



Safety Through 'Skills First' Approach

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Evidence shows the positive effect of **experiential** skills components on behaviour change. Sexual violence prevention programmes become safer, more fun and effective if a 'Skills First' approach is taken.

Why 'Skills First'?

Individual problem solving and critical thinking are important, but teaching prevention programmes is different to common teaching because it can re-traumatise survivors and involves changing behaviours and beliefs. We want to make it easy for participants to change beliefs about themselves and their ability to change and do something they haven't done before (like staying calm and feeling OK when they don't get what they want or expect, belief that they have the right to be heard etc.).

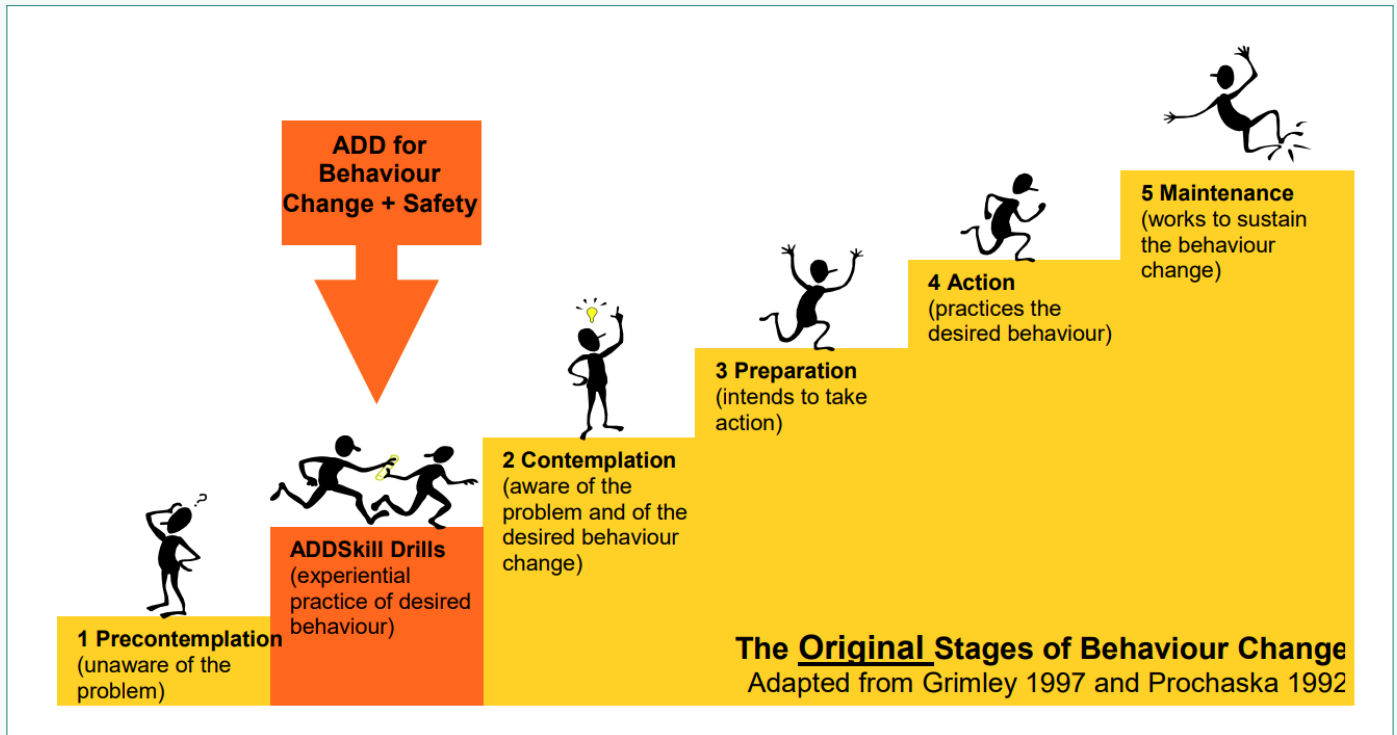
Knowledge, empathy, and/or fears and worries do NOT produce behaviour change - see ["Three Myths of Behaviour Change - What You Think You Know That You Don't" by Jenny Chross](#)



Jenny Chross

Adding (coached) **experiential 'Skill Drills'** at the start of the programme and ideally each session and ensuring the delivery uses non-intrusive situations and affirms everyone including survivors (i.e. ensures that victim blaming is not possible), will generate important prerequisites to successful learning:

- Emotional safety, buy-in, and trust as everyone (from potential victims to potential perpetrators) focuses on (new) possibilities and solutions right from the start.
- Participants feel more capable and less vulnerable.
- Participants are motivated to participate more and sooner in the exchanges and discussions that follow. Participants who grew up in dysfunctional families and environments see and experience what builds a healthy relationship. This is crucial for primary prevention, as it provides an experience of what is healthy, safe and positive. In earlier Behaviour Change models like the one below, practising the desired behaviour happened at a later stage. That stage should still be part of the process, but focus on individualising and tailoring the skills that were drilled at the start.



