

Using popular or people's media for hygiene education

What are popular media ?

Traditional or popular media, such as drama, singing, dancing, story-telling and proverb telling, exist in many communities worldwide. Community gatherings, religious meetings and ceremonies can provide opportunities for health education.

The most important characteristic of popular media is that they are enjoyed today. They are living traditions, enjoyed by many people and :

- They are entertaining.
- They cover ideas and issues of universal concern, such as love, marriage, honour, failure, success, jealousy, revenge, wealth, poverty, power, family and group conflicts, and religion.
- Even though they are based on tradition, they change and adapt with the times to deal with new situations and incorporate the issues and concerns of the day.

Folk media that have been used in health education include :

Story-telling - both oral and written ;

Drama - theatrical performances, participatory theatre and puppets ;

Song - pop and traditional song types ;

Pictures - art and cloth designs ;

Story-telling

Stories are an enjoyable way of learning about subjects. Many countries have a rich oral tradition of stories and legends. Story-telling is a good way of reaching both children and adults. Ideas can be presented in human terms and people can identify with the characters. Stories are an especially good way of introducing ideas about health and hygiene to children.

Stories build on the impact of the spoken word. Abstract ideas can be conveyed in everyday terms. People can identify with the characters and remember the lessons. After telling the story, the audience should be given a chance to discuss the story and ask questions.

Theatre

Theatre, or drama, is a valuable approach for hygiene education. Its impact has both a spoken and visual dimension.

In developing stories and dramas, it is important to spend time with the community asking them what they think and feel about the topic. These ideas - and the language that the community use to describe them - can all be put into the drama. One way to get the best impact on hygiene education from theatre is to use the following procedure :

- Have a dialogue with the community ;
- Build into the drama local concerns and issues ;
- Perform the drama at a time when most people can come ;
- Ask questions afterwards to stimulate discussion and to check that the main points are understood.

Music and dancing

These can be used on their own or combined with drama for extra impact. Music is an important form of communication in many societies. Music can arouse emotions and strong feelings. Music can be traditional music, where local singers have been directly involved in the selection of songs and words that have both appeal and carry health messages. Some countries have also used modern pop music to appeal to young people. Music can be performed live, but it can also be recorded and played in public places or broadcast on radio.

Puppets

Puppets are another form of theatre that can attract a crowd, and be an entertaining way of introducing ideas on health and nutrition. Puppets are a good way of raising sensitive issues surrounding faeces and personal hygiene that might not be acceptable if actors were used in a drama.

Other popular media

One good approach is to look around for examples of oral communication in the community. Poetry and proverbs have been used in health education programmes. Traditional medicine sellers, magicians, fortune tellers, town criers and market traders have all been used to get health messages across in interesting and entertaining ways.

General guidelines

Look out for folk and popular media in the community and see whether they can be mobilized for health education. Folk media have enormous potential for health education and health promotion. In using popular media, consider the following :

- Brief the artists, actors and musicians, but let them put the health topics in their own words.
- Any health education carried out through folk media should be based on some initial research on what the community know, feel and believe about the topic. Pre-test any folk media with a sample of the intended audience before using it.
- Involving communities themselves in putting together a drama can be a powerful stimulus for developing community awareness and raising consciousness. It also makes sure that the ideas presented are meaningful and relevant and are more likely to be understood and acted on.
- Performing live in front of an audience has more impact, especially if there is an opportunity for discussion and dialogue between actors and audience. Well planned and properly tested folk media can, however, still have a valuable impact when broadcast through mass media such as film, television and radio and played on audio and videocassettes.
- In using folk media for health, avoid moralizing and preaching. Do not destroy their essential characteristics : their popular nature, their entertainment value, and their ability to deal with social issues.