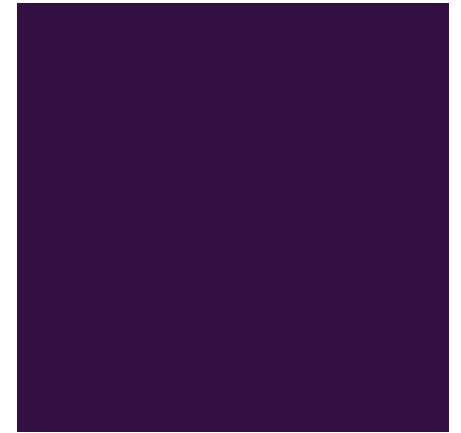
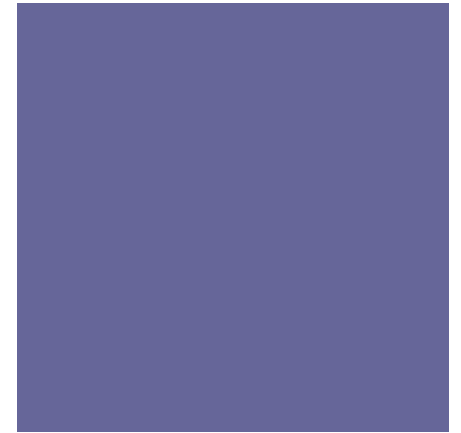




# The Principles of Harm Reduction

Kevin S. Irwin



## Harm Reduction in an Opioid Era



*Promoting the Health & Dignity of Affected Individuals  
& Communities*

January 18, 2018

# + Harm Reduction



- Harm reduction is a set of policies, programs and practices that reduce the negative consequences of drug use experienced by individuals and communities.
- Harm reduction approaches incorporate a spectrum of strategies from safer use, to managed use, to abstinence.
- Harm reduction strategies engage people who use drugs, identify their needs, and work towards goals that are attainable.

# + Harm Reduction in 1842

- “Is it just to assail, condemn, or despise them? Men ought not in justice to be denounced for yielding to it in any case, or giving it up slowly, especially when they are backed by interest, fixed habits, or burning appetites.”



*Abraham Lincoln, 22 February 1842*

*Address before the Springfield Washington*

*Temperance Society*



# Harm Reduction Definitions



- Harm reduction is NOT “whatever happens, happens.”
- Harm reduction is NOT “anything goes”
- Harm reduction is NOT only “meeting people where they’re at” (it’s supporting folks to change behavior)
- Harm reduction is NOT “Helping a person who has stopped using drugs to start using again.”
- Harm reduction is NOT condoning, endorsing, or encouraging drug use.
- Harm reduction is NOT Legalization

# + Compassionate Pragmatism



- Harm Reduction is a philosophy, integrated into a variety of practices
- There is no one right way
- Most life changes are gradual
- All chronic conditions are challenging
- Reducing harm is the fundamental objective of responses to all chronic conditions
- Abstinence is a state

