



# SMARTool: Systematic Method for Assessing Risk-Avoidance Tool

## SMARTool Targets

### 1. Enhance knowledge of a) physical development and sexual risks and b) personal relationships.

## REAL Essentials Advance Alignment

The most commonly incorporated topics in sexual risk-avoidance programs are medical (health) and relationship information. In addition, sexual risk-avoidance interventions and relationship programs often include goals related to planning for personal success, equipping for healthy relationships, and preparing for future marriage and parenting. Themes should reinforce the program's risk avoidance message and should be strong, clear, consistent, and focused on the target population.

REAL Essentials teaches reproductive anatomy and physiology utilizing correct anatomical language that is appropriate for target audience. REAL Essentials teaches physical and emotional changes related to growth and development, which also includes the development of the adolescent brain. The curriculum utilizes the whole person approach teaching about personal relationships from a physical, intellectual, emotional, social, spiritual, and financial dimension of health. It teaches the science of healthy relationship development identifying qualities of healthy and unhealthy relationships. The program teaches effective communication and conflict resolution skills as well as the prevention of assault, coercion, and intimate partner violence. REAL Essentials also directs students regarding consent laws and boundary setting. Topics are age-appropriate as well as scientifically accurate and the content focuses on clear health goals (e.g. the prevention of STD/HIV and/or pregnancy) as well as instruction and skills regarding specific behaviors leading to these health goals.

## Aligned Activities

### *Teaching Physical Development:*

- My Whole Self (p. 19)
- Learning about the Adolescent Brain (p. 35)
- Differences in Reproductive Anatomy (p. 343)

### *Risk Avoidance:*

- Choices and Effects (p. 249)
- Rising Above Risk (p. 261)
- Sexually Transmitted Diseases/ Infections (p. 373)
- HIV /AIDS Fact or Fiction? (p. 375)
- A Positive Test (p. 379)
- Something Fishy (p. 367)
- Swapping Juices (p. 365)

### *Personal Relationships:*

- Personality Styles (p. 27)
- Basic Needs of the Heart (p. 39)
- How Do You Feel Loved? (p. 45)
- Effective Communication & Barriers to It (p. 99)
- Communicating Effectively/Resolving Conflict (p. 113)
- Friendship, Dating and Love (p. 131)
- What Love Looks Like (p. 147)
- Foundations of a Healthy Relationship (p. 155)
- Relationship Red Flags (p. 163)
- Preventing Sexual Assault (p. 169)
- Communicating Consent (p. 175)

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## Aligned Activities

### 2. Support personal attitudes and beliefs that value sexual risk avoidance.

REAL Essentials lessons help students explore their attitudes, beliefs and values in a safe, affirming climate of learning and discovery. Lessons outline and highlight the value of delaying sexual activity as an optimal strategy for adolescents to achieve health and future life success. REAL Essential teaches toward the positive, rather than away from the negative. Additionally, REAL Essentials programming has:

- Defined desired outcomes
- Associated risky behavior with known risk factors
- Teach content that is relevant and familiar to the students
- Present the information in an innovative and compelling manner often surprising, engaging and captivating students which realigns their values and beliefs regarding sexual risk avoidance.

- Boundaries are Your Friend (p. 223)
- Setting Boundaries Early (p. 225)
- Peer Pressure Pull Down (p. 215)
- Peer Pressure Suck an Egg (p. 217)
- Obstacles to Success: Fact or Fiction (p. 205)

### 3. Acknowledge and address common rationalizations for sexual activity.

"I'm needed," "I'm popular," "I'm curious," and "I am attractive," are words adolescents use to describe motivation for sexual experiences. To counter these rationalizations, the REAL Essentials curriculum fosters awareness of the risks of these short-term choices. REAL Essentials includes topics regarding self-discovery, self-esteem and self-efficacy. This curriculum outlines a framework for a fresh start for students who want to apply the relationship education skills they acquire through the program. REAL Essentials ensures that those who have already been sexually active do not feel shamed or judged and have hope for a healthy loving relationship free of exploitation or coercion. REAL Essentials curricula helps learners comprehend the unforeseen effects of sexual activity with the potential for unhealthy physical, personal and social outcomes.

