specify what activity/ies and the adaptation(s) made. This also includes any content that was added to the session to make the session more relevant to participants.

If there are common adaptations for your program, consider listing these for facilitators as a multiple choice question, and then leaving a space for any additional open-ended feedback

Were there any interruptions that shortened the length of the session? If so, please explain.

Were any of the activities difficult to facilitate with participants (e.g., did not go well? Caused problems?)? If yes, please explain.

Were there any activities that participants seemed to particularly enjoy? If yes, please explain.

What was your overall impression of the session (e.g., potential impacts on participants, youth engagement, etc.)?

Please add any final thoughts you had on this session that were not captured above.

Thank You for Completing This Form

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