

Teen Talk's Mission, Vision & Operating Principles 2017

These principles are the foundation of how we work with youth. They are meant to be fundamental and relevant across our program and organization as a whole. Teen Talk recognizes that these principles are fluid and may overlap. We strive to keep up with promising practices as well as be relevant to the people and communities we work with. As such, this is a living document.

Teen Talk's Mission and Vision

Teen Talk's mission is to promote the health and well-being of Manitoba youth by sharing accurate, non-judgmental information in an interactive, youth-friendly manner. Teen Talk envisions an equal and diverse society, where youth are empowered to make informed decisions about their health and well-being.

Youth Friendly: A youth friendly approach builds allyship with youth by respecting and building upon their existing knowledge and experiences while withholding judgement. We do this by offering information in ways that are relevant and accessible to them. This includes being developmentally appropriate, not making assumptions, using accessible language including slang, humor and adapting to the unique needs of each group.

Harm Reduction: A harm reduction approach acknowledges that risk is a normal part of life and we strive to meet youth where they are at. We recognize there is a continuum of harm that spans from no risk of harm (abstinence) through to high risk. For Teen Talk, a harm reduction approach validates the experiences of all youth – those who are choosing abstinence as well as those who are engaging in behaviours that carry risk. We acknowledge that youth have the right to make decisions for themselves. We focus on sharing relevant, non-judgmental information as well as practical tools and strategies that youth can use to reduce harm to themselves and their communities. Harm reduction while living in a colonial society includes decolonization. (See decolonization principle.)

Feminist: Feminism recognizes that power imbalances and inequities exist for girls, women, and non-binary people in our society and strives to eliminate sexism together with all forms of oppression. We work from a basis of intersectionality, which acknowledges that people's experiences of oppression can be multilayered. Patterns of oppression are connected and bound together through social systems such as race, class and gender. Through using a gender lens we acknowledge the fact that inequities and oppression are influenced by gender.

Anti-Oppression: This is a commitment to recognize and challenge all forms of discrimination such as ableism, ageism, classism, fatphobia, homophobia, racism, sexism, transphobia, xenophobia and the ongoing effects of colonization. This includes working toward the goal of equity and justice for all of the youth and communities that we engage with.

Decolonization: We aim to build healthy and respectful relationships with Indigenous peoples, communities and nations and aim to work from a place of humility towards allyship. We support Indigenous youth's resistance to colonial approaches, as well as celebrate their strength and resilience. We acknowledge that our shared history has created a legacy of mistrust between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Decolonizing is an ongoing and

necessary process and, in the spirit of reconciliation, we are committed to recognizing Indigenous lands, knowledge, perspectives and experiences as we approach this work.

Strengths-Based: This approach focuses on youth's skills and resourcefulness when it comes to their health and wellbeing, as well as celebrates their resiliency. Rather than focusing only on risk (deficit-based approach), we strive to provide youth with tools and information to build on their inherent strengths. It validates youth's lived experience.

Trauma Informed: This approach acknowledges that youth may experience trauma and/or live with ongoing trauma e.g. accidents, loss, abuse, colonial processes. Trauma is defined as an unexpected event or experience that a person was unprepared for and there was nothing the person could do to stop it from happening.ⁱ This approach is a "commitment to provide services in a manner that is welcoming and appropriate to the special needs of those affected by trauma."ⁱⁱ We aim to meet youth in their realities by listening to them with positive regard and understanding that their responses and behaviour may be coming from something we cannot see. It is linking trauma to health outcomes, destigmatizing experiences and focusing on resiliency.

Pro-Choice: This principle supports the legal right of women, girls, trans people, two-spirit people, non-binary people, and all those who can become pregnant to have access to information about, and to choose between abortion, adoption, and parenting. We do this by providing accurate, non-judgemental information and resources about all three options.

Sex Positive: This principle recognizes each person's basic human right to experience their sexuality however they choose to throughout their lives. Sex positivity is inclusive of a range of sexual experiences, expressions, activities (including non-activity) and identities including asexuality. A sex positive approach realizes the potential life enhancing aspects of our sexualities.

LGBT2SQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirit, Queer, Plus) Positive: This principle recognizes diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity in society. We support LGBT2SQ+ people in their resistance to oppression such as homophobia and transphobia as well as celebrate their strength and resilience. We do this by providing information that is inclusive of and relevant to LGBT2SQ+ youth. We advocate for and promote safer spaces for LGBT2SQ+ youth.

ⁱ The Trauma Toolkit Second Edition. (2013).

Retrieved from trauma-informed.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Trauma-informed_Toolkit.pdf
Accessed October 2, 2017.

ⁱⁱ Harris, M. & Fallot, R.D. (2001). Using Trauma Theory to Design Service Systems. *New Directions For Mental Health Services*, 89, 1-103.