

# **PRACTICAL APPROACHES TO YOUTH AT RISK**

**Changing 'Solutions' into 'Problems'**

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# Adolescent Development

- All behaviors in adolescents serve a purpose
- Behaviors are situational expressions of maturational events
- As observers, we objectify the behaviors – “risk-taking”, “health-compromising”, “protective”, “health-enhancing”, etc.

# Adolescent Development

- But.....to most adolescents, they are just “doing their thing”.

# Adolescent Development and Risk Behaviors

- What adults see as ‘problems’, adolescents often experience as ‘solutions’
- and adolescents (and adults, for that matter) do not give up their ‘solutions’ that easy.
- Additionally, adolescent risk taking behaviors (‘solutions’) are embedded in their development.

# Risk Behaviors

A number of biological and social forces have changed the landscape against which adolescent development occurs producing both biological and psychological risk.

# Risk Behaviors

## Biological Forces

- Early onset of puberty
- Availability of effective contraception
- Increased body awareness
- Drugs to expand pleasure and disinhibit
- Knowledgeable 'sexuality'

# Risk Behaviors

## Social forces:

- High rates of **family mobility**
- Greater **anonymity** in neighborhoods
- **Both parents working** – out of the home and neighborhood
- **Schools** are larger and more heterogeneous
- **Media exposure** to violence, drug use, alcohol and sexualized themes and behaviors

# Risk Behaviors

## Social forces:

- **Deterioration** of neighborhoods and schools
- Increasingly **complex, technical and multicultural environment** creates new demands in a highly competitive environment

# Risk Behaviors

## Biological Sequelae

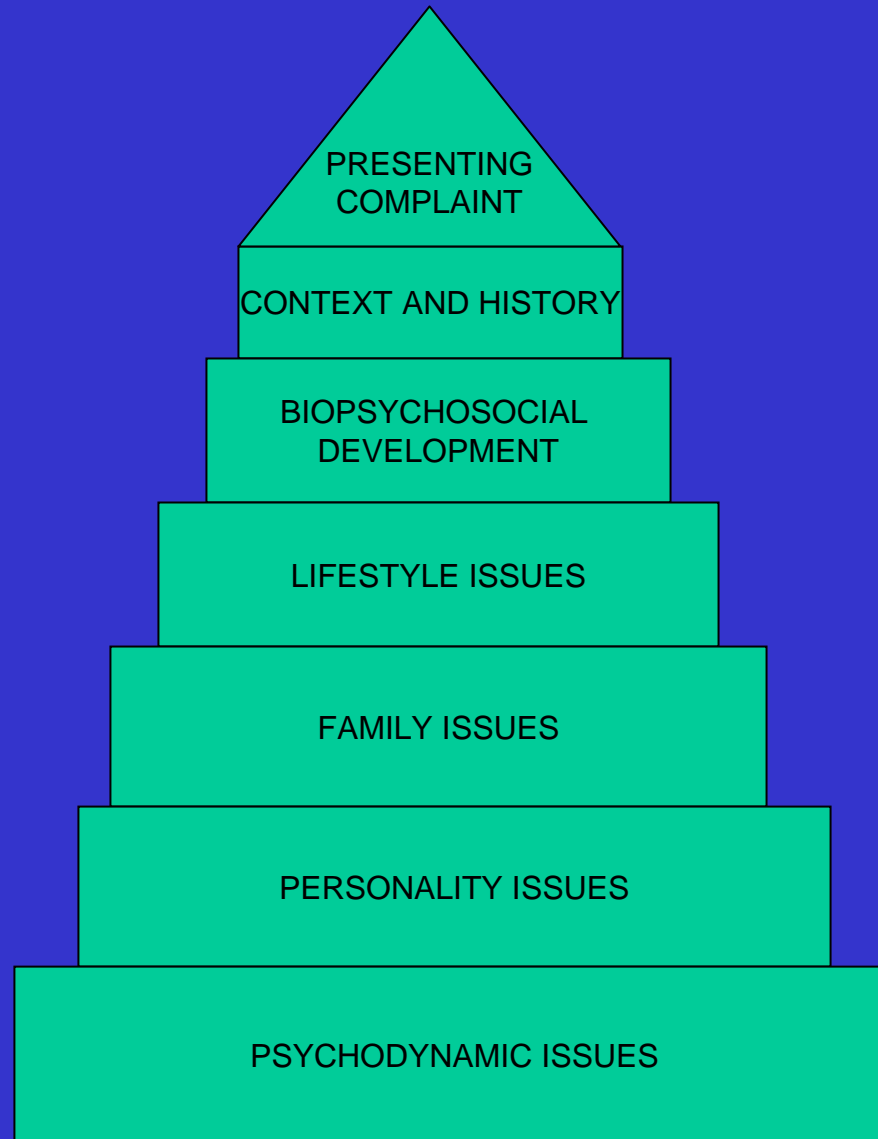
- Pregnancy
- HIV/STI
- Med. aspects drug and alcohol use
- Motor vehicle trauma
- Violence
- Physical and sex abuse
- Eating disorders & medical sequelae
- Obesity & sequelae
- Suicide
- Reactive lung disease

