



**SRAETTA**

Sexual Risk Avoidance Education  
Training and Technical Assistance

# An Introduction to the Sexual Risk Cessation Model: Providing Second Chances for Hope and Health

**Nanci Coppola, D.P.M., M.S.**

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ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

**FYSB** Family & Youth  
Services Bureau

# Objectives

***At the end of this workshop participants will be able to:***

1. Understand the basics of the risk cessation conceptual model
2. Name the factors that influence youth decision-making related to sexual activity
3. Describe the restorative role of risk cessation in providing hope and health

# Understanding Risk Cessation

**Sexual risk avoidance**—not engaging in sexual activity

**Sexual risk cessation**—discontinuing sexual activity after having engaged in it

# Model on Risk Avoidance Theory and Research Informing Optimal Health



February 2020

## Conceptual Models to Depict the Factors that Influence the Avoidance and Cessation of Sexual Risk Behaviors Among Youth

This brief was developed as part of a portfolio of youth-focused projects on sexual risk avoidance and cessation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The brief presents two initial, complementary conceptual models—one for sexual risk avoidance and a second for sexual risk cessation—that aim to guide efforts to prevent youth risk behaviors and promote optimal health. The models identify a range of factors that research shows may influence youth decision making, sexual behavior, and related outcomes. These influencing factors occur at the environmental, interpersonal, or individual level, and many can be modified through intervention. To this end, the models may be used to guide and support efforts to develop and refine programs, tailor educational messages to youth, and empower parents and other adults to help youth avoid or cease sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors. In particular, the sexual risk cessation conceptual model is supporting the development of a sexual risk cessation program model and related supplemental curriculum module, intended to help sexually-experienced youth avoid sexual activity in the future.

Policymakers and practitioners are interested in identifying strategies and approaches to empower youth to make informed decisions that promote optimal health. Such decisions include the avoidance and cessation of sexual risk. Strategies aimed at encouraging sexual risk avoidance and sexual risk cessation are intended to help teens avoid or discontinue sexual activity and contribute to their overall health and personal development. For purposes of this brief sexual activity encompasses consensual activities that youth engage in that are sexual in nature, primarily including but not limited to intercourse.

Identifying the factors that influence youth's decisions to avoid or cease sexual activity can support policymakers, practitioners, and public health officials as they develop programming and policy to improve risk-related outcomes. The primary behavioral outcomes related to sexual risk avoidance and cessation differ to reflect the developmental context of youth. For example, a delay in sexual initiation is one of the most common outcomes for sexual risk avoidance, since it is relevant to sexually-inexperienced youth. In contrast, a reduction in recent sexual intercourse is a common outcome cited in the

literature for sexual risk cessation due to its relevance to sexually-experienced youth. It may reflect an incremental step toward the avoidance of future risk. Other relevant outcomes include non-behavioral outcomes, such as attitudes, skills, and intentions toward sexual activity. These typically occur in the short-term and can also act as influencing factors on behavioral outcomes. Non-sexual behavioral outcomes are also relevant, including, for example, depression or anxiety, alcohol or substance use, and academic achievement. Finally, longer-term outcomes of sexual activity include pregnancy and sexually-transmitted infections.

Mathematica developed two complementary conceptual models that use graphical illustrations and supporting narrative to depict the factors that influence behavioral outcomes related to sexual risk avoidance and sexual risk cessation among youth. This work is sponsored by the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Health (OASH) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and overseen by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE).





# Model Empowering Youth to Resume Abstinence and Seek Optimal Health Now



December 2020

## Factors Influencing Youth Sexual Activity: Conceptual Models for Sexual Risk Avoidance and Cessation

This brief was developed as part of a portfolio of projects focused on youth sexual risk avoidance and cessation sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The brief presents two complementary conceptual models—one for sexual risk avoidance and a second for sexual risk cessation—that aim to guide efforts to prevent youth risk behaviors and promote optimal health. It builds on [an earlier brief](#) that presented initial versions of the conceptual models. This brief describes refined versions of the conceptual models enhanced through additional information and analysis. The models identify a range of factors that research shows may influence youth decision making, sexual behavior, and related outcomes. These influencing factors occur at the environmental, interpersonal, or individual level, and many can be modified through educational intervention. To this end, the models may be used to guide and support efforts to develop and refine programs, tailor educational messages to youth, and empower parents and other adults to help youth avoid or cease sexual and non-sexual risk behaviors.

