

Building Resilience Through Harm Reduction: Working with Sexually Exploited & Trafficked Young People

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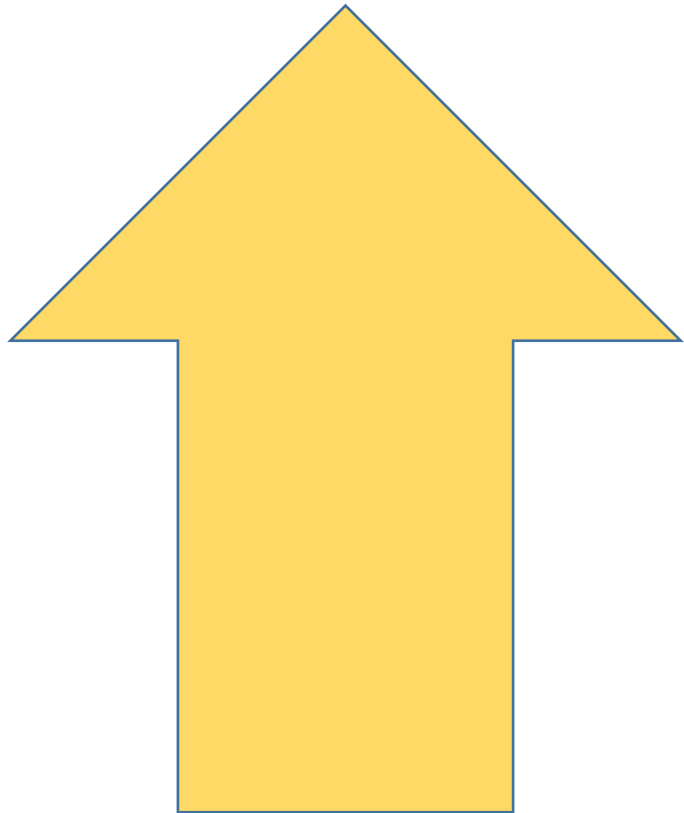
UC Davis Children's Hospital CAARE Center
Trauma Training Academy

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Why use harm reduction for Youth who are SE/Trafficked?



- Risk for violence (Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018)
- Risk for unwanted or early pregnancy/STIs (Hallet, Verbruggen, Buckley, & Robinson, 2019)
- Leaving care behavior (Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018)
- Substance use and abuse behavior (sometimes) (Hickle & Roe-Sepowitz, 2018)
- Distrust of the system
- Risk of psychological coercion/core identity disturbance

What is harm reduction?