# Risk Behaviors

## Psychological Sequelae

- Social insecurity
- Relationship problems
- Untrusting
- Exclusion/marginalization
- Antisocial/amoral norms
- Violence/poor anger expression
- Poor learning/skill building
- Feeling disempowered
- Impulsive behaviors
- Poor self regard

# PROCESS OF EVALUATION



# Adolescent Risk Profile

H – Home, Harassment

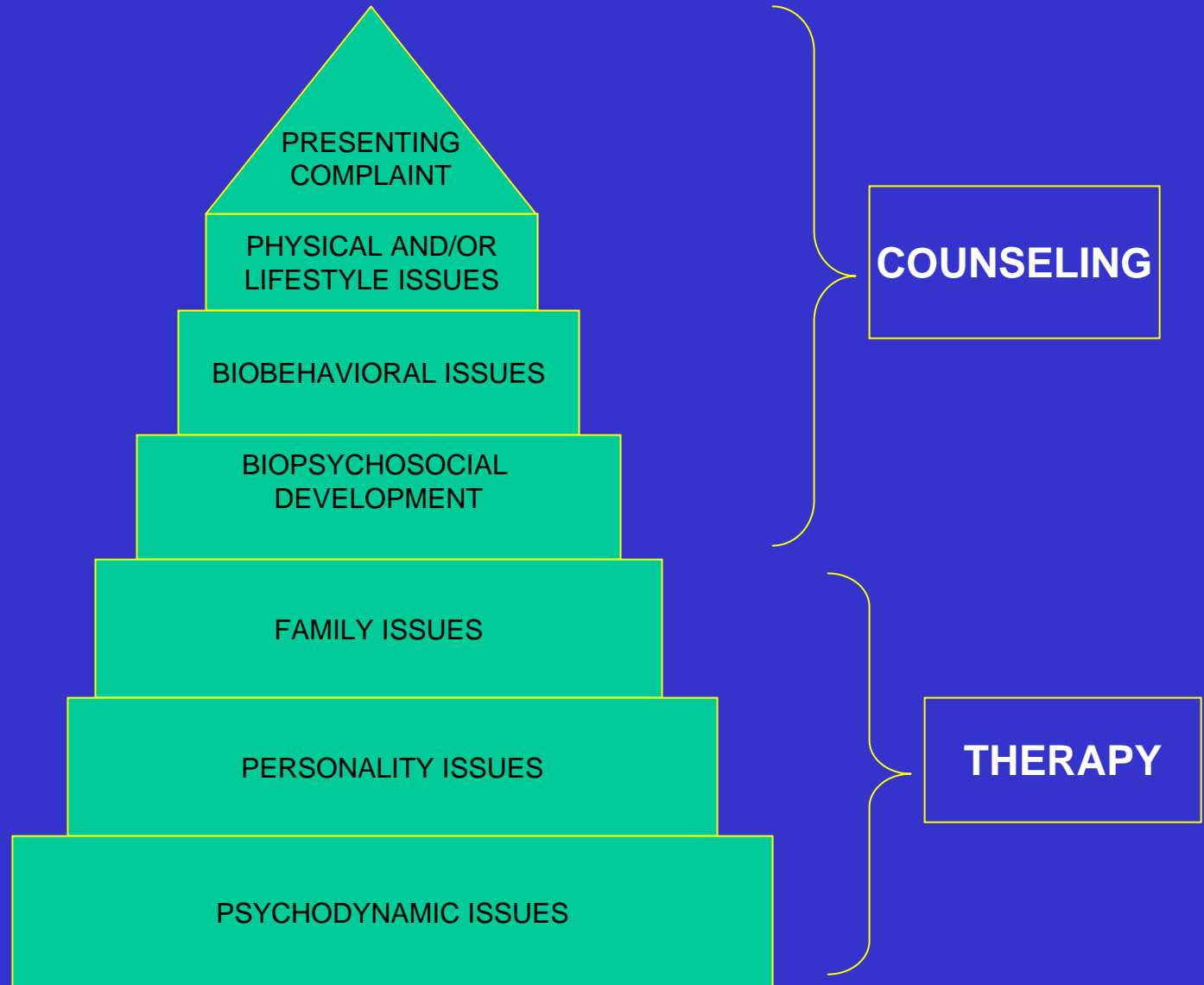
E – Education, Eating, Exercise,  
Employment

