

Clinical Technical Assistance: Harm Reduction

Although there is no universal definition for harm reduction, there is general consensus that harm reduction is focused on decreasing the negative effects associated with substance use by educating individuals and meeting them “where they’re at” on the spectrum of use from total abstinence to ongoing use.



Principles

- **Reduce** negative effects of substance use and unhealthy behaviors.
- **Accept** that some will continue to use and aren't ready for abstinence.
- **Prevent** health complications and fatal/non-fatal overdose.
- **Respect** the person's autonomy and choice, be nonjudgmental.
- **Adapt** to meet the person where they are.
- **Provide** resources and support.

Harm Reduction Approaches

Safe Use Strategies

ALWAYS

- Know the source
- Use clean water and supplies
- Utilize syringe exchange programs (when available)
- Carry naloxone
- Use test strips
- Seek medical care for health issues
- Accept tests/screens for transmittable diseases
- Rotate veins when injecting substances



AVOID

- DON'T mix substances
- DON'T share supplies
- DON'T drive while under the influence
- DON'T use alone
- DON'T use where others can't get to you



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Harm Reduction Approaches

Overdose Prevention

ALWAYS

- Use with others around
- Start low, go slow
- Know if you're in a high-risk group: overdose survivor, recently released from incarceration, recently completed inpatient treatment
- Stagger use
- Use test strips
- Carry naloxone



Harm Reduction Conversations

Utilize the spirit of Motivational Interviewing (collaboration, autonomy, compassion, and evocation) to discuss harm reduction strategies with individuals who use substances.

- “Adam, I **respect your choice to continue using** and I want to help you take care of yourself. Are you open to discussing **overdose prevention** tactics?”
- “You’re being released from treatment tomorrow, have you considered getting **naloxone** and carrying it with you?”
- “Let’s talk about **keeping you safe** – have you ever used the **needle exchange program**? That can help **reduce the risk of Hep C transmission**. They also have **fentanyl testing strips**, now, so that you can decide how much to use based on whether there’s fentanyl in it.”
- “I’d like to review what we talked about with overdose prevention. **If you decide to use, that’s ok**, just **start low because your tolerance is different**. Be sure to **use when others are around**. Let them know you have **naloxone** and that they should use it on you if you aren’t responding.”

Additional Resources:

Drug Policy Alliance - <https://www.drugpolicy.org/issues/harm-reduction>

Harm Reduction Coalition - <https://harmreduction.org/>

Harm Reduction International - <https://www.hri.global/what-is-harm-reduction>

Insite Supervised Injection Facility - <https://www.phs.ca/project/insite-supervised-injection-facility/>

Prevention Point Philadelphia - <https://ppponline.org/step-plate>

Prevention Point Pittsburgh - <https://www.pppgh.org/>