

## **PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS**

Schools make a substantial contribution to a student's health and well being. It is much more than health classes in the curriculum. The way the school is organised and conducted has an impact. So too, do the various out of class activities that schools undertake. There are many factors that contribute to how a school can enhance the health and well being of its students.

A considerable body of evidence has emerged in the last twenty years to inform governments, schools, Non Government Organisations (NGO's), teachers, parents and students about effective school health programmes. School programmes that are integrated, holistic and strategic appear to produce better health and education outcomes than those which are mainly information based and implemented only in the classroom.

The Health Promoting School (HPS) is an internationally accepted approach to addressing school health. In some parts of the world it is called Co-ordinated School Health. The HPS approach is strategic and involves all those key components which impact on a student's health and well being. If HPS are planned and implemented wisely and thoroughly, then students will gain considerable benefits whilst at school, and more importantly in their future adult lives.

The following Protocols and Guidelines for Health Promoting Schools have been produced by analysing research and evaluation evidence. Also examined were those quality practices and initiatives of international organisations such as the World Health Organization (WHO) the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the International Union for Health Promotion and Education (IUHPE) and others. Those factors which contribute significantly to the design, implementation, and evaluation and monitoring of HPS, have been summarised. These evidence based Protocols and Guidelines are presented in the following format to assist governments, schools, NGO's, and other interested groups and individuals to be more effective and strategic in their efforts to enhance school health programs.

# PROTOCOLS AND GUIDELINES FOR HEALTH PROMOTING SCHOOLS

## Principles of Health Promoting Schools

- Promotes the health and wellbeing of students
- Upholds social justice and equity concepts
- Involves student participation and empowerment
- Provides a safe and supportive environment
- Links health and education issues and systems
- Addresses the health and well being issues of staff
- Collaborates with the local community
- Integrates into the school's ongoing activities
- Sets realistic goals
- Engages parents and families in health promotion Yes

## Purposes of Health Promoting Schools

- To build health knowledge, skills and behaviours in the cognitive , emotional, social and behavioural domains
  - HPS build generic competencies in knowledge and understanding, analysing and synthesising information and creating ideas about, and solutions for, local and global health issues
- To enhance educational outcomes
  - Healthy students learn better. The core business of a school is maximising learning outcomes. Quality HPS's make a major contribution to achieving this outcome

## Essential Elements of Health Promoting Schools

The Health Promoting School is based on the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion. It has a number of essential components viz

- *Healthy School Policies*
  - These are clearly defined in documents or in accepted practices. The policies promote health and well being eg policies which enable healthy food practices to occur at school; policies which discourage bullying.
- *The School's Physical Environment*
  - The physical environment refers to the buildings, grounds, play space and equipment in and surrounding the school. It also refers to basic amenities such as sanitation, water availability and air cleanliness.
- *The School's Social Environment*
  - The social environment of the school is a combination of the quality of the relationships among and between staff and students. It is influenced by the relationships with parents and the wider community.
- *Individual Health Skills and Action Competencies*
  - This refers to both the formal and informal curriculum and associated activities where students gain age related knowledge and understandings and experiences which enable them to build competencies in taking action to improve the health and well being of themselves and others in their community and beyond.
- *Community Links*
  - Community links are the connections between the school and the students' families plus the connection between key local groups and individuals. Appropriate consultation and participation with these stakeholders enhances the HPS and provides students with a context and support for their actions.
- *Health Services*
  - These are the local and regional health services which have a responsibility for child and adolescent health care and promotion, through the provision of direct services to schools and in partnership with schools.

