

Risk Assessment and Risk Reduction Planning

What is Risk Assessment?

- Risk assessment is the exploration of the factors that influence the client's behaviors that place him/her at risk for HIV infection.
- During risk assessment, the counselor seeks to understand the client's HIV concerns and develop an understanding of the client's risk.
- This exploration of risk helps the client understand his/her risk behavior.
- The questions asked are intended to clarify how risk behavior occurs and what client characteristics, issues, and circumstances lead to risk behavior.

Exploration of Recent Risk

- Discussion of a client's most recent risk behavior will help clarify how his/her risk behavior occurs.
- What may have initially seemed like an accident begins to develop into a series of circumstances that contribute to the client's decision to engage in high-risk behavior.
- A client needs to gain an understanding of how he/she gets into risky situations in order to begin to reduce risk.

Patterns of Risk

To understand a client's risk behavior, it is often necessary to understand his/her pattern of risk. Patterns of risk are recurring situations in which the client is more likely to engage in risky behavior. *For Example: A male client travels for work. When he travels he is lonely and often stops at a bar for the evening to be with other people. He drinks alcohol at the bar. When he drinks too much, he is more likely to seek out a sexual partner and because of the alcohol, often doesn't think to use a condom. As a result, when the client travels for work he often has unsafe sex.*

Circumstances, Triggers, and Vulnerabilities

Risk Circumstances

The client's circumstances influence patterns of risk. A risk circumstance is a situation in which the client finds himself or herself in that may lead to engaging in risky behavior. *For example, lack of money for school fees or food could be a risk circumstance that could lead to exchanging sex for financial support.*

Risk Triggers

A risk trigger is an event that leads the client to engage in risky behavior. *For example, being separated from a spouse could be a risk trigger that could lead to seeking out other sexual partners.*

Risk Vulnerabilities

A risk vulnerability is an emotional or psychological state that leads the client to engage in risky behavior. *For example, a person in love might believe that his or her partner could not be infected with HIV.*

Assessing Risk

Time: 6-7 minutes	
Protocol	Examples of what to say
Assess client's reason for wanting to be tested	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could you start by telling me why you could need an HIV test today? • It sounds like you have some HIV concerns (list them) that we should talk about today.
Assess client's level of concern about having/acquiring HIV.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me why you feel you are at risk for HIV.
Explore most recent risk exposure/behavior. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When? • With whom? • Under what circumstances? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me a little about the last time you put yourself at risk. • How did you meet this person? • How long did you know this person? • How did you decide to have sex? • Had you been drinking at the time of this exposure?
Assess client's level of acceptable risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What concerns, if any, did you have about having sex with this person? • How concerned are you that you could become infected with HIV from this partner? • Would you have engaged in this same behavior if you knew this person had HIV? Would knowing have made a difference?
Assess pattern of risk (occurring regularly, occasionally, due to an unusual incident). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of partners? • Type of partners? • Frequency of new/different partners? • Condom use? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Let's look at how often these risk situations happen. • How many partners have you had in the last 6 months? • Where do you meet your partners? • How well do you know your partners? • Do you have a wife/husband (girlfriend/boyfriend)? • Other than your wife/husband (girlfriend/boyfriend), who have you had sex with? • How often do you have a new partner? • How often do you use condoms? • With what partners are you more or less likely to use a condom? • How do you decide with which partners to use condoms?
Identify risk circumstances, triggers, and vulnerabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about what may be going on in your life that could be increasing your risk behavior. • How does drinking alcohol influence your decision to have sex?
Assess partner's risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about your concerns about your partner's risk. • Has your partner had sex with anyone else? • What plans for the future do you and your partner have?

Assess communication with partners.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you and your partner talked about concerning HIV/STI risk? • When risk reduction came up with your partner, how did that discussion go? • Have you discussed whether either of you had been HIV tested? • How did you and your current partner decide to stop using condoms?
Assess indicators of increased risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever been diagnosed with an STI? When was that?
Summarize the client's situation and risk issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk pattern • Prioritize risk issues • Risk triggers and risk vulnerabilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here's how I understand your situation concerning risks for HIV/STIs (summarize the key issues provided by the client). • There are several issues that affect your risk behavior (list specific behavioral, communication, substance use issues). • You've been able to protect yourself when (list circumstances that help client reduce risk). • Is this how you see your risk behavior? Are there other issues we need to talk about?