Dr. Nolan Zane



Dr. Nzinga Harrison



Dr. G. Alan Marlatt

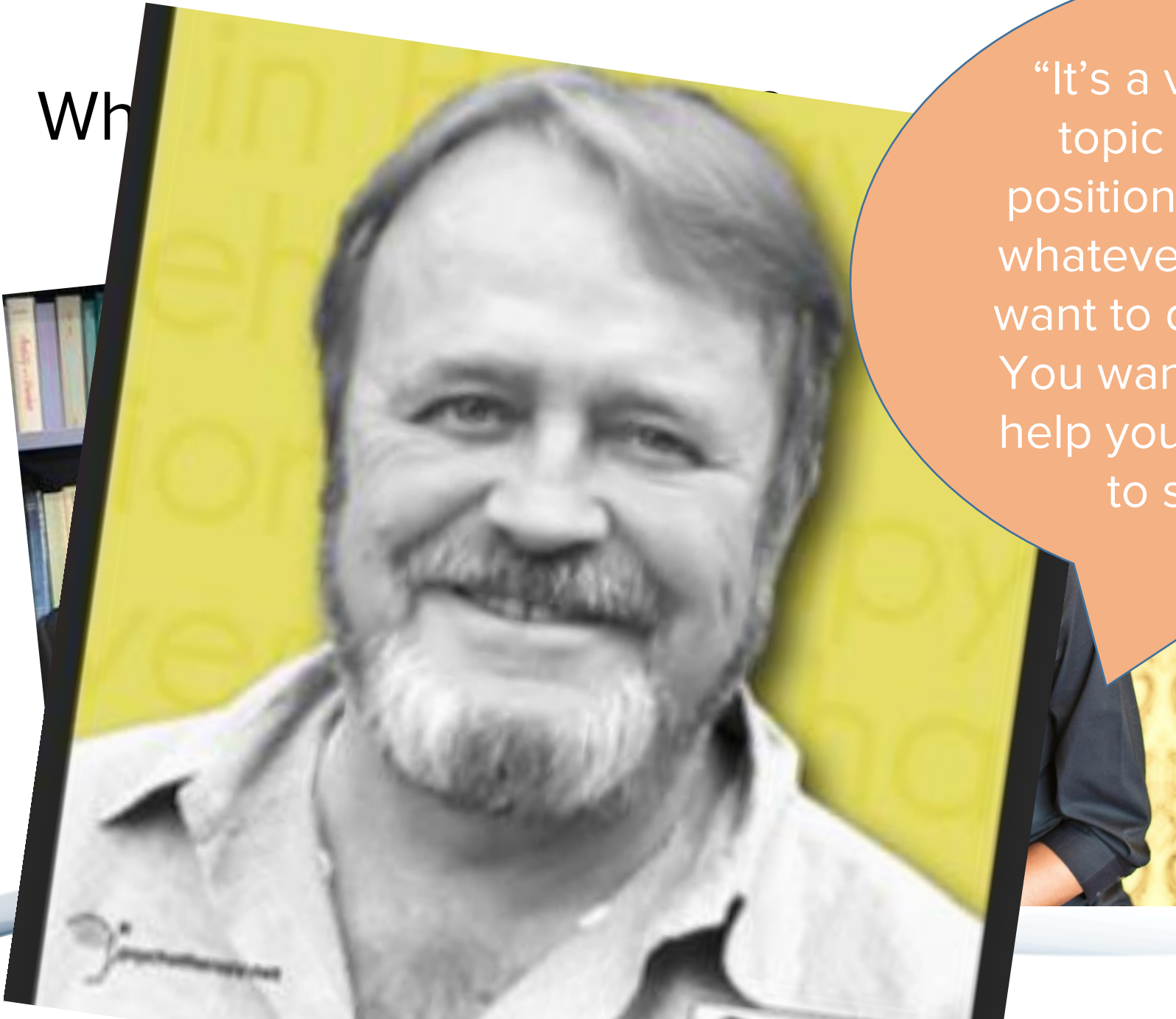
What is harm reduction?



“both an attitude and a set of compassionate, pragmatic approaches designed to reduce harm stemming from high risk behaviors and increase the quality of life of those who are engaging in high risk behaviors.”



Wh



“It’s a very controversial topic but basically my position is...We’ll help you, whatever your goal is. You want to quit, We’ll help you. You want to cut back, We’ll help you. We are not going to shut you out. “

What is harm reduction?



Ryan Walker, MD, MPH @road_tosuccess · Apr 2

Reframing Harm Reduction as “Compassion, Relationship, and Sawubona
“I see you.”” The humanism of connection in medicine @NzingaMD
#ASAMAnnual2022 #AddictionMedicine #MedTwitter



History of Harm Reduction

- Began to be discussed more frequently in the 1980s in the substance abuse culture after the increase of HIV (Bonomo & Bowes, 2001)
- Countries like Portugal have applied Harm Reduction strategies to address substance misuse in their countries
- Became popular also among professionals working in sexual health education programs and teen pregnancy

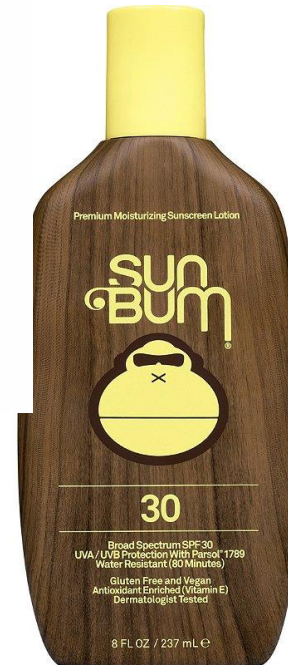


Stop risky behavior(s)

<Harm Reduction>

Engage in risky behavior(s)

Harm Reduction we already engage in.....



Harm Reduction Is:

- An approach based on a strong commitment to public health and human rights
- Targeted approach that focuses on specific risks and harms
- Evidence based, practical, feasible
- Incremental in nature
- Requires that one accepts youth how they are and avoid being judgmental
- Recognizes the value of all persons regardless of behavior
- Acknowledges ANY positive change an individual makes

Runaway and Homeless Youth Training and Technical Assistance Centers

WHO can implement HR?

