## The Concept of Risk and Adolescent High Risk Behaviors

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#### Risk is....

- A concept that denotes a potential negative impact to some characteristic of value that may arise from a future event
- Chance of harm or loss or danger
- Something that can be avoided or mitigated

Differs from 'uncertainty' where true outcome is not known; with risk, some of the possibilities can be predicted

75% of teens engage in at least one high risk behavior

## **High Risk Behaviors**

#### Drugs

- Illegal
- Prescription
- Alcohol
- Cigarettes
- Performance enhancing

## Sex

- Having it
- Number of partners
- Use of birth control

Body modification

Gambling

Tanning booths

Carrying a weapon

Driving without a seatbelt

- Driving and drinking
- Speeding
- Driving and texting

Biking without a helmet

Sexting

## Risk may be increased by... (these cannot usually be altered)

Genetics

Chronic conditions

Sex

Age and degree of brain development

Age when puberty occurred

Intelligence

Temperament

Environment

Poor school achievement - Chaotic home

Parental use and attitudes - Abuse

Community attitudes - Peer influences

# Why do they do it?

Lack of knowledge of the danger

Immature brain development

Egocentricity – just don't want to

I am immortal

Need to test limits

Rebel against adult authority

Develop their own identity

Cope with psychosocial issues

Need for sensation and stimulation

Because it is there!

"Seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience" (Zuckerman, 2007)

## Negative Risk Factors - make one more likely to engage in a risky behavior

#### Behaviors of peers

- Give excuse/rationalization to commit acts
- Acts as catalyst and justification
- Peer accomplices/ do it together
- The media and negative role models

#### Poor self esteem

- Feelings of inadequacy
- Feel powerless
- Feel isolated

#### External locus of control

• Blames others/ externalizes responsibility

#### Intense or absent attachments

• Or unwillingness to let go of attachments/ relationships

Substance abuse/ dependency

Mental disorders (1 in 5 teens)

- Depression/bipolar
- Antisocial personality

#### Academic issues

• History of poor performance

Violence/ abuse in the home or in relationships

• Excessively harsh punishment, neglect

Parent engaged in illegal/inappropriate behaviors

Ineffective parenting

Victim of bullying/ ridicule

Significant personal rejection

## **Positive Factors (to increase resiliency)**

Respects others and themselves

Healthy coping skills

Assumes responsibility for one's actions

Positive sense of self and self worth

Connection with friends, family, school

## Family cohesion

- Caring to each other; available
- Child feels loved and supported
- Family is available to the child
- Parents set reasonable limits, have rules and consistent discipline
- Parents monitor where their child is and with whom
- Family communicates!
- Family provides prevention education

Safe environment

Positive role models

Parents and friends are not engaging in high risk behaviors

Academic success (a safe and nurturing school environment where they feel connected)

Sense of humor

## The goal is to develop resilience and make positive choices despite the situation

"Develop a healthy set of behaviors and coping mechanisms that are integrated into decision-making and elicited in response to a threatening situation" (Morris & Clemente, 2008)

## Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance – United States, 2011

(9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders)

Centers for Disease Control, June 6, 2012

## **Findings**

72% of all US deaths from ages 10-24 are due to:

- Motor vehicle crashes
- Other unintentional injuries
- homicide
- Suicide

7.7% never or rarely wore a seatbelt (11.1%)

24.1% rode in a car with someone who had been drinking alcohol (29.1) [8.2% admitted drinking and driving]

32.8% had texted or e-mailed while driving

16.6% carried a weapon (18%); 5.1% carried a gun (5.4%)

5.9% had not gone to school because they felt unsafe at school or going to or from school (5.5%)

# 7.8% had attempted suicide(6.9%); 15.8% considered it (14.5%)

70.8% have ever had alcohol (75%)

23.1% used marijuana (19.7%)

47.4% had sexual intercourse (47.8%)

• 38% did not use a condom

32.8% had been in a physical fight (32.5%)

## 8% forced to have sexual intercourse (7.8%)

9.4% experienced dating violence (9.9%)