As above, it is important to distinguish safety and sexual violence prevention programmes as being different from the usual enquiry based learning as it is about behaviour change and safety. We still want inquiry learning, but **after** building confidence through skills.

Using a Skills First Approach in Your Teaching

The 'skills first' approach means you create opportunities for participant to apply what they learn rather than talk about it. The more they practice doing something, the better they'll know what to do, are more likely to accept it as a social norm, and able to recall and apply it in real life, also when under stress.

It works well to use role plays for all ages and games for younger children. However, it is important to create a safe environment for survivors as well as people who have harmed. As a facilitator you need to

- be able to relate to the participants.
- use low key scenarios that are tangible, personalised, and interactive. Make it easy and fun to learn.
- focus on basic skills that help deal with uncomfortable everyday interactions but can be used to prevent potentially traumatic/violent situations too. The cup of tea consent scenario is a good example of basic skills that can translate into far more critical situations.
- ensure that only you or your colleagues play the inappropriate behaviour. Participants practise the desired skills only!
- teach and coach people in a way that empowers them. Use clear scripts so everyone knows exactly what to say and do. Let participants improvise and adapt scenarios only once they have shown that they know and follow the basics.

Kidpower's Skill First Methodology

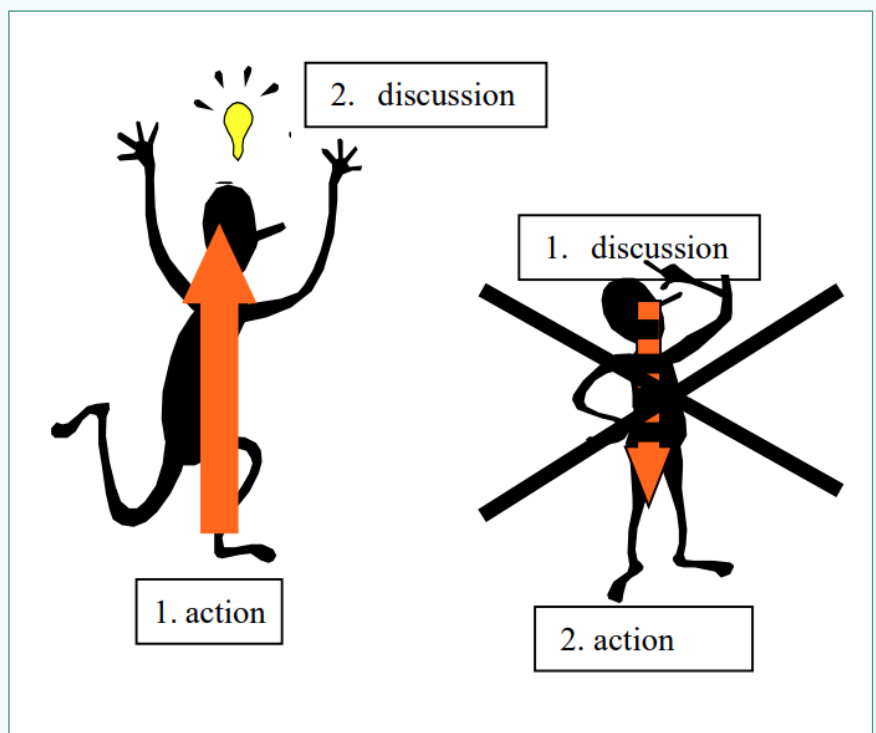
Kidpower uses the 'Skills First' approach in its programmes since 1987 by using the carefully developed, strength-based, step-by-step Kidpower Positive Practice™ teaching method that empowers people to be and act confidently in both, everyday and challenging situations.

Kidpower's Positive Practice™ teaching method provides rehearsal with in-the-moment coaching so that our students are successful in dealing with problems in very specific situations that are directly relevant to each person's age, abilities, and life situation. Success creates a foundation for more success when learning to act effectively under pressure.

The situations or scenarios range from someone whom you like doing something you don't like, someone provoking or pressuring you to do something you should not do etc. to physical assault. A set of five core skills are rehearsed that can be applied to low or high intrusion levels. Once the basic core skills are well understood and demonstrated, it is common that the participants start discussing and tailoring the scenarios to closely reflect their personal experiences of their own accord.

In other words, Kidpower accesses the brain (discussion) through the body (actions) while most other programmes aim to access the body (actions and behaviours) through the brain (knowledge).

Many of our over 4.6 million participants in over 30 countries across six continents say that this changed their lives, made them feel capable, valuable and in peace with themselves and the world. Many hundreds reported using the skills in everyday life and in emergencies to get help, take charge and prevent abuse and violence.



**A picture paints a thousand words
A play instils a million skills**