Social
workers

Mental
Health
Professionals

Substance
Abuse
Counselors

Caregivers

Placement
Workers

Advocates &
Mentors

WHEN to Use Harm Reduction Strategies

- A youth is actively being exploited or trafficked or engaging in sex trade and is not ready, willing, or able to stop or is ambivalent about stopping at this moment in time
- A youth leaves care without permission
- Youth is misusing substances and/or has a dependence
- Youth is in a violent relationship with trafficker and/or partner
- Youth is having unsafe behaviors associated with cell phone and social media use

Harm Reduction Philosophy

The 5 Keys

Key #1: HR is Congruent with Overall Goals



- HR is not in conflict with our overarching goal to stop child sexual exploitation
- You can utilize HR while still making a plan with the youth to get out and stay out
- HR increases safety and health and decreases death, serious injury, etc.

Key #2: Risk and HR exists on a continuum



- Risky behavior is not an all or nothing concept
- Having a clear understanding of the severity of risk can help create nuanced HR plans
- This also helps us evaluate “success”

Key #3: Risk and Risky behavior is a part of the human experience

- Avoid pathologizing youth for risky behavior
- Remember adolescent and the frontal lobe dilemma
- Experiences that cause us harm can also have benefits



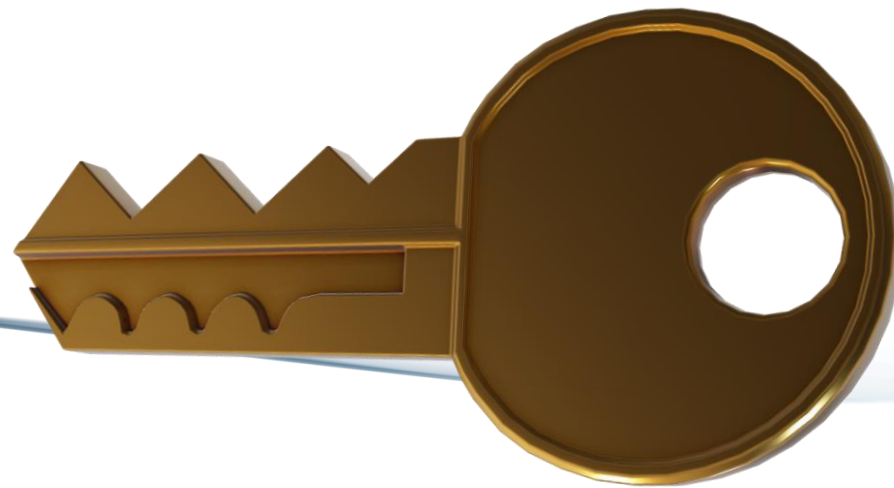
Key #4: Contextual risk is important to evaluate

- Risk related to exploitation is not just about an individual's behavior
- Systems also need to focus on the risks of demand, systemic barriers, systemic harms, etc.
- Experiences that cause us harm can also have benefits



Key #5: Humans make healthier choices in the context of compassionate relationships

- Support, empowerment, human connection and education are key
- All people deserve respect and dignity even if you don't agree with their behaviors
- Receptiveness to change increases when wellbeing is prioritized