18.1% currently smoke (20%)

32.4% watched > 3 hours of TV/day (35.4%)

13% were obese (unchanged); 15.2% were overweight

28.5% felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for 2 or more weeks in a row that they stopped doing some usual activity

## **Initiation of risky behaviors BEFORE AGE 13**

10.3% smoked before age 13 (14.2%)

20.5% drank alcohol before age 13 (23.5%)

8.1% tried marijuana before age 13 (8.3%)

6.2% had sexual intercourse before age 13 (7.1%)

#### **Goals for Sexuality Education:**

Provide accurate information about human sexuality

Provide an opportunity for youth to develop their values, attitudes, and insights about sexuality Help youth develop relationships and interpersonal skills

Help youth exercise responsibility regarding sexual relationships, including abstinence, pressures to becoming prematurely involved in sexual intercourse, and use of contraception

# APPROACHES TO TEACHING SENSITIVE CONTENT IN SEX EDUCATION (THESE CAN BE MODIFIED FOR ANY AGE STUDENT)

- 1. Have the students write or bring in "Dear Abby" letters related to sexual issues and let the students discuss and debate how to respond to the letter.
- 2. Play "What Happens Next." Start with a scenario of a girl who is dressed provocatively. Ask, 'What happens next?' and let the students think out the sequence of events. After each step, say, "What happens next?' (boys are attracted boys want to have sex with her boy rapes her). The goal is to get them to think about their actions and the potential consequences.
- 3. Role play what to say to set limits. Give responses or let them develop the responses in a group. Examples: "You would if you loved me!" "If you loved me you wouldn't put that pressure on me right now." (Make sure that boys and girls are together in the class for these role plays so that they see they are both getting the same message.)

- 4. Values clarification. Explain the various values related to the issues of sexuality and reproductive health from the perspective of multiple religious and cultural groups, making sure to provide the rationales so that students can see the reasons why rules and laws were developed. Discuss the values of relationships and the difference between manipulation and caring.
- 5. Delaying gratification. This can be taught by saving money or coupons for something desired later.
- 6. Have students ask their parents what they were taught about sex when they were in school.
- 7. Have young people who are teen parents talk about how it has changed their lives: socially, educationally, financially, and related to employment and baby care-taking.

# GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS WHEN DISCUSSING SEXUALITY WITH THEIR CHILDREN

- 1. Be willing to answer any and all questions.
- 2. Be honest—don't lie.
- 3. Develop a rapport first: Show your child you are not afraid of or embarrassed by the material.
- 4. Tell your child how normal his or her questions are and that it is normal to be curious and to have a lack of knowledge about their own bodies.
- 5. It's O.K. to acknowledge that you don't know something. You and your child can look it up together or you can get the answer and have another 'session' with them, thus continuing the dialog.
- 6. Buy age-appropriate books with explanations and have them available on family bookshelves; when the books are missing from the shelf, then you know your child has a question and this is a good time to start a conversation.
- 7. Encourage pride in their bodies; there is no 'sin' involved and nothing about it is 'dirty'.
- 8. Dispel myths and fears.
- 9. When your child tells a 'dirty' joke, have him or her explain it (they may want you to really explain it to them!).
- 10. When your child uses words with a sexual context, have him or her define them.
- 11. Encourage children that they need to know about their bodies so that they can take good care of themselves in the future.
- 12. Enforce the idea that only THEY can touch their own bodies; that if someone wants them to do something and it "feels" wrong, then it is wrong.
- 13. Explain your values related to sex and sexuality and your rationale for those values.
- 14. When your child has a first period or wet dream, have a private celebration (e.g., a dinner out with adults only). Let your child know that it is exciting and special to grow up and that you are proud of them...but that this is the beginning of new responsibilities related to their bodies.
- 15. Let them know you are available to pick them up any time day or night from any situation where they feel unsafe or threatened.
- 16. Teach them to respect the bodies (and belongings and reputation) of others.
- 17. Give unconditional love.