

How you can support your child in making the best health decisions for their lives!

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BEING a young person in South Africa can't always be easy. Growing up is a journey often burdened with the effects of a seemingly unrelenting AIDS epidemic and educational systems are still recovering from the country's previous inequalities. Not to mention issues of poverty and unemployment. Nonetheless, young South Africans are brave and inspiring. They bring boundless energy, passion and fresh ideas to the table, and their commitment is critical to building a healthy tomorrow. Seen neither as children nor uninformed adults, they are in a stage of transition from childhood to adulthood, which is both a time of risk but also great opportunity for change.



In partnership with parents

Today, 1.3 billion young people live in the developing world. In South Africa alone, nearly 40% of all South Africans are between the ages of 14 and 35. Clearly, young people make up a significant part of our total population. And unlike the past, integration of youth in strategic planning and policy development is no longer lacking. In fact, they are one of our most valued assets.

Luckily, an increasing number of parents/caregivers are now realising that by partnering with their children, they can best support them on HIV prevention. Support from parents/caregivers and family members, is in fact, invaluable. They are in a unique position to teach young people responsible sexual behaviour based on their own learning through experience. As such, prevention programmes can benefit greatly from this natural opportunity for adolescent support by parents/caregivers and family members to deliver safer-sex messages. Risk-reduction programmes can benefit from this natural opportunity for adolescent HIV prevention by teaching family members to deliver safer-sex messages. By intervening at the family

level, parents can continue prevention messages after the formal program ends, thereby enhancing the likelihood of sustained behavioural changes." Pequgnat & Szapocznik, 2000.

According to a joint study by the Glasgow Caledonian University, the London School of Economics and the Durban-based Centre for HIV/AIDS Networking (HIVAN) on supporting youth peer education in South Africa, the principle is that to bring about social change in young people, one will need the support of reliable social networks. The study highlights that to bring about social change, community members need to work as a team.

OneVoice South Africa (OVSA) is a vibrant and unique non-governmental organisation, which uses innovative and

creative ways of actively involving young people in HIV and TB prevention in schools. OVSA Schools Programme Manager, Nontu Vezzi, agrees that the support from family members is very important in terms of making healthy lifestyle decisions.

Often however, the parents/caregivers are not well informed themselves and not in a position to provide their children with the right advice. Providing young people with the 'right' information is crucial, says Vezzi. Should parents/caregivers wish to become knowledgeable, they could get more involved with the Life Orientation activities their children are engaging on at school, or, visit their local library to read up on health issues faced by young South Africans on a daily basis. In Mbaiba's experience, parents/caregivers need to set good boundaries, live by



example and provide the right kind of parental guidance (especially at home), but can only do so if they are well-informed.

As an example she referred to the TV programme 'Intersections' on SABC 1 and suggested that parents watch these types of programmes with their children. This would allow them to become sufficiently knowledgeable to be able to reinforce the right health messages to their children. Most importantly though, parents/caregivers should try to be more open with their children, and create a safe space for them to discuss sexual reproductive health issues at home. She concluded by saying, "times have changed and parents/caregivers need to let go of their own myths and superstitions, and make way for responsible behaviour change."

If you are interested in learning more about the great work that is being done with South African learners or donating to the OVSA Schools Programme, please visit their website at www.onevoice.org.za or call them on Tel: +27 (0)31 202 0555. OVSA is currently funded by the Interchurch Organisation for Development Cooperation (ICCO), Oxfam International, the D.G. Murray Trust and the Belgian Development Agency (BTC).