Last thought on HR philosophy

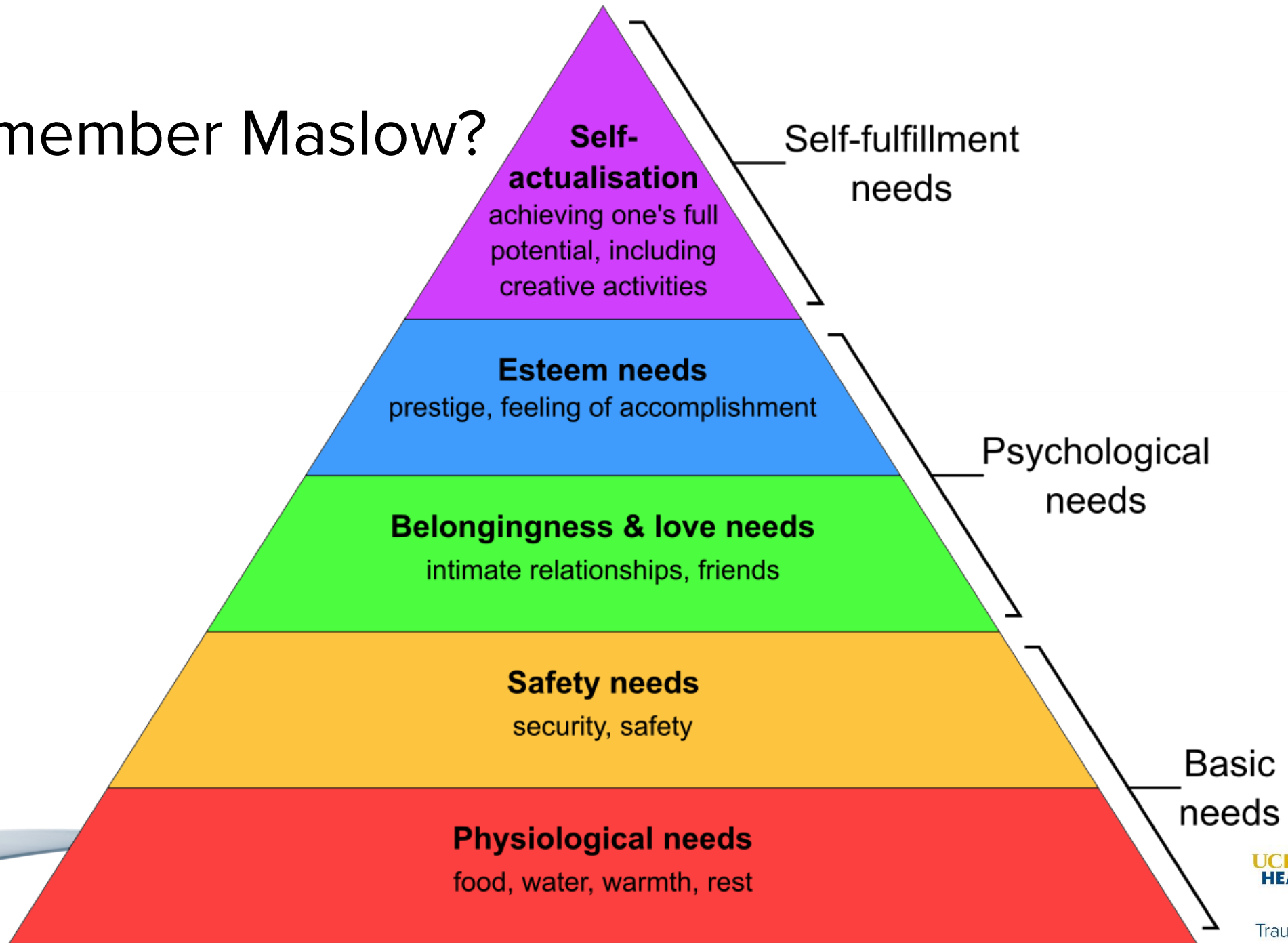
- Effective HR takes quite a bit of self-reflection (see example reflective questions)
 - What are your biggest fears and worries about this particular youth?
 - How will HR strategies be received by your agency? Field?
 - Do we have any other implicit or explicit bias or moral judgement that may get in the way of our work?

Example Reflective Questions

- Do you believe humans, even youth, deserve respect and dignity regardless of their behavior or experiences?
- Do you believe risky behaviors including drug use and sexual exploitation happen in a larger societal and cultural context or are primarily a flaw or issue with an individual person?
- Do you believe that despite our best efforts we cannot force people to change behavior?
- Do you believe we can help youth be safer even if they are currently engaging in sexual exploitation, problematic drug use, or other risky behaviors?

Assessment of Risks & Needs

Remember Maslow?



Assessment Strategy: Risk, Set, Setting

Risk

- What is the most pressing/riskiest issue?

Set

- What is the current mindset (thoughts, moods, expectations)

Setting

- What setting is the risky behavior occurring in?

Harm Reduction Practical Strategies

Harm Reduction Strategies for Active Exploitation

- Tip #1-Have honest and open conversations about sexual health
- Youth may be getting sex ed from traffickers and sex buyers

Comprehensive Sexual Health includes:

- 1) Sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expressions
- 2) Consent – legal and ethical concept
- 3) Exploitation vs non-exploitative sexual exchanges
- 4) Protection from STIs and HIV
- 5) Pregnancy – prevention and reproductive health
- 6) Values in sexuality and relationships
- 7) Pleasure – both giving and receiving; emotional and physical

HR for active exploitation, cont.

Tip #2: Discuss safety exchanges with sex buyers

- Condom negotiation
- Clear expectations about pricing, time limits, sex acts, payment arrangement
- Bad “date” lists

Tip #3: Promote physical safety

- Clothing and jewelry options
- Escape plans (from trafficker or sex buyer)
- Ways to meet basic needs without trafficker

HR for active exploitation, cont.

