

Connections: Dating and Emotions Evaluation Results

Executive Summary

The Connections: Dating and Emotions (Connections) curriculum was evaluated in 10 high schools across the United States with over 500 students during the 2003-2004 school year. The sample contained an ethnically diverse cross-section of the country. Students both in the Connections class as well as a comparative Non-Connections class were surveyed both before and after the curriculum was taught. It is important to note that in the results discussed below, while the Connections students improved in the area in question, the Non-Connections students either did not improve or in many areas showed some deterioration.

The results of the evaluation suggest that the Connections curriculum is particularly effective in improving students' ability to resist sexual pressure. Additionally, the curriculum also appears to benefit students behaviorally by decreasing their negative behaviors in school, at home as well as in relationships with other students. Lastly, there are also some positive impacts on student attitudes toward positive relationship formation.

Knowledge

The Connections curriculum does appear to be effective in increasing the knowledge of key healthy relationship concepts.

Behaviors

The Connections curriculum is effective as a teen pregnancy prevention curriculum. Students improved significantly in their perceived ability to resist sexual pressure while those students not taking the curriculum remained unchanged. Students are more likely to communicate with their parents after taking the curriculum which further strengthens their likelihood of avoiding risky sexual activity.

Students taking the curriculum also decrease their use of violence with their boyfriend or girlfriend, decrease their use of verbal aggression in the relationship, and decrease how often they get into trouble in school, and at home. Additionally, students report a significantly decreased acceptance of

dating violence. These findings suggest that Connections may also be an effective violence prevention curriculum particularly in the area of boyfriend - girlfriend relationships.

Attitudes

The Connections curriculum is effective in terms of improving attitudes. The curriculum has a significant and strong impact on student attitudes toward positive relationship formation. Students taking the Connections curriculum become much more likely to say they will take advantage of marriage preparation classes in the future, marriage enrichment classes after marriage, and marriage counseling if their marriage is in trouble. Students not taking this course remain unchanged in their likelihood of participating in such effective preventative interventions. The Connections students also seemed to remain unchanged in their level of self-esteem while the Non-Connections students significantly decreased in their levels of self-esteem over the same time period.

In summary, the Connections: Dating and Emotions curriculum is effective as a teen pregnancy prevention curriculum. Additionally, the curriculum is effective at preventing future relationship and marriage difficulties by improving key attitudes that should lead to students participating in behaviors and activities which are protective against future marital distress, domestic violence and divorce. The curriculum also shows promise in reducing violence in relationships and negative behaviors at school and at home.