Guidelines for Using an Anonymous Question Box

USE IT
After decorating and introducing your box to your group/class, don’t just leave it in a corner hoping someone will put a question in it. Be sure to take the time each day, or couple of days to give them a chance to submit a question. Instruct them to either write a question or write, “I do not have a question at this time.” That way, everyone will be writing at the same time and no one will know who is submitting a question and who is not. Set aside a specific time to answer questions each day, or each week and then really stick to it and answer their questions.

DON’T BE BLIND-SIDED
Often facilitators collect the questions and start answering them on the spot. This is not likely to be the most effective use of the question box. It gives the facilitator no time to prepare responses and allows the group too much control over what issues get covered and when.

Take the questions out of the box each day and pre-select the questions you will answer. Doing so gives you time to formulate an answer or do research you need to answer the question. It can also help you to introduce or supplement a given topic area, with their questions related to that topic.

PROVIDE FACTS
Do your best to answer the question that was asked. Then, even if the question does not necessarily ask for a specific fact, do not miss an opportunity to remind people how diseases are spread, or that it is always okay to say no or choose to wait or stop with regard to specific sexual behaviors.

BE TRUTHFUL
Never lie or tell half-truths. You can choose not to respond to a question, but if you are going to answer, give them the complete and truthful response. Teens can see through a lie and if you get caught in a lie, you will lose your credibility. It is even better to say, “I will lose my job if I answer that question,” than to lie about it.

DON’T TRY TO BE ‘COOL”
No matter what you do or say, you will NEVER know what it is like to be a teenager today – trying to make them think you are cool, or that you ‘get’ them is likely to backfire. Acknowledge that you cannot possibly know what the pressures and issues are today and ask them to help inform you. They will be more likely to respect the information you can provide if you maintain some distance from them and don’t worry if they ‘like’ you or not.