Reducing the Risk

Adaptation Guidelines

ETR (Education, Training and Research) is a nonprofit organization committed to providing science-based innovative solutions in health and education designed to achieve transformative change in individuals, families and communities. We invite health professionals, educators and consumers to learn more about our high-quality programs, publications and applied research, evaluation and professional development services by contacting us at 100 Enterprise Way, Suite G300, Scotts Valley, CA 95066, 1-800-321-4407, www.etr.org.

Adaptation Guidelines

Whereas the core components for *Reducing the Risk (RTR)* specify the important components and qualities of *RTR* that must be implemented to insure that it is effective, these guidelines specify possible adaptations that people might like to make during implementation and how those adaptations might impact effectiveness. They fall into three categories: "Green light" adaptations are minor adjustments that are encouraged, either because they will not reduce effectiveness or because they might even improve effectiveness. "Yellow light" adaptations are those that should be implemented thoughtfully with caution and possibly guidance. These may be minor or more extensive. They might not reduce effectiveness in some situations, but could reduce effectiveness in other situations. "Red light" adaptations are those that should not be implemented, because typically they will reduce effectiveness. They are considered major adaptations.

In the table on the following pages, possible adaptations are color coded appropriately (green, yellow and red) with an accompanying explanation describing the conditions under which an adaptation may be made or reasons why it should not be made.

Core Component: Ideally *Reducing the Risk* should be implemented in school settings.			
YELLOW		**Adaptation:**	**Shifting from an in-school classroom format to a voluntary after-school format**
		Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* was evaluated in a school classroom setting, but it has also been implemented in after-school settings. It will probably be effective in after-school settings if the instruction resembles the instruction in the classroom. For example, it may be effective if most learners attend all classes and participate in all activities, they are attentive and participate in activities, and they are not disrupted by other events or people coming into or going out of the room. However, incentives may be needed to encourage most participants to complete some assignments (e.g., homework assignments).

Core Component: The curriculum is designed for students in the 9th grade, but can be implemented with participants who are in other appropriate grades (i.e., grades 8–12) or the appropriate age (e.g., 13–18).			
YELLOW		**Adaptation:**	**Implementing *RTR* with students who are not yet in the 8th grade (or not yet 13) or who have graduated from high school (or are about 19 or older)**
		Rationale and Guidance:	What is most important is that the curriculum be appropriate to the sexual experience of the learners. It will not increase sexual risk behavior by being implemented with learners who are either too young or too old. However, if the learners are too young, it may not delay their initiation of sex, because they would not be having sex anyway. If the learners are too old, they are likely to already be sexually experienced and the activities encouraging them to delay sex or not have sex may be less effective with them.

Core Component: Ideally *Reducing the Risk* should be implemented in school settings.			
RED		**Adaptation:**	**Trying to implement *RTR* after school without taking steps necessary to recruit and retain youth**
		Rationale and Guidance:	If necessary steps to recruit and retain youth are not completed, then too few youth may participate and the program will not be effective.

Core Component: Classes should last at least 45 minutes.

GREEN		
Adaptation:		**Lengthening each class to 55 minutes or more without cutting the number of classes**
Rationale and Guidance:		Lengthening classes can allow more time for review of previous lessons, discussion, questions, role-play practice, personalization activities and other activities. This may increase effectiveness.

Core Component: Ideally, classes should be taught 2–3 times per week.

YELLOW		
Adaptation:		**Teaching the program only 1 day per week or 4 or 5 days per week instead of 2–3 times per week**
Rationale and Guidance:		If classes are taught only 1 day per week, learners may forget material from the previous week. If classes are taught every day, then there may not be adequate time for reflection between classes.

Core Component: Classes should last at least 45 minutes.

YELLOW		
Adaptation:		**Teaching classes back-to-back in block schedules**
Rationale and Guidance:		*RTR* was designed for 45-minute segments. When classes are taught back-to-back in block schedules, learners may become less attentive and will have less time for reflection between classes. While some classes combine together well to fit block periods, some, such as classes 4 and 5, do not.

Core Component: The ideal class size is between 10 and 30 youth.

YELLOW		
Adaptation:		**Implementing the program with fewer than 6–8 learners or more than 30 learners**
Rationale and Guidance:		If there are fewer than 10 learners in the class at a time, then some of the activities may not be effective (e.g., the STD handshake activity, group discussions or role-play activities). If there are too many students (i.e., more than 30), it may be very difficult to control the learners' behavior during some participatory activities (e.g., role playing).