The avoidance of sexual activity among youth not only prevents unplanned pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs) but can also promote healthy outcomes and contribute to the positive development of youth. Research has shown, in particular, that delayed initiation of sexual intercourse can lead to better academic achievement for youth, improved self-esteem and mental health, and higher-quality relationships with romantic partners over time (Rotz et al. 2020b; Bridges and Hauser 2014; Sabia and Rees 2009; Meier 2007). Overall, rates of reported sexual activity among youth have declined in recent decades and are at their lowest since the early 1990s, with the decrease having been most pronounced during the past decade (Twenge and Park 2019). Still, estimates from 2019 show that 38 percent of high school-aged youth had ever had sex (Centers for Disease Control 2020; Kann et al 2018). In addition, among sexually experienced youth, estimates suggest that 60 percent wished they had waited longer before having had sex (Albert 2012).

These findings have influenced policymakers and practitioners to identify strategies and approaches to empower youth to make informed decisions that avoid sexual risk, support attainment of future goals, and promote healthy outcomes. Identifying the factors that influence youth's decisions to avoid sexual activity (for sexually inexperienced youth) or cease sexual activity (for sexually experienced youth) supports development of programming and policies focused on youth outcomes.

This brief presents two complementary conceptual models that depict factors that influence outcomes related to sexual risk avoidance and sexual risk cessation among youth. The brief describes *refined* versions of the conceptual models, building on [an earlier brief](#) that presented initial versions of these models.

The models were developed as part of a broad effort by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to study sexual risk avoidance and cessation and identify innovative avenues for youth-focused programs, policy,

# Factors Influencing Sexual Risk Cessation

## Environmental Factors —

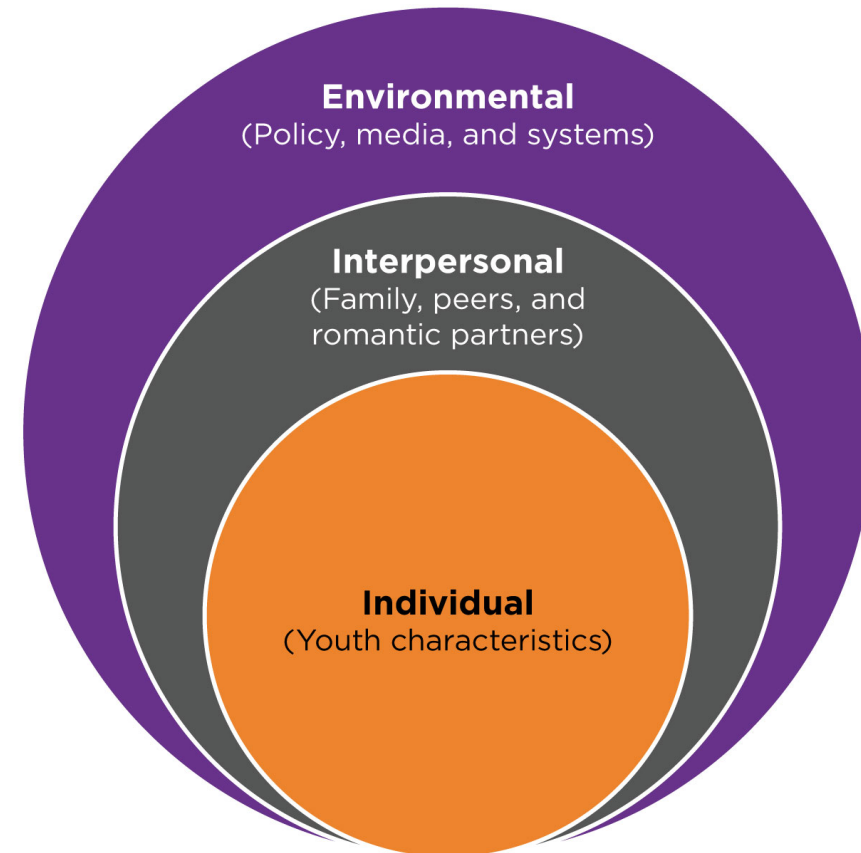
- *Neighborhood characteristics*
- *Media*
- *State and federal policies and systems*