Tip #4: Promote Emotional Safety

- Utilizing MI strategies to find focus and enhance change talk
- Encourage less “traditional” therapy styles – self-help books, Ending the Game, phone applications

Tip #5: Increase empowerment and quality of life behaviors

- Focus on values, interest, and identity
- Have discussion of “life worth living”
- What brings them joy?
- Reminder – they have agency to make their own decisions about their lives

Harm Reduction for Leaving Care Behaviors

Tip #1-Openly talk about urges to leave care and create a comprehensive safety plan targeting leaving care

- Reduce stigma and shame
- Reduce impulsivity when leaving care
- Allows for consistent evaluation of risks

Tip#2-Pack an emergency bag with the youth

- Water, snacks, clean clothes, copies of identification, safe sex supplies, crisis contact numbers
- Small amounts of psychiatric medication
- Cell phone and cell phone charger

HR for leaving care behaviors, cont.

Tip#3-Problem solve “safer” places to go

- Can they leave placement and also avoid the trafficker?
- Can they reduce their time being away?

Tip #4-Discuss how to get their basic needs met

- Are they familiar with the area? Do they know where food banks and shelters are? Where will they be sleeping?

Tip #5-Address specific concerns (e.g., drug use, active exploitation, staying safer in violent relationship)

HR Strategies to Address Substance Misuse

Tip #1-Discuss alcohol and drug use in an open and non-judgmental manner

- Assessment of what, how, when, etc. they are using
- Have they tried to quit or cut down before?

Tip #2-Help Youth increase knowledge about their drug use

- How a drug is made; How it affects the brain
- Risk of overdose; mixing drugs

Tip #3-Problem solve safer ways to ingest/inject drugs

- Not using alone
- Sterile supplies; disposal
- HIV, Hep C prevention

HR for Substance Misuse, cont.

Tip #4-Discuss overdose prevention strategies

- Especially if youth is using opiates (but may be useful to all)
- Warning signs of overdose
- Narcan/Naloxone Training
- Knowing tolerance, avoid mixing, quality/strength of drug

Tip #5-Apply Motivational Interview strategies to assess ambivalence, and a youth's readiness, willingness and ability to participate in substance abuse treatment

- Seven Challenges is a HR treatment model

HR strategies for Violence in Relationships

Tip #1-Have an open, non-judgmental conversation about the relationship (assessment of the level of risk/harm/severity of the violence and perpetrator's behavior)

- You care about their safety even if they are in this violent relationship
- Get a sense of coercive control; access to weapons; other behaviors related to lethality

Tip #2-Help the youth to recognize the violent partner's warning signs of violence

Tip #3-Discuss potential safer escape plans if and when they are ready/can leave

- Validate fear and discuss the reality of the situation
- Scheduling a weekly appointment, copies of identification, turning off location tracking, emergency bag, safety people

Tip #4-Discuss and increase the sense of control over the youth's own life

- Therapy, career, interests,
- Recognizing strengths and resiliency
- Plan activities for sense of competence, self-esteem, and wellbeing

Tip #5-Apply Motivational Interviewing strategies to reduce ambivalence and assess readiness, willingness, and ability to leave abusive/violent relationship and/or be connected to other services/resources

Harm Reduction for Cell Phone/Social Media Use

Tip #1: Evaluate values and rules

- Make sure youth know the rules, why the rules are created, and when more freedom will occur
- Consider a nuanced vs. blanket response

Tip #2: Engage the youth in conversations around cell phones/social media

- Benefits of use; preferred modes of communication; previous rules or expectations

Tip #3: Help increase benefits of cell phone and social media use

- Help program in numbers, apps, positive content creators
- Discuss privacy and programming protective codes and passwords
- Risk vs benefits of sharing location online

Tip #4: Openly discuss urges for utilizing cell phone and social in risky ways

- Triggers, warning signs, safety planning for trafficker or sex buyer contact

Tip #5: Increase knowledge and awareness about social media safety tips

Harm Reduction Resources



https://harmreduction.org



FIND NALOXONE

FIND SYRINGES

DONATE

NATIONAL
HARM REDUCTION
COALITION

THE MOVEMENT ▾ WHO WE ARE ▾ WHAT WE DO ▾ RESOURCE CENTER ▾ TAKE ACTION ▾ 





HOME

ETG CURRICULUM ▼

SUPPORTER TRAINING ▼

BLOG

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Reducing recidivism by breaking bonds of attachment to traffickers and “The Game” lifestyle



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Motivational Interviewing - Foundational



2:14





Sexual Health and Trauma

Positive Thoughts

Every young person counts

Every young person deserves a place in the world where they matter

Every young person has a purpose

Every young person has something to give

Physical, mental, emotional and spiritual development is important to all people

Everyone has the capacity to learn and make positive choices

Changing and growing is a part of a life-long process



References