Core Component: All classes should be taught in sequence.		
YELLOW	**Adaptation:**	**Changing the sequences of classes**
	Rationale and Guidance:	The classes and activities presented in *RTR* are presented in a particular order and are designed sequentially, with each class building upon the previous one. The first class provides the foundation for the rest of the program by establishing the classroom ground rules and discussion environment. Knowledge about pregnancy, HIV and STD prevention is taught and discussed in the early classes. Attitudes, values, peer norms and communication with parents are addressed within the context of role plays and other group activities that allow for interaction and discussion. It is important that youth receive basic information, perceive that they are at risk for HIV/STDs and unintended pregnancy, and develop supporting attitudes, norms and motivations before learning new skills. Changing the order of the classes could decrease the understandability and mastery of these skills and information. It would disrupt the learning sequence and probably reduce behavior change. A curriculum or learning theory specialist might be able to advise about appropriate ways to move classes or activities, if necessary.

Core Component: The classes should be taught in a way that most youth attend most classes.		
RED	**Adaptation:**	**Implementing the program in any setting or manner so that many participants do not attend consistently**
	Rationale and Guidance:	If *RTR* is implemented such that many students do not attend nearly all classes consistently, then they will miss important activities, understandings and skills that are needed for subsequent classes. Thus, the program will be less effective.

Core Component: All 16 classes should be taught.		
RED	**Adaptation:**	**Teaching fewer than the 16 classes and the activities within them**
	Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* is structured in 16 classes. Research studies of other curricula demonstrate that deleting activities or classes can reduce their effectiveness. As demonstrated by the logic model, every activity is designed to affect an important risk and protective factor that, in turn, affects sexual risk behavior. Omitting one or more of the classes would dilute the program's ability to address one or more of these factors, and, therefore, reduce its overall effectiveness.

4 | | *Reducing the Risk Adaptation* Guidelines

Core Component: Classes should last at least 45 minutes.

RED	Adaptation:	Shortening each class to less than 45 minutes
	Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* was designed for 45-minute or longer classes. If classes are shortened, then either activities must be cut or time for discussion, reflection, personalization, review, etc. must be shortened. Any of these changes can reduce effectiveness.

Program Leaders

Core Component: Educators for the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum should be familiar with the *Reducing the Risk* content, comfortable discussing the material, and experienced in teaching a skills-based program.

GREEN	Adaptation:	Implementing *RTR* with educators who are not the same race/ethnicity or gender as the learners
	Rationale and Guidance:	Although some curricula are written for particular racial/ethnic or gender groups and their effectiveness might be improved by matching race/ethnicity or gender, *RTR* is written for young people of all races/ethnicities and genders, including mixed classrooms, and neither the race/ethnicity nor gender needs to match that of the students.

Core Component: Educators for the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum should be familiar with the *Reducing the Risk* content, comfortable discussing the material, and experienced in teaching a skills-based program.

GREEN	Adaptation:	Having specially trained outside educators teach the curriculum instead of regular classroom teachers
	Rationale and Guidance:	When *RTR* was evaluated, it was taught by trained high school teachers. However, if outside educators are well trained and can relate to youth, they should be able to implement *RTR* without loss of effectiveness.

Core Component: Educators for the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum should be familiar with the *Reducing the Risk* content, comfortable discussing the material, and experienced in teaching a skills-based program.

YELLOW		
	Adaptation:	**Implementing *RTR* with classroom teachers or educators who do not have all the qualities often deemed important in educators, e.g., ability to connect with youth, credibility with youth on this topic, experience teaching a skills-based curriculum, comfort talking about sexuality, and considerable background knowledge about adolescent sexuality**
	Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* has been found to be effective with classroom teachers. Not all of them necessarily had all the qualities desired in an educator, but all of them were trained. It is commonly believed that these desired qualities in educators do increase effectiveness, but *RTR* may still be effective if the educators lack one or more of these qualities but are well trained.

Core Component: Educators for the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum should be familiar with the *Reducing the Risk* content, comfortable discussing the material, and experienced in teaching a skills-based program.

YELLOW		
	Adaptation:	**Using peers to help implement the curriculum**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Using peers to help implement activities can improve effectiveness if they are properly selected and trained appropriately and if they are chosen to help with appropriate activities (e.g., modeling a role play).

Core Component: Educators for the *Reducing the Risk* curriculum should be familiar with the *Reducing the Risk* content, comfortable discussing the material, and experienced in teaching a skills-based program.

