INTRODUCTION

In this session, we will focus on peer education as an effective approach for empowering adolescents. With a view to attaining the objectives of adolescence education, various activities are conducted in schools by teachers. But since adolescence is a period when peers tend to have more influence than adult or authority figures such as parents and teachers, peer education has proved itself as an effective approach. Well-trained and motivated peer facilitators undertake informal or organized educational activities with their peers (adolescents) over a period of time, aimed at developing their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills, and enabling them to practice informed and responsible behavior in respect of their concerns. Peer education can take place in small groups or through individual contact and in a variety of settings with different age groups. This is why there is a need to empower a select group of students in every school to act as peer educators. Peer education is an effective tool for youth to youth reach which promotes and encourages a youth-led shared learning for skills. It compliments teacher-led effort in providing education and information to young people and provides for creating opportunities for youth leadership.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

At the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Understand the meaning of peer education and its significance for attaining the goal of AEP;
- Appreciate the role of peer facilitators and their training needs; and
- Plan the training program for peer facilitators.

ACTIVITY 1: PEER EDUCATION: AN APPROACH FOR EMPOWERING ADOLESCENTS

Time required: 30 minutes

Materials required: Copies of Fact Sheets on peer education

Note for the Facilitator:

- Brainstorming modality may be adopted for ensuring active participation of every participant.
- Make a power-point presentation or use the hard copy of the material on peer education.
- Ensure that the presentation is truly interactive right from the beginning and the participants are encouraged to define concepts of peer, peer group, peer education, and peer facilitators.
- Discuss the significance of peer education approach in attaining the objectives of adolescence education.
- Presentation may be followed by discussion on issues raised by the participants.
Summing up:

- While summing up, the facilitator will highlight the following points like:
  - Peer education is more cost effective than other methods, as it is an education through both informal and organized educational activities with peers over a period of time.
  - Peers have more influence on adolescents, they are accepted as more credible source of information.
  - Peer facilitators act as role models and they are better suited also to reinforce learning through on-going processes.
  - Peer education is not a substitute but complimentary to teacher led learning efforts in AEP.

Activity 2: Identifying Needs of Peer Facilitators for Their Trainings

Time required: 45 minutes

Materials required: Copies of Fact Sheets on peer education

Note for the Facilitator:

- Divide the participants into four groups, one on Identifying Peer Facilitators, the second on Role and Functions of Peer Facilitators under AEP; the third on Training of Peer Facilitators; and the fourth on Planning a Training Programme for Peer Facilitators.
- Ensure that each group discusses the given themes for 15 to 20 minutes and the designated Coordinator of each group notes down the main points that will emerge out of the discussion.
- Request the Coordinators to present their respective group work in the general session that will be followed by discussion. Encourage participants to make their observations, comments and suggestions.

Summing up:

- While summing up, the Facilitator will highlight the following points:
  - Identification of peer facilitator is important and should meet the objectives of the AEP program. Identification and selection process should ensure a balance of gender, vulnerability, age, personality, communication skills.
  - Peer facilitators have to engage peers in informal or organized educational activities on the concerns of adolescents, provide them authentic knowledge and focus on life skills development.
  - Peer facilitators are expected to assist teachers in organizing activities and gathering feedback, to act as role models and also to reinforce learning through on-going processes.
  - Training needs of Peer Facilitators are based on their roles and responsibilities; they must have accurate and authentic knowledge on adolescents’ concerns and also about the authentic sources of information, have skills to organize informal and formal activities focused on objectives of adolescence education and gather feedback.
  - Planning a Training Programme has to be based on the training needs of peer facilitators and socio-cultural setting as well as the school ambience.
Who is a peer?

A peer is a person who belongs to the same social group as another person or group. The social group may be based on age, sex, occupation, socio-economic or health status, and other factors. A peer can also be someone who is part of the same educational institute.

Education refers to the development of a person’s knowledge, attitude, beliefs or behavior as a result of the learning process.

Peer Education: Peer education is the process whereby well trained and motivated young people undertake informal or organized educational activities with their peers. These activities, occurring over an extended period of time, are aimed at developing young people’s knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills and enabling them to be responsible for and to protect their own health. Peer education is an effective tool for youth to youth reach which promotes an encourages a youth led shared learning for skills. It compliments teacher led effort in providing education and information to young people and provides for creating opportunities for youth leadership.

Importance of Peer Education:

Peer education has been an important aspect of the process of socialization, but it has been popularly used in educational programs as an approach, a communication channel, a methodology and a strategy. Peer education initiatives have been documented as far back as Aristotle. In recent decades it has been employed in many areas of public health, reproductive and sexual health, nutrition education and substance abuse, HIV/AIDS education, gender education and environment education. Under AEP also the strategy of peer education has been employed, but on a limited scale. The reason for the indifference appears to be the popular notion that students are recipients of education in schools. Their role as providers of education or constructors and communicators of knowledge is yet to acquire proper appreciation. It is, however, very important to take note of the evidence based fact that peer education is an effective behaviour change strategy and peer educators’ role, especially under AEP, may be pivotal for the realization of its objectives.