Exploring Options for Reducing Risk

Time: 4-5 minutes	
Protocol	Examples of what to say
Explore client's communication with friends or partners about risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When HIV risk reduction has come up with a sexual partner, how did that discussion go? How did you feel about it? • What do your friends say about HIV, about protecting themselves from becoming infected?
Review previous risk-reduction attempts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What have you done to try to reduce your risk of acquiring HIV? • How have you tried to protect yourself and your partners from STI/HIV?
Identify successful experiences with practicing safer sex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a specific time you remember when you practiced safer sex? Can you tell me about that time? How was that for you?
Identify obstacles to risk reduction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What has been the most difficult part of reducing your HIV risk?

Explore triggers and situations, which increase the likelihood of high-risk behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does alcohol affect you having high-risk sex? Tell me what makes it more likely you'll put yourself at risk. • In what particular situations or with which type of partners do you find it difficult to negotiate or ask for safer sex?
Place risk behavior in the larger context of client's life.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there times in your life (feeling sad, unemployed, after ending a relationship) that you feel it has been more difficult for you to practice safer sex to protect yourself?
Assess condom skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How well do condoms work for you? • Tell me about times you have had problems using condoms. • With which partners do you find it most difficult to use a condom? • Would you like me to demonstrate for you the proper use of a condom?
Identify entire range of options for reducing risk.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell me about what would be easy for you to change and what would be more difficult for you. Why? • You have some options for reducing your risk. (List)
Role-play, skills build, problem solve.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imagine that your partner is sitting next to you, what would you say to him/her about wanting to reduce your risk?
Address examples when the client's beliefs and behavior are at odds or when feelings are mixed about changing behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It seems you have many HIV concerns, but you also don't like using condoms. What are your alternatives? • It seems important to you to feel free to have several partners, yet at the same time, you do not want to get HIV. Help me understand this.
Summarize risk-reduction options or discussion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It seems like you have identified several ways in which you are comfortable in reducing your risk. (List them). Can you think of any other ways? • You have a lot of choices for reducing your risk. We'll settle on a specific plan later. First, let's talk about the test, as your plan may change depending on your test.

Male Condom Demonstration Steps

1. Show how to inspect the condom by checking the condom package to make sure it is not punctured and not expired. (*If the condom package is punctured or expired, throw the condom away and repeat inspection with a new condom.*)
2. Open the condom package carefully with your fingers. (*Stress that you should never use a sharp object because it may puncture the condom.*)
3. Find the tip of the condom with the forefinger and hold it so that the ring hangs down like a little hat.
4. Hold the tip with the forefinger and thumb as you place the condom on the penis model, ring on the outside.
5. Roll the condom down to the base of the penis with the other hand.
6. Tell the client that after sex, hold the condom at the base and pull the hard penis away from the partner. Do not spill any liquid on the partner.
7. Slide the condom off.
8. Tie the condom in a knot and dispose it away from human contact or either throw it in a Blair toilet/ pit latrine or burn

Female Condom Demonstration Steps

1. Show how to inspect the condom by checking the condom package to make sure the packet is intact and check for the expiration date (If the condom is punctured or expired, throw the condom away and repeat the inspection with a new condom)
2. Carefully open the condom package by tearing along the edge and remove the condom
3. Hold the female condom with the open end hanging down
4. Squeeze the inner ring between your thumb, index and middle fingers, or
5. Twist the inner ring and hold it between your thumb, index and other fingers
6. Guide the condom into the vagina using the other hand to help widen the opening of the vagina
7. Put your index finger inside the condom till you can feel the inner ring
8. Use this finger to push the ring up inside the vagina so that it lies behind the pubic bone
9. The inner ring must sit around the cervix, ensure that the outer ring lies flat against the vagina
10. Instruct the client to guide the penis into the condom and make sure that the outer ring remains flat
11. Instruct the client that if the penis accidentally enters underneath or besides the condom stop and guide penis back in through the center of the condom
12. To remove the condom after lovemaking, twist the outer ring to keep the semen inside and gently pull the condom from the vagina
13. Instruct the client to wrap the used condom in a paper and throw in a Blair toilet /pit latrine or burn

If the client is **NOT** willing to participate in a condom demonstration:

Sample Dialogue

State:

“You said that you know how to use a condom, you realize the importance of wearing one and you don’t feel it’s necessary to practice here, so instead of demonstrating, I’d like to give you this pamphlet and together we can review the major steps.”

Obtain and Review Pamphlet on Instructions for Condom Use

Wrap up your condom review by saying:

“It is important to know that this is one of several important ways to reduce risk. Now let’s consider other options for risk reduction.”

Remember:

*If you review a pamphlet on instructions for condom use with the client it **should not** dominate the counseling session!*