RED		
	Adaptation:	**Replacing the adult facilitator with peer facilitators**
	Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* was not designed to be taught by peer educators and all of its evaluations have involved adult educators.

Core Component: If *RTR* is implemented in a school setting, appropriate approval should be obtained from the school and parents. If implemented out of school, appropriate approval should be obtained from the host organization and parents, and steps necessary to successfully recruit youth should be implemented.

RED	Adaptation:	If implementing in a school setting, not informing the school about the contents of the curriculum and not obtaining appropriate approval from the school
	Rationale and Guidance:	Sexuality education is a controversial topic. Thus, it is important to fully inform the school about the curriculum and its contents and to obtain appropriate approval from the school authorities. Not doing so may cause the program to be terminated.

Core Component: If *RTR* is implemented in a school setting, appropriate approval should be obtained from the school and parents. If implemented out of school, appropriate approval should be obtained from the host organization and parents, and steps necessary to successfully recruit youth should be implemented.

RED	Adaptation:	If implementing out of school, not informing the host organization about the contents of the curriculum and not obtaining appropriate approval from the host organization
	Rationale and Guidance:	Sexuality education is a controversial topic. Thus, it is important to fully inform the host organization about the curriculum and its contents and to obtain appropriate approval from that organization. Not doing so may cause the program to be terminated.

Core Component: If *RTR* is implemented in a school setting, appropriate approval should be obtained from the school and parents. If implemented out of school, appropriate approval should be obtained from the host organization and parents, and steps necessary to successfully recruit youth should be implemented.

RED	Adaptation:	Implementing *RTR* without obtaining appropriate approval from parents
	Rationale and Guidance:	Because sexuality education is a controversial topic, parents should be notified that their teens are receiving sex education. This is particularly important for *RTR*, because it includes two homework assignments to talk to parents or other trusted adults about teen sexual behavior.

Core Component: The educators should be adequately trained and experienced in order to teach the content, to implement the interactive activities, to lead role plays and to discuss the sexual topics comfortably.

RED			
	Adaptation:	**Failing to train the educators to teach the content, to implement the interactive activities and to discuss the sexual topics comfortably**	
	Rationale and Guidance:	Unless teachers have considerable experience with a very similar curriculum, they may not be familiar with the content, may not know how to implement the particular *RTR* activities, may not be skilled at implementing participatory activities such as role playing or may not be comfortable discussing the sexual topics. Proper training can help meet all of these needs.	

Core Component: The educators should be adequately trained and experienced in order to teach the content, to implement the interactive activities, to lead role plays and to discuss the sexual topics comfortably.

RED		
	Adaptation:	**Not obtaining needed materials**
	Rationale and Guidance:	If needed materials are not obtained or prepared, then some activities cannot be implemented.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

GREEN		
Adaptation:	**Changing the title**
Rationale and Guidance:	If the name *Reducing the Risk* could be replaced (or combined) with another name that resonates better with the youth being served, that adaptation is acceptable.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

GREEN		
Adaptation:	**Tailoring the content (e.g., for visual learners or particular gender or racial/ethnic groups)**
Rationale and Guidance:	Tailoring the content for your particular learners could increase its effectiveness, if done carefully. You can use an optional *RTR* Activity Kit that includes posters and cards for a more visual presentation of the material. In addition, Student Workbooks are available in both English and Spanish. You can make other minor adaptations in order to help your learners relate to the content, provided you do not change the basic ideas and skills in the activities.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

GREEN		
Adaptation:	**Updating any statistics or facts**
Rationale and Guidance:	Updating statistics and facts about youth sexual behavior, the risk of pregnancy and STDs, the effectiveness of condoms or other methods of contraception or other things is encouraged both to keep information up-to-date and to increase its accuracy.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

GREEN		
Adaptation:	**Updating/adapting myths held by young people**
Rationale and Guidance:	Because myths about sexual risk may vary from one community to another, determining which myths are most common in your community and among your potential learners and then addressing and refuting these myths can increase the effectiveness of *RTR*.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

GREEN	**Adaptation:**	**Adding reproductive health lessons before the program starts**
	Rationale and Guidance:	The program is designed to be implemented with learners who have had some basic instruction in reproductive anatomy, physiology and puberty. If learners have not had this instruction, they may benefit from being given this foundation before talking about sexual intercourse, preventing pregnancy, condoms and contraceptive use. Any additional instruction should be limited to a few lessons to avoid making the program too long. Additionally, these lessons should not take away from the time available for the program and should be taught before the program lessons.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

