

Healthy Young People

Healthy Young People & Health Literacy

What is health literacy?

Health literacy is the knowledge and skills needed to find, understand and use information and services to make decisions about health and healthcare. This includes all areas of health and well-being.

Many things can impact a person's health literacy including a person's individual characteristics, support available, the community they belong to, access to and delivery of services, as well as the environment in which they live, work and play.

An individual's health literacy can vary at times of stress and trauma and over time, as people are exposed to new information, skills and experiences.

Developing Young People's Health Literacy

Schools can be important environments for developing knowledge, skills and values and attitudes that support health and wellbeing. However:

- Learning new information does not necessarily develop the skills or values and attitudes to make healthy choices
- Health and wellbeing is experienced in inequitable ways. Young people's lives and experience may quite different from what the guidelines say is needed to maintain health and wellbeing.
- Health and wellbeing needs change over a person's lifetime
- Health information can change based upon new research.
- Reliance on online sources of health information and the wide variety of sources and accuracy
- The prevalence of advertising means it is particularly important that they develop skills to critically analyse information.

The Australian Curriculum

Health literacy is a key idea of The Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education. It focuses on developing knowledge, understanding and skills related to the three dimensions of health literacy proposed by Nutbeam (2000):

- functional dimension – researching and applying information relating to knowledge and services to respond to a health-related question
- interactive dimension – requires more advanced knowledge, understanding and skills to actively and independently engage with a health issue and to apply new information to changing circumstances
- critical dimension – the ability to selectively access and critically analyse health information from a variety of sources (which might include scientific information, health brochures or messages in the media) to take action to promote personal health and wellbeing or that of others.

(ACARA, 2016)ⁱ

HYP Health Literacy Outcomes

HYP provides an authentic learning opportunity for young people to develop health literacy across the three dimensions. By following the mission steps, young people will develop skills to critically analyse health information, participate in meaningful projects and be empowered to create health supporting environments.

The HYP missions will support young people to co-design resources or strategies to support healthy choices helps them explore health topics, put learning into action, gain confidence and benefit other young people.

Functional health literacy

The HYP Missions will:

- Develop young people's ability to apply reading, writing, and numeracy skills to health-related materials
- Develop young people's knowledge of health information including health guidelines and health risks
- Develop young people's understanding of health supports and services available locally and online.

Communicative/Interactive health literacy

The HYP Missions will:

- Improve young people's capacity to find and act upon health knowledge
- Motivate young people to make healthy choices
- Develop values and attitudes that support young people to maintain health and wellbeing
- Develop young peoples' skill to communicate health information to their peers, family and community.

Critical health literacy

The HYP Missions will:

- Develop young people's skills to critically analyse health information
- Improve young people's capacity, motivation and self-confidence to act upon health information and resist unhealthy or misleading information and advertising.
- Develop young people's understanding of the influences on people's capacity to make healthy choices
- Develop young people's capacity to participate in formal and informal processes for community change to support the health and wellbeing of all people.
- Develop skills to create or influence environments to support the health and wellbeing of all.

Tips for developing young people's health literacy

1. Take a strengths-based approach to health and wellbeing. Develop young people's assets to enable them to engage effectively with health information and services rather than focussing on risk factors.
2. Take the role of facilitator of learning rather than the role of teacher as expert. Help young people explore what health means to them and the tools or resources they find useful.
3. Teach young people to ask questions about health and wellbeing.
4. Prioritise young people's voices in designing and delivering health education in schools.
5. Encourage and support self-reflection.
6. Include all dimensions of health literacy.
 - Explore the purpose of health information, how it is created and how a person's own experiences and biases can influence how they interpret health information.
 - Integrate media literacy approaches with health education to combat harmful health messages.
7. Consider the impact of the [social determinants of health](#)ⁱ on people's health and wellbeing.
8. Teach young people to evaluate health information. Adapt these questions from Renwick (2014)ⁱⁱ to help young people develop their health literacy:
 - Who created this?
 - Why was it created/developed?
 - How can it be used/utilised?
 - What resources are needed and who has them?
 - What is it about this that has meaning and/or interest for me?
 - How do I understand this and how might others?
 - What/whose values, lifestyles and points of view are represented and/or omitted from this?
 - What could be done differently to benefit/enable the least advantaged?
9. Support and engage staff in professional learning

For more information about Health Literacy:

[Public Health Services Communication and Health Literacy](#)²

ⁱ Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016b). ACARA HPE learning area. Retrieved July 31, 2019, from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/health-and-physical-education/key-ideas/>

ⁱⁱ Renwick, Kerry. (2014). Critical health literacy: shifting textual–social practices in the health classroom. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport and Physical Education*. 5. 201-216. 10.1080/18377122.2014.940808.

¹ tcal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Social-determinants-of-health-action-sheets-TasCOSS-2012.pdf

² www.health.tas.gov.au/publichealth/health_literacy