- Are you Enough? (p. 53)
- Personal Strengths (p. 23)
- Discovering my Passion and Purpose (p. 71)
- Love vs Infatuation (p. 149)
- Not I (p. 197)
- Appointment with Love (p. 153)
- The Meaning of Sex (p. 335)
- The Media's Influence (p. 185)
- Influence of Drugs and Alcohol (p. 199)
- Strong Bonds (p. 339)

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## REAL Essentials Advance Alignment

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### 4. Improve perception of and independence from negative peer and social norms

Adolescents are influenced by peers. Many decisions and behaviors may be determined by their perception of the activities of their friends, their understanding of socially accepted conduct, and their desire to conform to perceived social norms. Positive peer norms can provide support for teens to avoid health-risk behaviors. Social media bombards adolescents with sexual images and messages. This may lead adolescents to believe their peer group is more sexually active or more approving of having sex than the data supports. If teens believe this about their peer group, they are more likely to be sexually active themselves. REAL Essentials lessons equip adolescents to have discussions with peers about sex being more than a physical act and effecting whole person health. REAL Essential lessons help students improve their awareness of positive and negative peer pressure, including media depictions of high-risk behavior. By helping young people become media savvy and learn the way marketing and advertising works, REAL Essential lessons help build media literacy. REAL Essentials lessons encourage students to be free thinkers and build their skill set to be confident and push back against peer pressure to be involved in high-risk behaviors.

- The Media's Influence (p. 187)
- Internet and Texting (p. 193)
- The Influence of Drugs and Alcohol (p. 199)
- Pornography: Fact or Fiction? (p. 209)
- Peer Pressure Pulldown (p. 215)
- Peer Pressure Suck an Egg (p. 217)
- Setting Boundaries Early (p. 223)
- Boundaries are Your Friend (p. 221)
- Where are Your Boundaries? (p. 227)

### 5. Build personal competencies and self-efficacy to avoid sexual activity.

Self-efficacy is the capacity to demonstrate self-respect and practice self-protective behaviors, even in difficult situations. REAL Essentials curriculum helps students recognize their personal worth, their gifts and talents, and their passion and purpose, thus improving critical thinking, communication, conflict resolution, and refusal skills. Elements of the REAL Essentials lessons include building social, emotional, and cognitive competence. The ability to establish and maintain personal boundaries is part of the competency to avoid sexual activity, whether that means resisting sexual coercion or avoiding sexually charged situations.

A particularly efficacious approach to build personal competencies is a positive youth development framework, where youth are engaged in interpersonal skill-building, social engagement, taught healthy relationship skills, given a safe space, and given positive norms and expectations. REAL Essentials accomplishes this through helping students and parents discover their assets and resiliency factors utilizing the positive youth development work of the late Dr. Peter Benson at the Search Institute. The ability to establish and maintain personal boundaries, ask for what they need, and communicate feelings, are all part of the competencies that are taught in the REAL Essentials curriculum.

- Healthy People Ask (p. 103)
- Emotional Needs (p. 49)
- Communicating Feelings (p. 109)
- Communication and Resolving Conflict (p. 113)
- Navigating Differences (p. 75)
- Feelings vs. Behavior Train (p. 107)
- Life Plan (p. 233)
- Making Healthy Decisions (p. 251)
- Overcoming Potential Obstacles (p. 255)
- Rise Above Risk (p. 261)
- My Commitments (p. 387)
- Refusal Skills (p. 267)
- Asset Assessment (p. 57)
- Ideas for Building Assets (p. 63)
- Relationship Red Flags (p. 163)
- Break-up Skills (p. 167)
- Preventing Sexual Assault (p. 169)
- Bullying and Violence (p. 179)

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### 6. Strengthen personal intention and commitment to avoid sexual activity.

Intentions are important precursors to both positive and negative behaviors. The degree to which they affect behavior depends on three primary factors: the strength of the intentions, the skills of the person to follow their intentions, and the social supports they possess. REAL Essentials lessons help students learn the skills to make their behavioral intentions clear and concrete to others. REAL Essentials explores what it means to be committed to something. Those commitments of healthy decision-making and self-regulation are strengthened as the curriculum explores a personal understanding of the risks of teen sex and delaying sexual activity.