A – Ambition, Accidents, Affect

D – Drugs, Dieting, Dating

S – Sex, Suicide

# PROCESS OF INTERVENTION



# The Intervention

Risk taking behavior as with all human behaviors serve a purpose.

Efforts at behavioral change (risk reduction) must take into account this purpose to maximize successful outcome.

# The Intervention

- Criticize the activity and not the individual
- Avoid pontificating, lecturing or blaming
- Make sure the adolescent is in the present. Drug use may negate
- Focus the initial interaction on why the adolescent is there

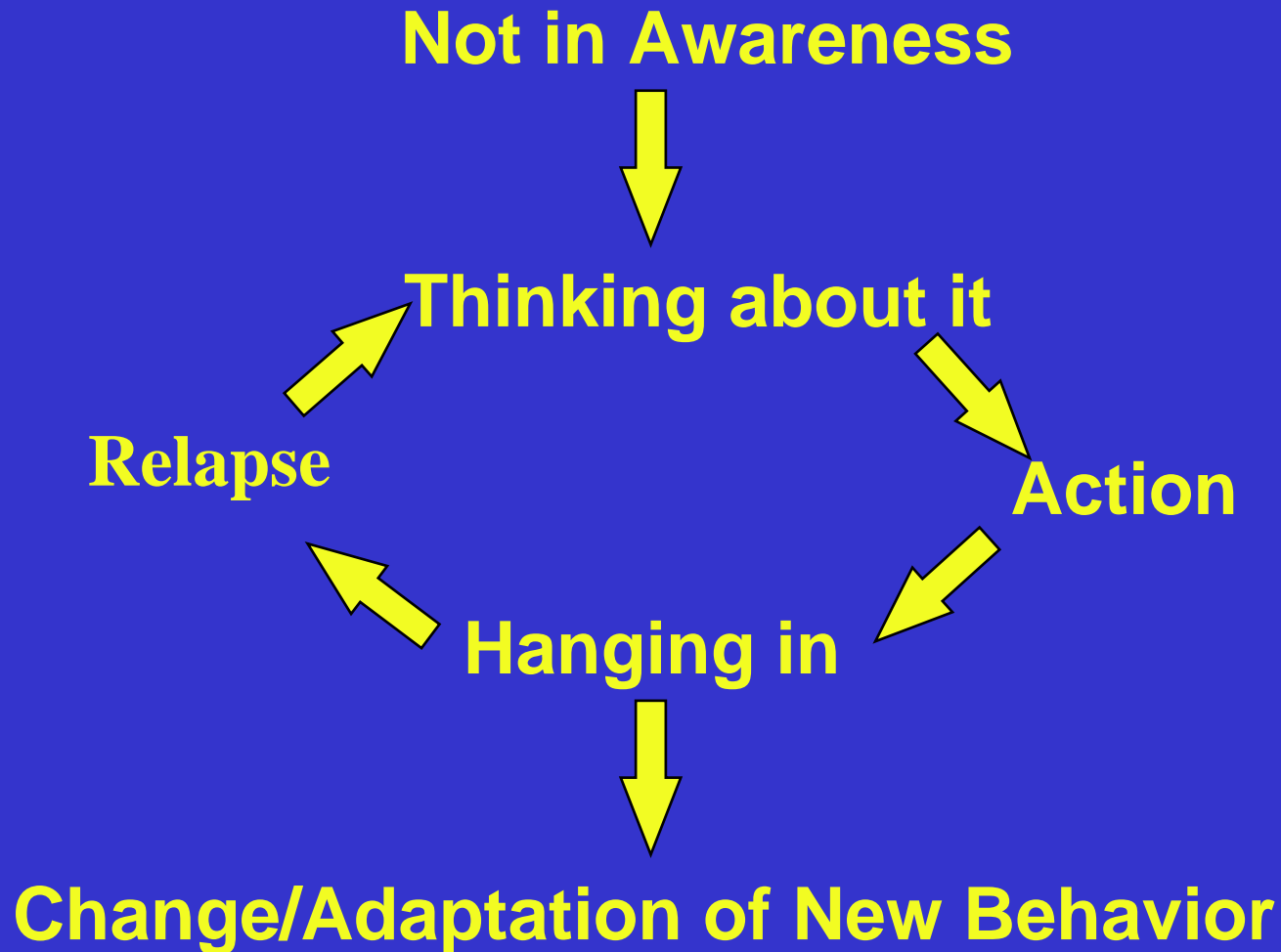
# The Intervention

- Be attentive and aware
- Don't over interpret
- Difficulty is 'hearing' what is being said may be due to your own resentments
- If you highlight the positive the negative will diminish

# TEEN PREGNANCY AS A VEHICLE FOR CHANGE

Using the 'crisis energy' as a  
lubricant for change

# Stages of Change



# INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

- MINIMIZATION
- INSULATION
- DELAY OF ONSET

# MINIMIZATION

Strategies are used that will confine or minimize involvement in the risk activity or behavior to experimentation or to a controlled, moderate, or responsible level