## Establishing a Health Promoting School

The following elements have been shown to be necessary in starting a Health Promoting School:

- **Developing a supportive government / local authority policy for HPS**
  - Where there are supportive policies for HPS by national or regional authorities, then it is easier for schools to embrace the concept. In a number of countries the initiative for HPS have come initially from the school community level leading to later policy adoption at the national level.
- **Achieving administrative and senior management support**
  - The HPS is a whole school approach and as such HPS need to have ongoing support and commitment from headteachers or school directors/managers.
- **Creating a small group of activists including teachers, students, parents and community members to lead and coordinate efforts**
  - HPS begin well if the workload is shared and all key groups are involved. It is essential to have a number of students participating and that their ideas are respected.
- **Conducting an audit of current HPS related actions according to the six essential elements (see above)**
  - The audit explores what a school is currently doing by examining each of the six elements. A quick overview of the six elements would be a good starting point. If it involves all staff it engenders discussion about health issues and what the school should do about them. It also encourages a larger group of staff to become committed to establishing a HPS.
- **Establishing agreed goals and a strategy to achieve them**
  - Goals need to be realistic and the strategy within the capacity of a school's resources.
- **Developing a Health Promoting School Charter**
  - This document symbolises the commitment of the school and embeds the locally developed principles, etc. into the school's policies. Many schools display their Charter in a prominent place.
- **Ensuring appropriate staff undertake capacity building programs and that they have opportunities to put their skills into practice**
  - HPS work requires staff to think about activities more outside the classroom than within it. It is essential they have ongoing opportunities to attend professional development programs and to be able to present and discuss their school's initiatives with others.
- **Celebrating milestones eg the launch of the HPS Charter**
  - All HPS have certain milestones, e.g., the HPS Charter, a student presentation to the local community; a new food policy, etc. Celebration of these serves to affirm the concept of HPS in the minds of the school and its local community and senior officials.
- **Allowing 2-3 years to complete specific goals**
  - Establishing a HPS is not a project. It is a process of change and development which builds a healthy school community. However everything cannot be changed at once and if the goals and strategies are realistic, then substantial change can occur in 2-3 years.

## **Sustaining a Health Promoting School**

These factors have been demonstrated to be necessary for sustaining the efforts and achievements of the first few years over the next 5-7 years.

- Ensure there is continuous active commitment and demonstrable support by governments and relevant jurisdictions to the ongoing implementation, renewal, monitoring, and evaluation of HPS. (A signed partnership between health and education ministries of a national government has been an effective way of formalising this commitment.
- Establish all the elements and actions as core components to the working of the school
- Seek and maintain credibility for HPS programs and actions both within and outside the school
- Communities need to have an active expectation that their schools will promote the health of their children
- Ensure there is time and resources for appropriate staff development
- Review and refresh after each 3-4 years
- Continue to ensure adequate resources
- Maintain a coordinating group to oversee and drive the HPS with continuity of some personnel and the addition of new personnel
- Ensure that most of the new and ongoing initiatives involve most of the staff, students, and families in consultation and implementation
- Ensure monitoring services in the education sector view health promotion as an integral part of the life of the school and it is reflected in the monitoring indicators
- Designate a trained lead person with adequate release time
- Publicise success and progress with students, staff, parents and the community

### **Issues (which may inhibit HPS development and sustainability)**

- Many school health initiatives are funded over a short project base
- HPS outcomes occur in the medium to long term
- Evaluation is difficult and complex
- Health sector funding often orients the HPS approach to a morbidity/mortality reduction approach
- The education sector has certain language and concepts which have different meanings to those in other sectors. Time and partnerships are needed to build a shared understanding
- The necessity to convince the education sector about the advantages a HPS can offer schools in improving educational outcomes

## What Works

- Developing partnerships between education and health sector policy makers
- Ensuring students feel they have some sense of ownership in the life of the school
- Diversity of teaching and learning strategies
- Adequate time for class-based activities, organisation and coordination, and out of class activities
- Exploring health issues within the context of the students lives and community
- Teaching and learning strategies which adopt a whole school approach rather than primarily a classroom learning approach
- Providing on going capacity building opportunities for teachers and associated staff
- An excellent social environment which fosters open and honest relationships within the school community
- Consistency of approach across the school and between the school, home and wider community
- A sense of direction in the goals of the school and clear and unambiguous leadership and administrative support
- Resources which complement the fundamental role of the teacher and which are of a sound theoretical and accurate factual base
- A democratic and participatory school community