

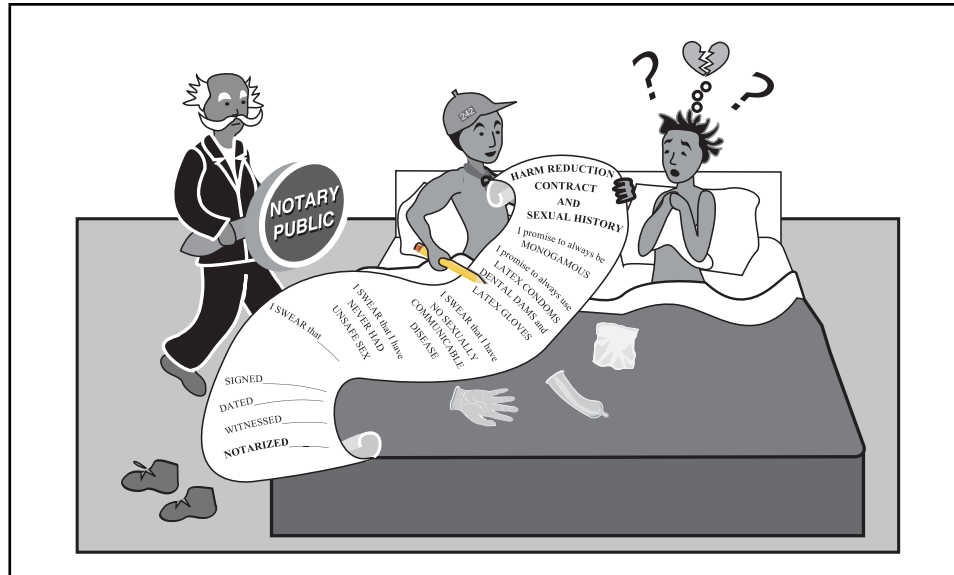
Chapter Four

NEGOTIATING HARM REDUCTION WITH PARTNERS

Skills to Be Learned

- **Harm Reduction Negotiation and Communication Skills**
- **Eroticizing Safer Sexual Practices**

In the last chapter we talked about protecting your health and the health of your partner by engaging in safer sexual practices. We focused on the importance of using latex condoms, dental dams, and water-based lubricants. However, it is not enough to know how to reduce risk by using latex; each person has to agree to using harm reduction techniques.



As this illustration suggests, waiting until you are about to have sex to discuss harm reduction strategies will probably not work to your advantage. Despite good intentions to be safe, in the height of passion it may be difficult to come to an agreement. Your partner may believe that latex reduces sexual pleasure, or may doubt that latex use is necessary or not know that it is effective in reducing harm. You will therefore need to be prepared for responding to your partner's reluctant to use latex. The purpose of this chapter is to teach you some negotiation skills and also some ways to eroticize safer sex, so that you can persuade your partner that latex is not only an effective barrier to infection, but it can also actually increase sexual pleasure.

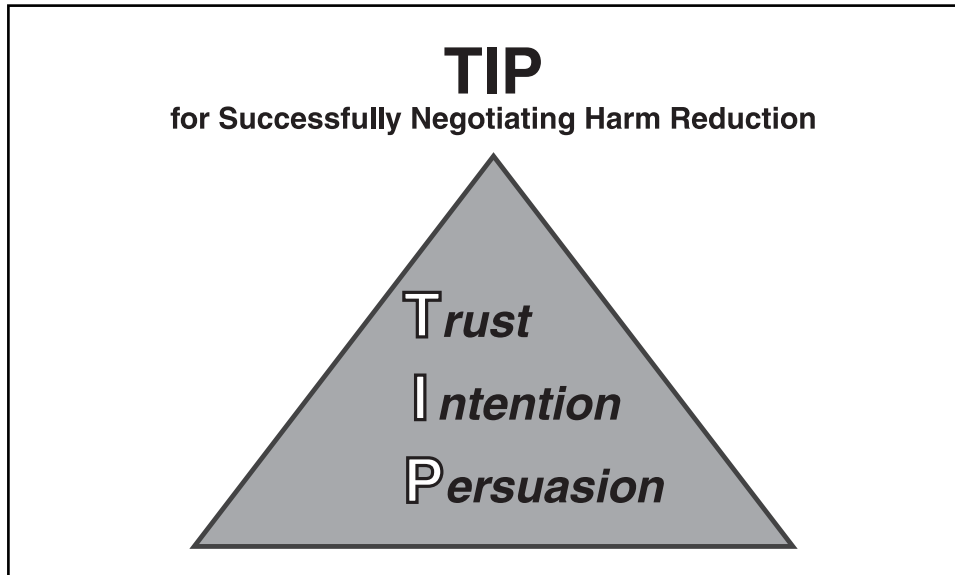
First, let's define what we mean by negotiation. Negotiation is the process of achieving a desired goal through persuasion, bargaining, and compromise. Examples of negotiation include negotiating with a car dealer for a car; negotiating with an employer for a higher salary; negotiating with children for good behavior.