YELLOW	**Adaptation:**	**Adding videos to augment lessons**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Adding videos that support the messages of the curriculum can increase effectiveness if they do not replace other activities or shorten time allocated to other activities.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

YELLOW	**Adaptation:**	**Adding other health goals that contradict, compete with or dilute the program's focus**
	Rationale and Guidance:	If learners are given messages about many behaviors, e.g., sexual behavior, tobacco use, alcohol use, drug use, nutrition, exercise, violence, etc., the impact of the message about any one of these behaviors may be diluted by the messages about all the other behaviors, and learners may become less attentive and less open to the messages about sexual risk behavior. *RTR* can be effective when implemented as a unit in a larger health education course, but its effectiveness may be diminished if its lessons are interspersed throughout many other lessons with other health goals.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

YELLOW	**Adaptation:**	**Adding activities to address additional risk and protective factors**
	Rationale and Guidance:	After conducting an assessment of youth, you may learn there are other important determinants of sexual risk-taking behavior that are not addressed in *RTR* and that you believe should be addressed. For example, you may learn that alcohol and/or other drug use is quite prevalent among your group of youth, and you may want to add activities to strengthen avoiding drug and alcohol use.
		It is possible to add activities to address other risk and protective factors, but it is important to focus on risk and protective factors highly related to the sexual risk behavior and factors that can be changed through prevention programs. It is ideal to engage a prevention science specialist if making these types of adaptations.

Core Component: Nine topics specified in the core components should be covered.

RED	**Adaptation:**	**Not teaching all the content areas in order to save time or to avoid any possible controversy**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Research studies of other curricula demonstrate that deleting activities or content areas can reduce their effectiveness. This is especially true of topics such as condoms or other forms of contraception.
		As demonstrated by the logic model, every activity is designed to affect an important risk and protective factor that, in turn, affects sexual risk behavior. Omitting one or more of the content areas would dilute the program's ability to address one or more of these factors, and, therefore, reduce its overall effectiveness.

Core Teaching Strategies (Pedagogy)

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

GREEN	**Adaptation:**	**Adding more debriefing or processing questions**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Adding more debriefing or processing questions may increase effectiveness, provided learners do not become bored and doing so does not detract from other activities.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

GREEN		Adaptation:	Reinforcing information with additional visual material
		Rationale and Guidance:	Because some students learn best visually, providing additional visual reinforcement may increase effectiveness, provided doing so does not replace other learning strategies.

Core Component: All role-play activities are implemented so that all skills are explained and modeled and participants repeatedly practice those skills.

GREEN		Adaptation:	Customizing role plays
		Rationale and Guidance:	*RTR* uses role plays in several places to demonstrate or allow youth to practice a skill. You may change names, settings, language, and even some of the details of the role play, as long as the meaning and skill practice elements do not change. Assessment data gathered from your students can help guide these types of adaptations. For example, you can get their suggestions for wording or ideas for places where they usually socialize.

However, the sequence of skill-building activities, number of repetitions, pattern of modeling, and opportunity to practice and receive feedback should not be altered. |

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

YELLOW		**Adaptation:**	**Tailoring instructional methods**
		Rationale and Guidance:	Current *RTR* instructional methods are designed to improve particular risk and protective factors and use effective teaching strategies. Using alternative teaching strategies may reduce learning or personalization.
			However, teaching strategies can be slightly changed to address the particular needs of the learners if done very carefully. Research on *RTR* has indicated that attempts to tailor *RTR* for highly impulsive youth or high sensation seekers did not make *RTR* either significantly more or less effective. Thus, such tailoring can be done, if done knowledgeably and carefully. For example, adding more visual materials is acceptable.
			As noted above, tailoring the language used in role plays is also acceptable.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

YELLOW		**Adaptation:**	**Replacing the condom demonstration with a mini-lecture on how to use condoms**
		Rationale and Guidance:	The condom demonstration is probably more effective than a mini-lecture on how to use condoms because it is more visual. However, if the condom demonstration violates school guidelines, then it can be replaced with a mini-lecture or video providing the same information.

Core Component: Create a safe and effective learning environment in the classroom by establishing group agreements and including mechanisms for asking sensitive questions and actively involving participants.

RED		**Adaptation:**	**Not creating group agreements**
		Rationale and Guidance:	Creating group agreements is important to the effectiveness of *RTR*. Students need to feel reasonably safe and comfortable asking questions, completing roleplays and participating in other activities. Agreements contribute to good classroom management, to a safe environment and to learners' feelings of safety and comfort.

