

# What's the Difference in teaching a...

**Risk Avoidance Message**

**VS**

**Risk Reduction Message**

A **Risk Avoidance** message stresses eliminating the risky behavior.

A **Risk Reduction** message stresses merely reducing the consequences wherever/ whenever possible.

## What constitutes high-risk behavior?

Most people agree that for the adolescent/teen population, smoking cigarettes, underage drinking and illegal drug use are high-risk behaviors. Young people that engage in such behaviors put themselves at risk for a host of medical and legal consequences.

## Do We View And Treat Early Sex Like Other High-Risk Behaviors?

Not necessarily. There is a common idea that since humans are sexual beings, the best we can do for young people is to help them to do it as safely as possible. This usually means encouraging specific behaviors and contraception to decrease their risk. Following that practice will, at best, only reduce a young person's risk of developing life-altering consequences. It teaches that the "urge of the moment" is paramount and it needs to be carefully gratified. What is left out of the equation is full disclosure of the life-long repercussions so commonly faced with early sexual involvement; the physical, emotional and the impact on one's future. Encouraging condom/contraceptive use to young people has the potential to lead them down the path to promiscuity. In addition, many Risk Reduction curricula deceptively teach that condoms/contraceptives will "prevent" STDs and pregnancy when medical research shows they may prevent some physical consequences but there are significant failure rates. Moreover, condoms/contraceptives offer little to no protection from STDs spread by skin-to-skin contact.

## Do We Enable Teen Smoking, Drinking or Drugs? Then Why Sex?

We don't tell our children that smoking cigarettes, using illegal drugs and drinking alcohol can be done safely. If we want them to succeed, we wouldn't encourage low-tar nicotine cigarettes, the use of clean needles or light alcoholic beverages to reduce their risk. Instead, a standard Risk Avoidance model is used with encouragement to avoid these risky behaviors because of cancer risk, derailed futures and serious life trouble. Early sexual behaviors of young people today often do not develop serious consequence until later in life. We want to avoid this risk.

## How Can Teens Be Taught In A Way That Is Healthiest For Them?

By using a Risk Avoidance (or Risk Elimination) model. Curricula that help young people to avoid risk have several criteria.

What is included in Teaching:	What is included in Teaching:
<p><b>Risk Avoidance/ Risk Elimination</b></p>	<p><b>Risk Reduction</b></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Avoidance of ALL high-risk behaviors</b> Smoking — Drugs — Alcohol — Sex</li> <li>• Equipping w/ strategies to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ establish boundaries</li> <li>◆ strengthen refusal skills</li> <li>◆ acquire/build self-respect</li> <li>◆ nurture personal value</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Affirmation of the best choices:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◆ healthy goal setting</li> <li>◆ development of the whole person</li> <li>◆ valuing intimacy</li> <li>◆ encouraging new starts</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• promotion of condoms</li> <li>• teaching about OCs, implants</li> <li>• encouraging fewer partners</li> <li>• emphasizing importance of testing and treatment</li> <li>• negotiation for contraceptive use</li> <li>• discouraging alcohol or drug use</li> <li>• avoidance of intimate partner violence</li> </ul>

### Evaluate the Curricula Your School/Your Child’s School Uses

**Does it:**

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stress the importance and benefits of avoiding/eliminating risk?</li> <li>• discourage teen sex?</li> <li>• define “age-appropriate” as behaviors typical for the age group?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce the instruction on abstinence to a disease prevention choice only?</li> <li>• use the word “prevention” to describe condoms and contraceptives?</li> <li>• include morals, values and family beliefs?</li> <li>• take into consideration legal age of consent?</li> </ul> |
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### Everyone’s Doing It, So Aren’t We Just Protecting Our Kids?

Let’s remove the stereotype that “Everyone Is Doing It” - They’re Not. According to the June 2014, National Youth Risk Behavior Survey done by the CDC, shows that only 46.8% of all high school students have ever been involved in sex - less than half. If that stereotype is removed, young people have the freedom to understand that they don’t have to participate in an activity many of them are not prepared for, physically, emotionally and socially.

For students who are putting themselves at risk, a risk-reduction message is important because they need to be as safe as possible. However, for the 53% of students who are not involved in sexual activity, a risk-avoidance approach empowers them to eliminate their risk. They are offered support in postponing the activity and delaying it for a mature, steady, committed relationship where there is less risk of disease, early pregnancy and emotional heart-break. Don’t we owe it to our children to strengthen their resolve to make the smartest choice?