Tips for Successful Negotiations

Successful negotiations occur when both parties come away from the negotiation transaction with something desirable. In business, this is called a **win-win** situation. Successful negotiation occurs when both parties feel heard and feel that they have gained something positive from the transac-

tion. Unsuccessful negotiations occur when one or both of the parties feel that their best interests will not be served. These are **win-lose** or **lose-lose** transactions.

So how do you ensure a **win-win** negotiation transaction when it comes to safer sex? No, you don't have to whip out a lengthy harm reduction contract for your partner to sign each time you get into bed as shown in the previous illustration, but you do need at least 3 things:



Successful harm reduction negotiation require mutual **T**rust, a strong **I**ntention to be safe, and **P**ersuasive ability. Let's go over each one of these:

The Role of *Trust* in Successful Negotiation

- There needs to be trust that both parties are concerned about the other's welfare—increase trust by reassuring your partner that you care not only about your own health but also about your partner's health and welfare.
- Neither person should feel that use of latex reflects a lack of trust. Insisting on latex does not imply that either you or your partner has been unfaithful. Because you are HIV-positive, insisting on latex protection means reducing the risk of infecting your partner with HIV. However, even if your partner is also HIV-positive, you still need to use latex protection. Using latex will help reduce the risk that you will re-infect each other with more of the HIV virus or with a strain of the HIV virus that may not respond to new medications. It also protects both of you from other sexually-transmitted diseases or infections. You or your partner could be infected with a blood-borne infection without having sex with

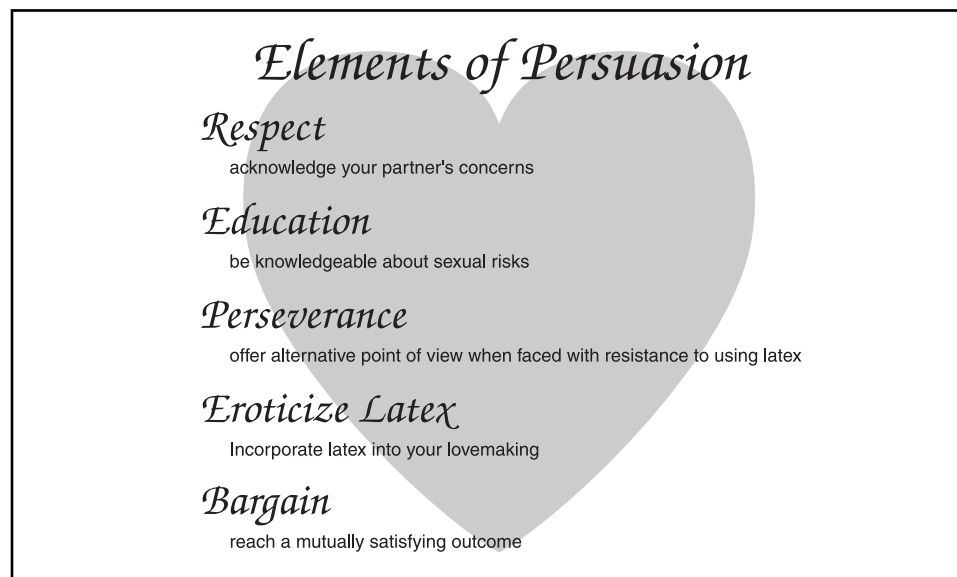
someone else (for example, by sharing a needle with someone else or by some other means), and then you could sexually transmit this infection to each other. So insisting on latex does not mean that you believe your partner is having sex with other partners or that you are. Insisting on latex means that you care about your health and the health of your partner. The consequences of being infected with hepatitis or STDs is potentially serious for anyone, but can be life-threatening for a person who is HIV-positive and whose immune system is compromised.

