

# Reducing the Risk

## Overview

*Reducing the Risk (RTR)* is a 16-session curriculum designed to help high school students delay the initiation of sex or increase the use of protection against pregnancy and STD/HIV if they choose to have sex. The major focus is the development of attitudes and skills that will help teens prevent pregnancy and the transmission of STD, including HIV. This research-proven approach addresses skills such as risk assessment, communication, decision making, planning, refusal strategies and delay tactics.

## Description

**The greatest emphasis of *Reducing the Risk* is on teaching students the interpersonal or social skills they can use to abstain or protect themselves.** Abstinence is presented as the best, safest and most common choice for high school students, but *Reducing the Risk* also recognizes that some students are sexually active. For this reason, students are given clear guidelines and rationales for using protection during sex. Young people do not find these messages contradictory, and lessons reviewing protection do not increase the likelihood that students will become sexually active. Students learn they must consult with their parents and think through their own values to decide what to do.

### **Two key skills are taught:**

- **Refusal skills** – Responses that clearly say no in a manner that doesn't jeopardize a good relationship, but which leave no ambiguity about the decision not to have sex or to refuse unprotected sex.
- **Delay tactics and alternative actions** – Ways students can avoid a situation or delay taking action until they have time to decide what to do or say, or until they are more prepared to make a decision.

*Reducing the Risk* is delivered through roleplays, skill practice, brainstorming, mini-lecture and worksheet activities. Roleplays are an essential and powerful part of the program. At first, students may be hesitant about their performances, but they soon begin to enjoy these opportunities and use them to great advantage. Teachers help students by encouraging them to practice their interpersonal skills in the roleplays. The more students practice effectively saying no to sex (or to unprotected sex), the more likely they'll be to use these skills in real life.

### **As a result of participating in RTR, students will be able to:**

- Evaluate the risks and lasting consequences of becoming an adolescent parent or becoming infected with HIV or another STD.
- Recognize that abstaining from sexual activity or using contraception are the only ways to avoid pregnancy, HIV and other STD.
- Conclude that factual information about conception and protection is essential for avoiding teen pregnancy, HIV and other STD.
- Demonstrate effective communication skills for remaining abstinent and for avoiding unprotected sexual intercourse.

## Population Served & Setting

RTR can be implemented with high school students in both rural and urban areas. It has been used successfully with students from a range of racial/ethnic backgrounds. While designed primarily for ninth grade students, it can be used with students in other appropriate grades (e.g., 8–12) or the appropriate age (e.g., 13–18).

## About the Author

**Richard P. Barth, MSW, PhD**, is Dean, School of Social Work, University of Maryland. His AB, MSW and PhD are from Brown and UC Berkeley, respectively. He has served as a chaired professor at UC Berkeley and the University of North Carolina.

He was the 1986 winner of the Frank Breul Prize for Excellence in Child Welfare Scholarship from the University of Chicago, a Fulbright Scholar in 1990 and 2006, the 1998 recipient of the Presidential Award for Excellence in Research from the National Association of Social Workers, the 2005 winner of the Flynn Prize for Research, and the 2007 winner of the Peter Forsythe Award from the American Public Human Services Association.

He is the author, co-author, or editor of ten books and three curricula, including *Reducing the Risk, Safer Choices* and *Power through Choices*, all designed to reduce the likelihood and risks of youth becoming sexually active. He was also the Principal Investigator (PI) of the ENABL evaluation in California, and served as PI of the evaluation of the Hewlett Foundation's Responsible Fatherhood and Male Involvement Initiative in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Teenage Pregnancy Prevention Initiative (TPPI) in North Carolina. He has published more than 120 articles in a variety of health and social work journals and is on the editorial board or a consulting editor of *Social Work*, *Social Service Review*, the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, *Children and Youth Services Review* and *Adoption Quarterly*. He has also served on the boards of numerous child-serving agencies and is now a Commissioner on the Advisory Board of the Baltimore City Social Services Department.

He has led research studies and service evaluations for numerous federal and state agencies and foundations in the area of children's services. For 8 years he served as Co-PI on the National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being, the first national probability study of child welfare services. He is currently PI of a Maryland DHR funded effort to examine reproductive health services and teenage births in foster care.

## Who's Using?

ETR's effective, award-winning, evidence-based resources are used by schools, departments of education, youth groups, government agencies and clinics nationwide.

Some of the sites that have purchased *Reducing the Risk* include:

- Montana Department of Health & Human Services
- Duval County Public Schools, Florida
- Maricopa County Department of Public Health, Arizona
- San Diego Youth Services, California

- Wyoming Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs
- Buffalo Public Schools, New York
- San Antonio Metropolitan Health District, Texas
- Belmont County Health Department, Ohio
- Communities in Schools of the Charleston Area, Inc, North Carolina
- Sedgwick County Health Department, Kansas
- West Virginia Department of Health & Human Resource

## Parent/Guardian Notification

It is essential to inform parents and guardians regarding the nature and scheduling of this or any sexual health education program. Prior to implementation of the curriculum, families should receive written notice describing the goals of Reducing the Risk and the nature of the content to be covered. Parents also should be given an opportunity to view the curriculum and related materials if they wish. The vast majority of parents want their children to receive appropriate instruction and be given the information and skills they need to protect their sexual health, but parents/guardians also must be allowed the chance to opt out or exclude their children from participating in the program, if they wish.

## Curriculum Review

If you would like to view the Reducing the Risk curriculum, please follow the directions in the link below:

**Link:** <https://www.etr.org/sample/?c=rtr&p=1>

\*Please note you must use the link to request 30-day review access\*