- Steps of Physical Intimacy (p. 357)
- The Measure of My Commitment (p. 277)
- My Commitments (p. 387)
- Freedom to Enjoy When You Say Yes to Healthy Relationships (p. 369)
- Success Sequencing (p. 239)
- Hopes and Dreams (p. 237)
- Future Orientation (p. 231)
- Life Plan (p. 233)

### 7. Identify and reduce the opportunities for sexual activity.

Teenagers who date early, often, and steadily are more likely to have earlier sexual encounters. In addition, participating in unsupervised activities, and dating older partners, are consistently associated with higher rates of drug and alcohol use, sexual activity and dating violence. Substance use is a noted risk factor, and activities targeting both these issues should include promotion of social and emotional competence, parenting skills training, parent engagement, and family support. REAL Essentials lessons acknowledge the role of high risk situations that place teens in vulnerable situations, identifies these situations, promotes insights for students, and addresses how to mitigate these factors. Teens who have been sexually active then become more aware of vulnerable situations and develop personal strategies to avoid these opportunities. REAL Essentials utilizes "Connect at Home" lessons throughout the curriculum to engage parents and trusted adults. Building parental support, engaging adolescents in the community, and the availability of shared and safe activities are important protective factors. In the REAL Essentials Certification Training the Master Trainer outlines ways to create a supportive, healthy community for which to utilize curriculum content in a variety of settings.

- Good Date / Bad Date (p. 139)
- Create a Date (p. 141)
- Paper Snowball Fight (p. 383)
- Asset Assessment (p. 57)
- Ideas for Building Assets (p. 63)
- Setting Boundaries Early (p. 225)
- Partnering with parents throughout curriculum and programing efforts

## SMARTool Targets

### 8. Strengthen future goals and opportunities.

## REAL Essentials Advance Alignment

Goal setting and future vision plays a powerful role in motivating healthy adolescent decisions. REAL Essentials lessons create an opportunity for students to identify viable, attractive options for their future plans and relationships. Students who hope to find a life-partner and someday marry will understand the data for building a framework to support healthy commitments. Research shows a correlation between the number of sexual partners and future relationship satisfaction. REAL Essentials provides information for students to make informed decisions about this pattern for themselves. High educational aspirations help provide focus for avoidance high-risk cluster behaviors, while lower educational expectations increase the odds that teens will participate in high-risk activities. Teens who perceive limited life/career options may view early parenting less negatively or even as an alternate life course. REAL Essentials targets future goals and opportunities throughout the curriculum. The “success sequence” is highlighted as an important part of sexual risk avoidance. This sequence provides a protective factor against poverty, noting that if students 1) graduate from high school; 2) maintain a full-time job; and 3) marry before having children, they will have less than a 2% chance of ending up in poverty. Creating a new life script for high risk youth who have experienced generational poverty is a strategy to break this cycle.

## Aligned Activities

- Success Sequencing (p. 239)
- Leadership and Job Readiness (p. 315)
- Future Orientation (p. 231)
- Life Plan (p. 233)
- Hopes and Dreams (p. 237)
- Discovering Your Passion and Purpose (p. 71)
- Creating My Life Plan; the Road to Success (p. 243)
- Overcoming Potential Obstacles (p. 255)
- Finding the Love of My Life (p. 287)
- Dreaming of the Future (p. 301)
- Mock Wedding Ceremony (p. 311)
- Marriage, It's Good Stuff (p. 307)

### 9. Partner with parents.

Parents\* should build strong relationships with their children and talk to their children about sex, early and often. Parents are the first and best resource for helping youth make sound decisions. Multiple studies concur that parental engagement and monitoring are protective factors against sex risk behaviors. There is some evidence that parental attitudes and beliefs influence adolescent's intent to delay sex. Parental involvement is also key to reducing other risk behaviors, such as alcohol and drug use, which often affect adolescents' decisions about sexual activity. Parents who develop a strong relationship with their children also have a positive impact on academic achievement.

The need for parental involvement is further reinforced by adolescent attitudes, because most teens want to obtain information about relationships, expectations, and sex from their parents. Research reveals that parents are more likely to talk to their children about sex and about delaying sexual activity when provided with direction and information. REAL Essentials has many lessons that have a “Connect at Home” component, involving parents in the dialogue. REAL Essentials programming has a robust parent outreach and educational component to foster parent/child support and education.

\*caregivers or trusted adults.

- Permission Slip
- Where are your boundaries? (p. 227)
- Influence of Alcohol and Drugs (p. 199)
- A Distorted View (p. 213)
- Asset Assessment (p. 57)
- Connect at Home Assignments Throughout