

Health Education is the process by which people learn about their health and more specifically, how to improve their health. Doctors, nurses, physician's assistants and nurse practitioners often provide one on one health education to patients on behaviors that improve their health. Health education is often provided to youth in schools, by health teachers in the format of a regular weekly class.

Another group that provides health education is health educators. These professionals differ from health teachers in that they focus on behavior change and do not work in a school class format. Health educators may work with individuals or groups.

Health education encompasses not only the information on what behaviors are healthy, but also how to achieve those behaviors with skills development and can sometimes include motivation to change. For example, in addition to knowing what foods are healthy, know how to prepare those foods, and easy ways to incorporate them into your diet. All these aspects together are more likely to result in behavior changes that lead to improved health.

Responsibilities of a Health Educator

Responsibility I: Assessing Individual and Community Needs for Health Education

Provides the foundation for program planning

Determines what health problems might exist in any given group

Includes determination of community resources available to address the problem

Community Empowerment encourages the population to take ownership of their health problems

Includes careful data collection and analysis

Responsibility II: Plan Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs

Actions are based on the needs assessment done for the community (see Responsibility I)

Involves the development of goals and objectives which are specific and measurable

Interventions are developed that will meet the goals and objectives

According to Rule of Sufficiency, strategies are implemented which are sufficiently robust, effective enough, and have a reasonable chance of meeting stated objectives

Responsibility III: Implement Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs

Implementation is based on a thorough understanding of the priority population

Utilize a wide range of educational methods and techniques

Responsibility IV: Conduct Evaluation and Research Related to Health Education

Depending on the setting, utilize tests, surveys, observations, tracking epidemiological data, or other methods of data collection

Health Educators make use of research to improve their practice

HOW TO PROVIDE HEALTH EDUCATION

Responsibility V: Administer Health Education Strategies, Interventions, and Programs
Administration is generally a function of the more experienced practitioner
Involves facilitating cooperation among personnel, both within and between programs

Responsibility VI: Serve as a Health Education Resource Person
Involves skills to access needed resources, and establish effective consultive relationships

Responsibility VII: Communicate and Advocate for Health and Health Education
Translates scientific language into understandable information
Address diverse audience in diverse settings
Formulates and support rules, policies and legislation
Advocate for the profession of health education

Sample Conversation

Teenager: I want to live a healthier life. What can I do?

Health Educator: First, you have to be an active person. Instead of watching tv all afternoon, you should play sports with your friends.

Teenager: And what else?

Health Educator: Well, you should eat many fruits and vegetables and proteins, but you should avoid food that has a lot of fat.

Teenager: Anything else?

Health Educator: Yes, you should drink a lot of water; at least 8 glasses every day. Water is better than sodas and juice.

Teenager: Is that everything?

Health Educator: Last, you should sleep enough; in between 8 and 10 hours every night.

Teenager: Thank you for all the information. I am going to eat an apple, and then I am going to play soccer with Nicholas.

Health Educator: Excellent. I hope you will continue to have a healthy lifestyle.