## Interpersonal Factors —

- *Relationships*
- *Social networks*

## Individual Factors —

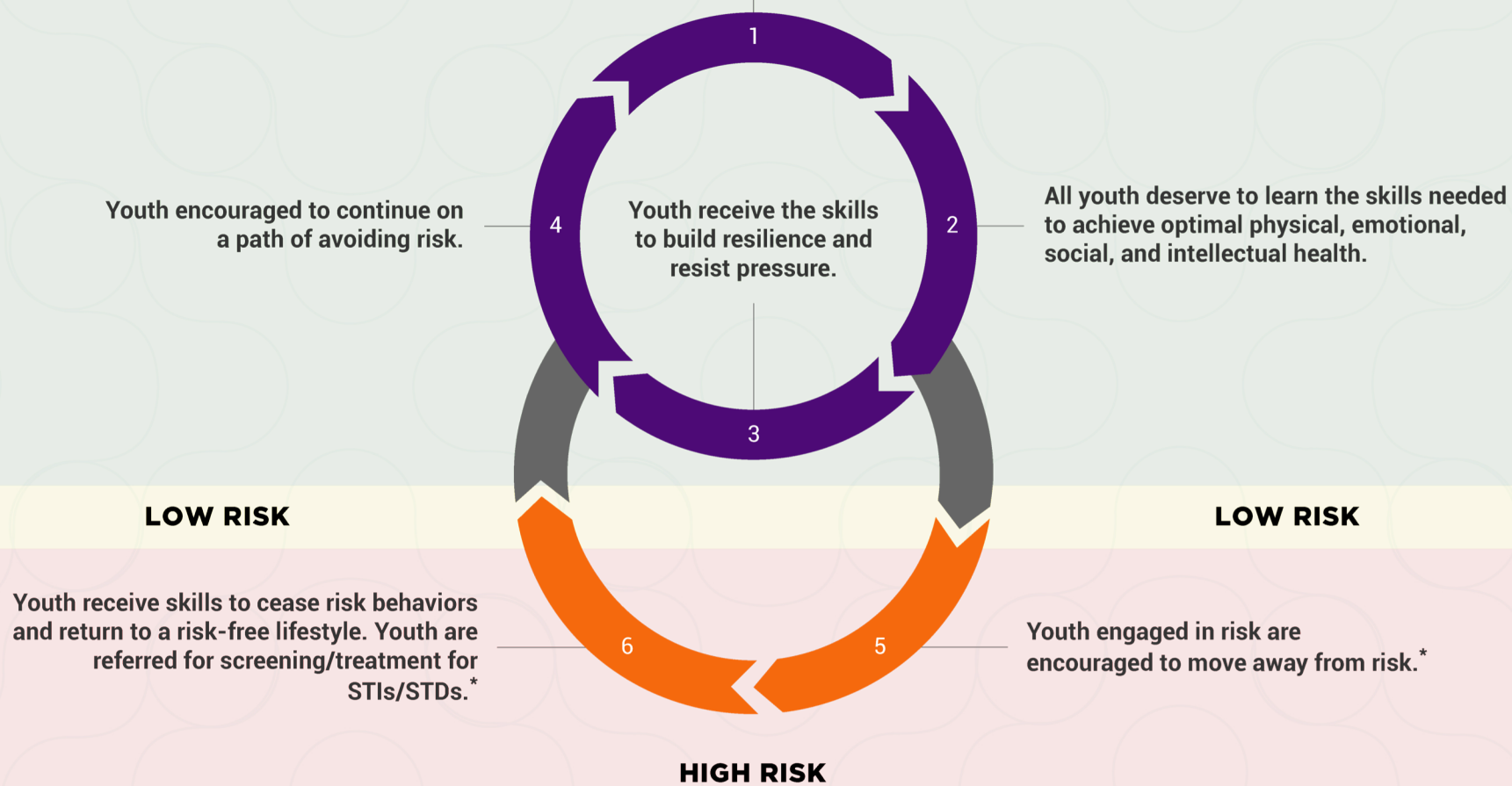
- *Biological, physiological, and cognitive characteristics*
- *Behaviors, intentions, and beliefs*



**Note:** Adapted from Bronfenbrenner 1977

## OPTIMAL HEALTH (NO RISK)

Risk Avoidance:  
A primary prevention approach.