Core Component: Create a safe and effective learning environment in the classroom by establishing group agreements and including mechanisms for asking sensitive questions and actively involving participants.

RED	Adaptation:	**Not maintaining good classroom management and a safe environment**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Good classroom management and a safe environment are critical to the effectiveness of *RTR*. Without them, activities may become chaotic, students may not be as attentive and students may not participate fully or personalize important messages.

Core Component: Create a safe and effective learning environment in the classroom by establishing group agreements and including mechanisms for asking sensitive questions and actively involving participants.

RED	Adaptation:	**Not using praise and reinforcement**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Learners may feel uncomfortable discussing sexual topics, doing role plays and participating in other interactive activities. Thus, giving them appropriate praise and reinforcement is important to promote engagement in the lessons.

Core Component: All activities are taught in sequence within each lesson.

RED	Adaptation:	**Changing the order of activities within each lesson**
	Rationale and Guidance:	Many of the activities build upon one another and have appropriate transitions from one activity to another. Changing the order affects flow and effectiveness.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

RED	Adaptation:	**Rushing through or skipping review and summary activities**
	Rationale and Guidance:	At the beginning of each class, the teacher is prompted to review key points from the previous lesson. This recap helps remind learners of the previous class and sets them up for new learning. At the end of each class, the teacher is prompted to review key points from that lesson. This helps learners recognize and remember the key points from the lesson. People often need to hear new information or skills multiple times before they can remember or integrate the new learning. Rushing through or deleting these activities can reduce effectiveness.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

RED	Adaptation:	Not implementing each activity as specified
	Rationale and Guidance:	Certain types of instructional methods are particularly effective in changing the risk and protective factors. For example, role playing is a particularly effective method of teaching skills and improving confidence in those skills. *RTR* uses instructional methods that are well designed to change the designated risk and protective factors. Use of other teaching methods, especially less interactive methods, may reduce the impact on those risk and protective factors.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

RED	Adaptation:	Replacing interactive activities with lectures or other noninteractive activities
	Rationale and Guidance:	Multiple studies indicate that interactive activities are more effective at involving young people, getting them to personalize information and actually changing their behavior than passive noninteractive activities.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

RED	Adaptation:	Failing to use visual materials
	Rationale and Guidance:	Many students learn best visually. Failing to use visual materials can reduce *RTR* effectiveness.

Core Component: All activities are implemented using the interactive strategies included in the lessons, as these teaching strategies and activities were designed to influence the theory-based risk and protective factors related to sexual risk behaviors.

RED		Adaptation:	Deleting condom activities, such as not doing the condom demonstration at all
		Rationale and Guidance:	Studies have demonstrated that when condom activities are deleted from curricula, they are less likely to increase condom use. Further, these activities address theory-based risk and protective factors, such as attitudes and norms toward condom use and condom use skills and self-efficacy. Therefore, the condom and contraceptive activities should not be deleted.

Core Component: All role-play activities are implemented so that all skills are explained and modeled and participants repeatedly practice those skills.

RED		Adaptation:	Not implementing all the role-play activities
		Rationale and Guidance:	Some of the role plays teach different skills. If the different skills are not taught, then the curriculum may be less effective. In addition, youth must have an opportunity to practice these skills until they can use them effectively and comfortably. If not all role plays are taught, then students will be less likely to master those skills and to use them in real life.

Core Component: All role-play activities are implemented so that all skills are explained and modeled and participants repeatedly practice those skills.

RED		Adaptation:	Reducing opportunities for skill practice (e.g., role plays)
		Rationale and Guidance:	Learners are more likely to adopt skills when they are clear about the components of the skill, know what the skill looks like in real life, and have had an opportunity to practice and master the skill. These steps are essential ingredients of behavior change. It is not sufficient to simply present the steps of the skill and model it for youth. *RTR* teaches several important skills, including refusal skills and delaying tactics. Learners must have an opportunity to practice these skills until they can use them effectively and comfortably, and must receive positive feedback as they improve on and master each skill.

Core Component: Messages about important values and sexual behaviors are stated clearly and emphasized repeatedly. The key message is that the only responsible alternatives for teenagers are to abstain from sexual activity or to use condoms or other forms of contraception.

RED		Adaptation:	Failing to emphasize a clear message about behavior
		Rationale and Guidance:	Emphasizing a clear message about what behaviors are unsafe, safer and safest is one of the most important characteristics of effective programs. Therefore, it is very important to emphasize the message of *RTR*, namely that people should avoid unprotected sex either by not having sex or by using condoms and other forms of contraception.