

## What is Harm Reduction?

Harm reduction is a set of strategies that encourage clients to reduce harm to themselves and their communities, even if they are unable to eliminate harm by abstaining from a risky behavior. While abstinence is the highest form of harm reduction, improvements in personal and public health can occur without it.

The guiding principle of harm reduction is that any positive change in the life of a client is a good one. It's important to start where the client is and move at her or his own pace.

## What is the Concept of Harm Reduction?

Harm reduction promotes the individual right to health and well-being as well as a belief in people's competency to protect themselves, their loved ones, and their communities. In addition, harm reduction acknowledges that many people use drugs to cope with the affects of racism, classicism, sexual use or violence in families.

## Who Uses Harm Reduction?

This method was first used in the HIV/AIDS field but has been applied to other fields. Drug and Alcohol counselors use harm reduction strategies with injection drug users to clean their needles before sharing or not sharing needles at all and utilizing needle exchanges. By doing this they are working with the client to lower the risks of injecting drugs and staying healthy.

## Harm Reduction Scenarios

*Here are some examples of how harm reduction strategies may work:*

### HIV

You are in a primary, committed, open relationship which means that both you and your partner have other partners outside of the relationship. If using condoms ALL THE TIME is not a realistic goal, you and your primary partner may commit to use condoms, especially for anal sex, with all outside partners to reduce your risks of HIV/STI infection.

### Injections Drug Users

You are "not ready" to completely stop meth use but you want to reduce the harm and risks that come along with it's use. Bring your own needles and condoms to any event where you may choose to use.

### Alcohol & Sex

You like to have a few drinks to get comfortable and loose in social-sexual situations. Ask a buddy/friend to come along and check-in with you about (not) taking that last drink or two that you know from experience may lead to risky sexual activities.

## What is your scenario?

**What steps can you take to reduce the harm of any risky behavior?**

## Some Harm Reduction Steps:

- Use condoms and other barriers for sex, like dental dams, and Reality condoms (female condoms).
- Don't share needles, clean works, or use a needle exchange programs.
- Learn more about HIV and its impact on your community and worldwide.
- Talk with friends, youth, everyone you know about HIV prevention.
- Participate in community events that support HIV prevention.
- Organize and lead events that support people to take control of the conditions that determine their health and the well-being of our communities.



## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT AND WHERE YOU CAN GET MORE INFORMATION

### Definition

**harm re•duc•tion** \harm r-dkshn\ n.:

*a public health philosophy which promotes methods of reducing the physical, social, emotional, and economic harm associated with drug and alcohol use and other harmful behaviors on individuals, their family and community. Harm reduction methods and treatment goals are free of judgment or blame and directly involve the client in setting their own goals.*

*stable and affordable housing* = harm reduction

*a living wage* = harm reduction

*job development & training* = harm reduction

*culturally competent* = harm reduction

*food security* = harm reduction

*social justice* = harm reduction

### For Further Information:

#### Project SAFE

Ocean Campus Cloud 405  
Information, Referrals & Safer Sex Supplies

#### San Francisco AIDS Foundation Hotline

415.487.3000 or 1.800.FOR.AIDS, [www.sfaf.org](http://www.sfaf.org)

#### Center For Disease Control & Prevention

CDC HIV & STI Info: 1.800.232.4636 or 1.800.CDC.INFO  
[www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

#### California AIDS Hotline

1.800.367.2437

#### San Francisco Sex Information Hotline

415.989.7374

#### Needle Exchange HIV Prevention Project

415.241.1500, [www.sfaf.org](http://www.sfaf.org)



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