The Role of *Intention* in Successful Negotiation

- The **stronger** your intention to protect your health and the health of your partner, the more likely you are to persevere in your negotiations, and to ultimately succeed in reducing the harm of sexual intimacy.
- The **weaker** your intention to protect your health and the health of your partner, the more likely you are to compromise, and the greater the likelihood that you will engage in risky behavior.
- You can increase the strength of your intention by learning about the serious consequences of unsafe sexual practices, and the effectiveness of various harm reduction strategies. Then weigh the costs and benefits of using harm reduction strategies. The net benefit (benefits minus costs) is your health and the health of your partner.

The Role of *Persuasion* in Successful Negotiation

There are several elements to successful persuasion.



Examples of how each of these five elements could be used to negotiate safer sex is described in the following conversations between sexual partners:

No. 1: Respect for partner's concerns.

Partner 1: Condoms ruin sex for me; I just can't feel anything with those things.

Partner 2: I understand what you're saying, and I want you to enjoy our time together. Could we try using lubricant to see if that helps?

No. 2: Education.

Partner 1: I don't care if you are HIV-positive, we've had sex before and I've never got it; it's my decision.

Partner 2: I've been trying to educate myself about this virus, and I now regret that we ever had unprotected sex. Using latex is for the protection of both of us, so it's not just your decision. It is possible for you to get the virus from me and not know it for six months or so, and it's possible for me to get infections from you that you may not even know you have which, because I'm HIV-positive, could make me very sick. So I'm learning that using latex is a way to show how much we care about each other.

No. 3: Perseverance.

Partner 1: Oral sex is safe.

Partner 2: On the other hand, why take chances with our health. Actually research has shown that oral sex isn't as safe as it was once believed to be. We've never used flavored condoms for oral sex. It could be fun. Perhaps we could give it a try.

No. 4: Eroticizing latex.

Partner 1: Stopping to put on a condom ruins the mood; it really turns me off.

Partner 2: I know ways to use condoms that will actually get you more turned on. Let me show you.

No. 5: Bargaining.

Partner 1: I want to have sex with you, but I don't want to use a condom.

Partner 2: I want to have sex with you, too. So we definitely want the same thing. So what do you say that we try using the lubricant with the condom

to see if we can make it feel good for you. That way we'll both get what we want and in the process we'll be showing that we care about each other's health.

To recap, you are more likely to persuade your partner to use latex protection if you show respect for your partner's concerns, know how to eroticize latex, and have accurate information about the risks of unsafe sex and know how to reduce these risks. But why should you worry about all of this if you are already HIV-positive? If your partner is willing to take the risk, why should you be the one to insist on using latex protection?

You will see the word **C.A.R.E.** frequently in this program because when you are in a situation that places you at risk, it is extremely important to remind yourself why you should CARE about diligently practicing harm reduction even if you are monogamous and your partner is also HIV-positive.

Do you remember what **C.A.R.E.** stands for?

C = Compromised immune system. When you are HIV-positive, your immune system, which helps your body fight infection, has been weakened. Exposure to any other infections is potentially very dangerous because your body has less ability to fight infection, and as a result can hasten the disease process. Your partner could unknowingly transmit an infection to you.