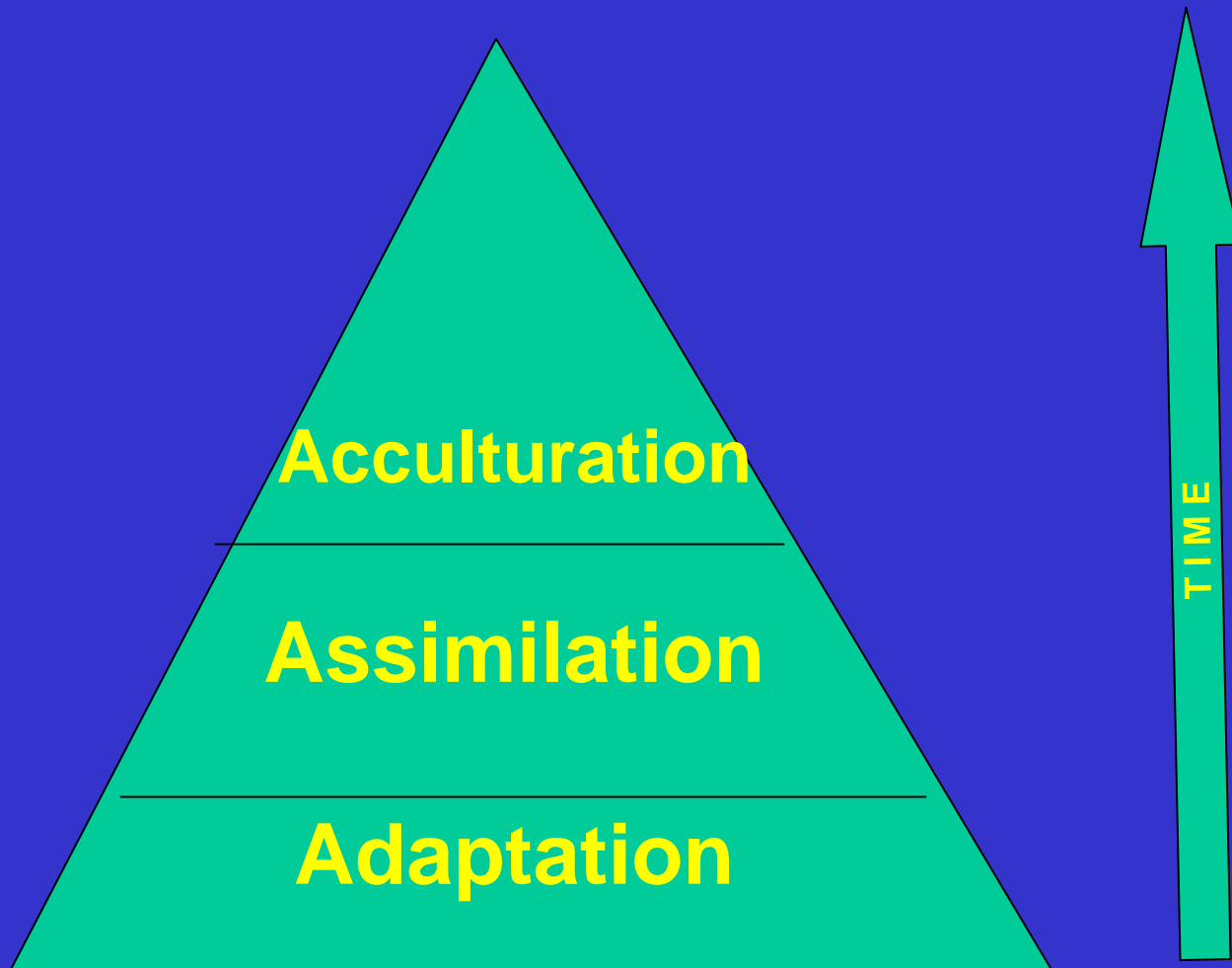
# INSULATION

Strategies are used to insulate the individual involved in a problem behavior on an exploratory or regular level from serious consequences

# DELAY OF ONSET

- Strategies are used that postpone the initiation of a risk behavior to a time when developmental need (maturation) is greatly diminished

Behavioral Integration in Response to  
Continued Exposure



# High Risk Youth

“While the healthcare needs of adolescents have become increasingly complex and derived from bio-psycho-social interaction, access to knowledgeable and skillful professionals and services are decreasing”

# Youth - 2005

- All young people need a variety of experiences to develop their full potential
- Most youth are doing well.
- Some youth have had limited developmental options and struggling.
- Some have integrated poor developmental behaviors into identity and are at risk for significant bio-psychosocial sequelae.

We need to positively value 'risk behaviors', within the therapeutic context and and work on improving our skills to change 'solutions' into 'problems'. Resistance results from our lack of ability to deal with certain situational behaviors!



# Optimism Protects Against Death

Mon Nov 1, 5:03 PM ET

MONDAY, Nov. 1 (HealthDayNews) -- Being an optimist may help reduce your risk of dying from heart disease and other causes.....