Helping children and adolescents manage risks and challenges

Stepping Stones (South Africa, global)

Originally developed as an HIV prevention programme, Stepping Stones is a life skills training intervention that was found to be effective at curbing physical and sexual intimate partner violence among male and female 15- to 26-year-olds. The programme, which has been rigorously evaluated and implemented globally, encourages participants to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour through role-playing and drama. Designed to improve sexual health by developing stronger, more equal relationships between partners, the programme addresses issues such as gender-based violence, communication about HIV, relationship skills and assertiveness.

Result: The programme has been evaluated in various countries: the most thorough study is a randomized controlled trial in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa, with female and male participants aged 15-26. The findings indicated that, in the two-year period following the intervention, men experienced some reduction in violent and exploitative behaviour. Compared with the baseline, participants in the intervention were involved in fewer incidences of intimate partner violence, rape and transactional sex.

Smaller-scale evaluations of Stepping Stones in many other countries have shown a reduction in male perpetration of intimate partner violence, which further supports the findings of the Eastern Cape study. Stepping Stones stands alone as one of the few interventions to demonstrate effectiveness in reducing men’s violence against intimate partners. That the rate of violent behaviour continues to fall among men 24 months after the intervention following a 12-month drop suggests that positive behaviour change strengthens over time.

Further, qualitative research shows that Stepping Stones shifted attitudes, particularly among young men, by educating them on how they can reduce their personal risk to HIV and by encouraging much greater openness in talking about and sharing information about HIV. In the process, the programme appears to have instilled general life skills that made many of the men better partners, friends, family members and citizens.

For more information:
Evaluation of HIV prevention & intervention programming
http://www.mrc.ac.za/policybriefs/steppingstones.pdf