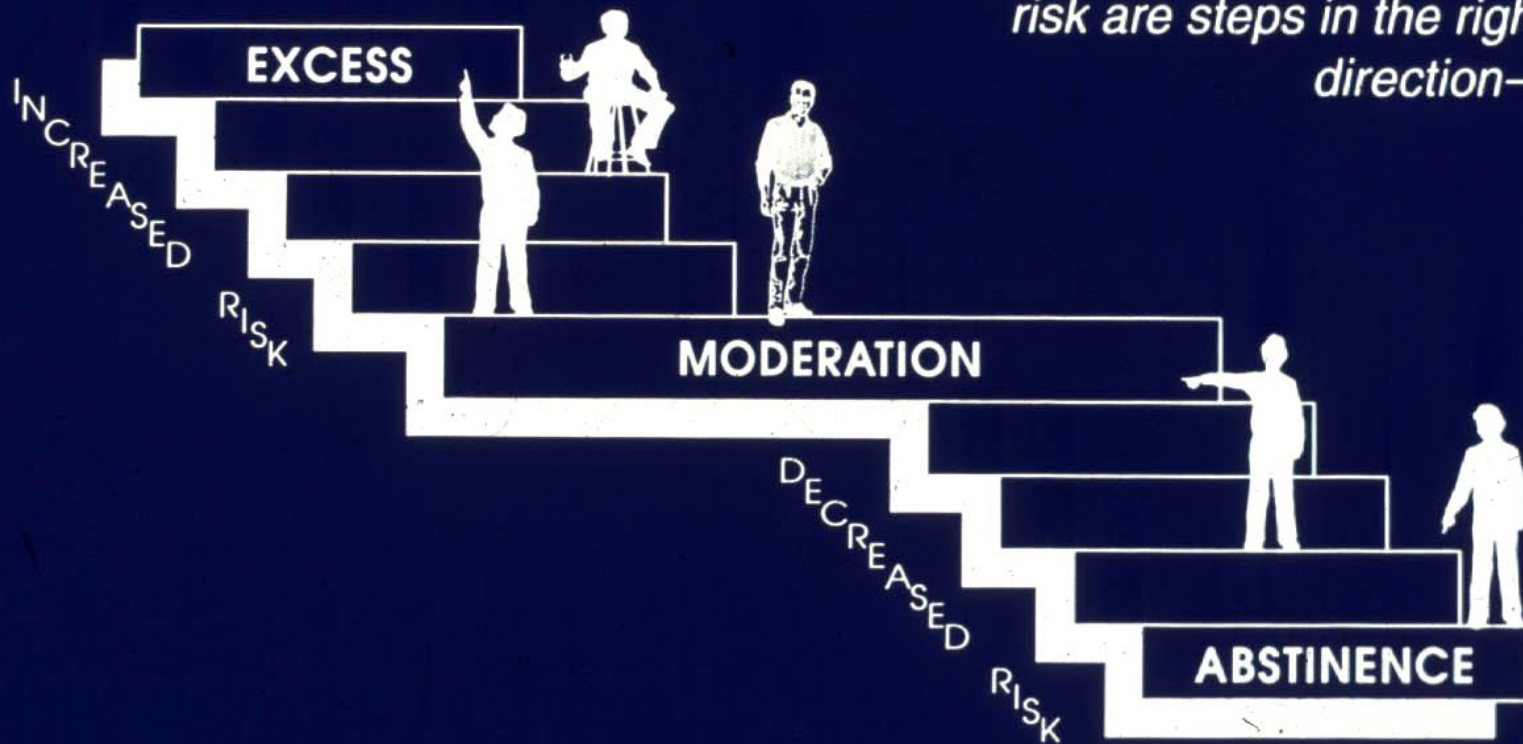
# + The A-word



- Are abstinence and harm reduction compatible?
- HOW are abstinence and harm reduction compatible?
- Harm reduction and abstinence are highly congruent goals.
- Harm reduction expands the therapeutic conversation, allowing providers to intervene with active users who are not yet contemplating abstinence.
- Harm reduction strategies can be used at any phase in the change process.

# Continuum of Excess, Moderation, and Abstinence

*—Any steps toward decreased risk are steps in the right direction—*





# + Principles



- Accepts, for better and for worse, that licit and illicit drug use is part of our world and chooses to work to minimize its harmful effects rather than simply ignore or condemn them.
- Establishes quality of individual and community life and well-being - not necessarily cessation of all drug use - as the criteria for successful interventions and policies.

# + Principles, cont'd

- Understands drug use as a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon that encompasses a continuum of behaviors from severe abuse to total abstinence, and acknowledges that some ways of using drugs are clearly safer than others.
- Recognizes that the realities of poverty, class, racism, social isolation, past trauma, sex-based discrimination and other social inequalities affect both people's vulnerability to and capacity for effectively dealing with drug-related harm.
- Calls for the non-judgmental, non-coercive provision of services and resources to people who use drugs and the communities in which they live in order to assist them in reducing attendant harm.

# + Principles, cont'd

- Ensures that people who use drugs and those with a history of drug use routinely have a real voice in the creation of programs and policies designed to serve them.
- Affirms drugs users themselves as the primary agents of reducing the harms of their drug use, and seeks to empower users to share information and support each other in strategies which meet their actual conditions of use.
- Does not attempt to minimize or ignore the real and tragic harm and danger associated with licit and illicit drug use.

# + Locating Harm: Drug, Set & Setting



## ■ Drug

- Dose, Frequency, Routes, Concentration, Combinations

## ■ Set

- Beliefs, Expectations, Rituals, Health
- Knowledge: Drug Interactions, OD,

## ■ Setting

- Risk Environment
- Purchase, Possession
- Who, Where, When

# + Complementary & Unifying



- Prevention
- Treatment
- Recovery

# + Self Care



- Clarify expectations
- Have realistic expectations
- Keep a sense of humor
- Celebrate small successes
- Roll with the punches
- Set limits
- Recognize strengths
- Learn to let go
- Don't get caught up in sense of urgency
- Don't be a rescuer
- Don't try to be a MH/Drug treatment expert
- Don't take it personally
- Don't try to go it alone

# + NH Harm Reduction Coalition



- Our **mission** is to develop, support, and promote policies, practices, and programs that reduce the harmful consequences of substance use and misuse in New Hampshire.
  - **Training & Education**
  - **Consulting and Technical Assistance**
  - **Policy Advocacy**
  - **Program Monitoring and Evaluation**
  - **Location of Funding Resources**
  - **Direct Services (Hand Up Health Services)**

Thank You!

NHHRC Meeting

Wed Feb 21 @ 6:30pm

UNH Law School Room 200

+ Concord