*\*Some youth are not on a path toward optimal health; the goal is to return them to that path.*

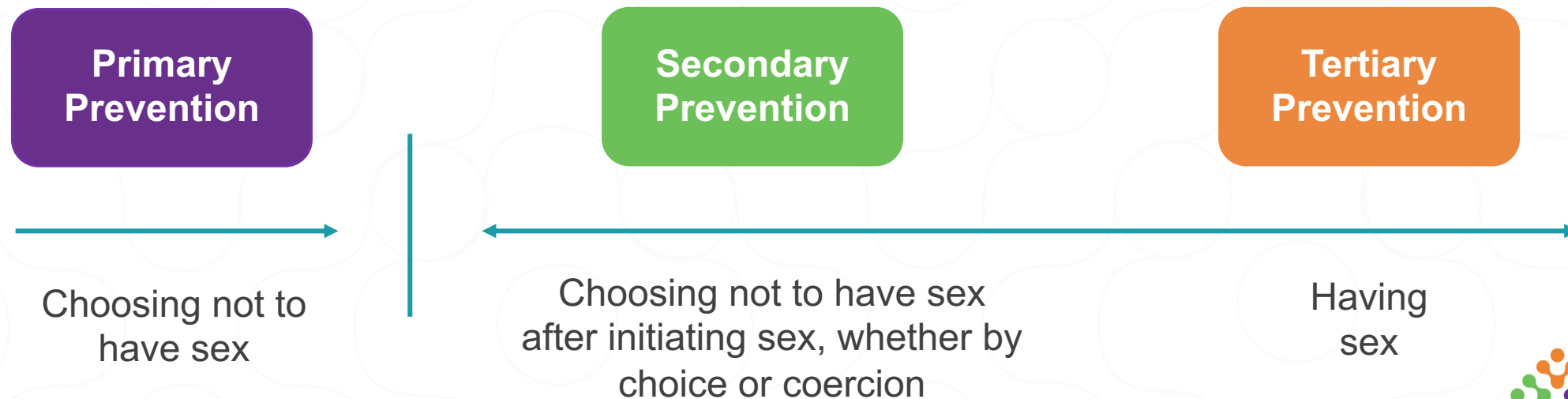
# Recovery and Restoration

**Recover**—To improve following an illness or condition

**Restore**—To return to the status of low-risk to prevent an illness or condition from recurring

# Framework for Sexual Risk Prevention

At any point in time, a youth can be at a different point on the continuum of prevention needs (driven by past decisions and experiences—both voluntary and forced/coerced).



# Risk Cessation for Protected Non-Consensual Sexual Activity

- Discuss unhealthy relationships
- Involve social services as needed
- Provide hope





# Potential Outcomes for Sexual Risk Cessation Model

## ***Sexual Health Outcomes:***

- Belief in sexual risk cessation
- Intention to practice sexual risk cessation
- Reduced frequency of sexual intercourse
- Reduced number of romantic or sexual partners
- Sexual risk cessation
- Reduction in sexually transmitted infections
- Reduction in teen pregnancy

## ***Non-Sexual Health Outcomes:***

- Improved academic achievement
- Improved mental health
- Decreased drug and alcohol use
- Decreased delinquency
- Improved relationship quality
- Increased likelihood of economic self-sufficiency



**QUESTIONS?**

# References

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# Contact Information

Nanci Coppola  
Senior Project Manager  
[Nanci.Coppola@PublicStrategies.com](mailto:Nanci.Coppola@PublicStrategies.com)  
609-878-8883

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