

Principles of Harm Reduction

Definition

Harm reduction is a set of strategies and tactics that encourage individuals to reduce the risk or harm to themselves and their communities by their various behaviors.

Goal

The goal of harm reduction is to educate the person to become more conscious of the risks of their behavior and provide them with the tools and resources with which they can reduce their risk.

Principles

- A humanistic, individualistic approach
- Does not deal solely with behaviors, but with whole person with complex needs
- Provides an alternative and challenge to traditional disease model and/or moral criminal models
- Accepts that risk is a natural part of our lives
- Places risky behavior on a continuum within context of person's life
- Looks at person's relationship to the behavior as defined by him/herself
- Accepts that behavioral change is often incremental
- Any positive change is seen as significant
- Interventions are not rigid, require creativity and innovation reflective of person's life situation
- Is helpful for communities most affected to be involved in creating safe places to get help by organizing harm reduction interventions and programs
- Though commonly associated with drug use, harm reduction is applicable to any social welfare and /or public health issue

Adapted from: "Recovery Readiness: Strategies That Bring Treatment to Addicts Where They Are" by Richard Elovich and Michael Cowing and National Harm Reduction Working Group Report from October 21-23, 1993 meeting.