Rationale:

There are many reasons cited in the literature to justify the use of peer based interventions. The following are commonly cited justifications for the use of peer education:

- It is more cost effective than other methods.
- Peers are a credible source of information.
- Peer education is empowering for those involved.
- It utilizes an already established means of sharing information and advice.
• Information passed by peers is better accepted in the peer group than those passed by others.
• Peer educators act as good role models.
• Peer education can be used to educate those who are hard to reach through conventional methods.
• Peers can reinforce learning through ongoing contact.

Peer education has proved to be an effective strategy in educational programmes focused on culturally sensitive issues like reproductive and sexual health, HIV/AIDS and substance abuse. In most of the countries and societies young people find it difficult to get the required knowledge related to these concerns owing to socio-cultural norms, taboos and other constraints. The adult world has been treating these issues that are private and thereby not to be discussed in public. Though quite often, young people are provided such information by adults at an appropriate time, but it is not adequate, because these are given by adults in a manner that is didactic and prescriptive, authoritarian, judgemental and pontificating. Young people cannot discuss and question adults on these issues and the adults also maintain strict boundaries beyond which they would not share any information.

Identification of Peer Facilitators:

In view of the above, there is a need to take special care in the identification of students who would be trained as Peer Facilitators. The identification of students for this purpose may be done by respective schools. It may appear to be a relatively easier task in those schools where the strategy of peer education has been operational under AEP or other educational programs of similar nature being implemented by government as well as non-governmental agencies. But for many schools in different states this may be a new experience. Therefore, the following criteria may help in the identification of Peer Facilitators under AEP:

• Since adolescence education activities are to be transacted in different classes, two students studying in each class need to be selected as Peer Facilitators.
• The teacher will select the peer facilitator and select the sessions to be jointly facilitated by the peer facilitator. The teacher will supervise the sessions of the peer facilitator.
• The selected students must have a mindset and outlook for acting as a facilitator for transaction of activities, an initiator (a catalyst) of the process of experiential learning and the qualities of providing positive leadership to the peer group;

Key traits of peer educators

• Respected by peer
• Non judgmental
• Discreet
• Tolerant
• Role model
• Energetic
• Interested
Role and Functions of Peer Facilitator under AEP:

The roles and functions of Peer Facilitators as envisaged in several countries are very varied. But in the context of school education in India, the expected roles and functions of Peer Facilitators may be envisaged and determined with needed moderation. These may be as follows:

- Lending active support to Nodal Teachers in the organization of activities and transaction of life skills focused adolescence education in and outside classrooms;

- Interactions with Peer Group for empowering its members:
  - As a follow up of the sessions engaged by Nodal Teachers, having continued interaction with the peer group as per the need;
  - Making need-based interventions for creating and sustaining an enabling environment in and outside schools; and
  - Acting as role models by “practicing” what s/he “preaches”.

- Peer Facilitators have to keep abreast of new information and knowledge in respect of adolescent concerns, HIV/AIDS, substance abuse and related issues.

- While following up the sessions conducted by Nodal Teachers, the Peer Facilitators may observe the following Dos and Don’ts:

**Dos:**
- He/she has to avoid conveying personal values, especially while discussing value laden issues.
- He/she has to respect the diversity of background of the peer members, their values and beliefs.
- He/she has to convince all the peer members that no idea or opinion is absurd or unwarranted. Every issue may be discussed in view of the scientific facts and in the context of the positive elements of socio-cultural ethos.
- He/she should give accurate and authentic information, and let the peer members make their own decisions based on facts.
- He/she should maintain confidentiality of information provided by learners.
- If there is some confidential concern, the Peer Educator should provide information where the concerned peer member may get professional help. One must remember that Peer Educators do not provide treatment or therapy.
- He/she has to lead by example, continue to have the trust and confidence of peer members and is to evolve as a young ambassador of AEP.
Don’ts

- The Peer Educators need not be prescriptive, as experiences prove abundantly that preaching is counter-productive.
- He/she is not to make value judgement either of peer members or their views, as education is more effective when varied views are expressed and discussed.
- He/she should not stigmatize other peers/students
- He/she should not conduct sessions in a personalized manner.
- He/she need not comment on things that cannot be changed.
- He/she need not reject or ridicule any point of view expressed by peer members, even though it may not be acceptable to him/her or may be against the social norms.
- S/he should never modify or manipulate scientific facts for gaining an immediate acceptability of the peer group.

Training of Peer Facilitators:

In order to ensure that Peer Facilitators perform their roles effectively, the identified students have to prepare themselves well. They have to undergo an intensive training. Adolescence education being a new area, the students have to acquire the competencies needed for accomplishing responsibilities as Peer Facilitators. The following points are to be essentially observed for preparing oneself as a Peer Facilitator:

- Undergoing intensive training to be organized for Peer Facilitators under AEP;
- Developing complete understanding of the national framework of AEP and its adapted version in the context of local socio-cultural setting by acquiring mastery over the Materials developed under the Programme.
- Sharpening their interpersonal communication skills and enriching the life skills and
- Having comprehensive knowledge of the roles and functions of Peer Facilitators.
Planning a Training Program for Peer Facilitator

AGENDA FOR TWO DAYS TRAINING OF PEER FACILITATORS IN AEP

Learning Objective:

- Understanding the rationale for peer education in AEP
- Building knowledge on the scope of AEP and the realities of young people
- Defining roles and responsibilities of peer facilitator

Notes for trainers/resource persons: Training of peer facilitators should be through participatory activity oriented processes and should be youth friendly

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