A = Altruism. That means having concern for the welfare of others – you don't want to spread HIV and other infections to your partner or unborn children.

R = Reinfection. By sharing needles or works or having unsafe sex, individuals with HIV could potentially become re-infected with a strain of HIV that is resistant to some of the newer treatments. Therefore, you may greatly reduce your treatment options or those of your partner.

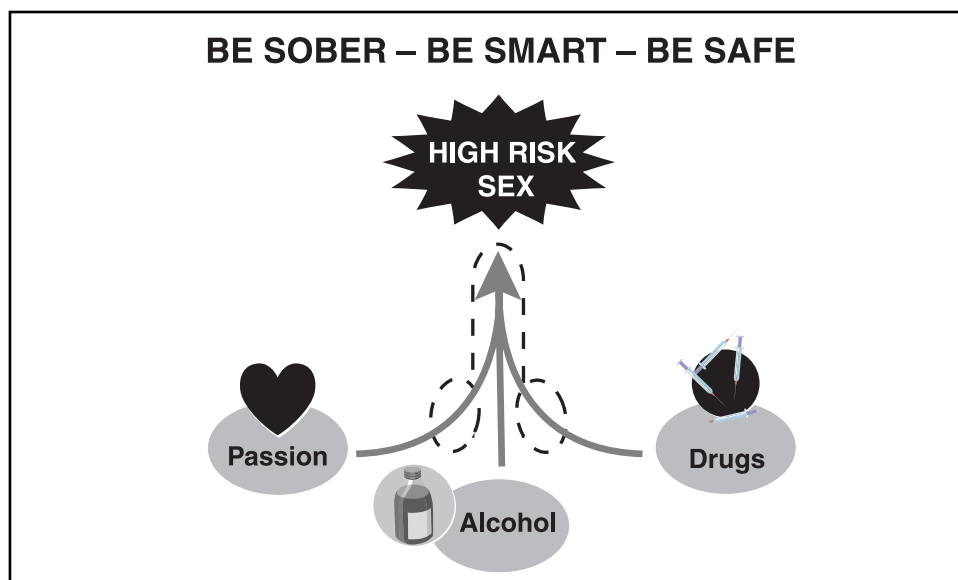
E = Evidence. HIV is transmitted sexually by the sharing of body fluids (blood, semen, vaginal secretions, breast milk). Only abstinence can entirely **prevent** sexual transmission of infection and only the correct use of latex barriers can **reduce** the risk of sexually-transmitted diseases, including HIV.

So, there are very good reasons for an individual who is HIV-positive to **C.A.R.E.** about learning how to negotiate safer sexual practices.

Safer sex videos are commercially available. Two videos we have used in HHRP+ groups are "Norma & Tony following safer sex guidelines" ©1985 Exodus Trust and The Complete Guide to Safe Sex ©1988 Exodus Trust Sex Education Series, 1525 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA 94109. In those videos you will see couples going through the process of negotiating safer sex with each other. They also demonstrate how to use latex products to make you a better lover and increase your sexual pleasure.

Review

Let's review what we've covered so far. We've talked about negotiating safer sex with your partner. We defined negotiation as the process of achieving a desired goal through persuasion, bargaining, and compromise, and we said that in order to be successful your negotiations should result in a WIN-WIN situation where both parties come away with a desirable outcome. When it comes to harm reduction, our TIP for successful negotiation was T= trust; there must be mutual trust; I=Intention; you must have a strong intention to protect your health; and P=persuasion skills. We talked about the 5 elements of persuasion: These are respect for your partner, education, perseverance, eroticizing safer sex, and bargaining. Your ability to persuade your partner is based not only on your communication skills but also on your knowledge about how unsafe sex can affect your health and your knowledge and skill using safer sex techniques. This leads us to an extremely important component of negotiation—being sane and sober when you negotiate.



Being under the influence of any substance or being in the throws of passion means that **you** are not in control—you are being controlled by chemicals (those you put in your body or those that your body produces in great abun-

dance when you are sexually aroused). At the time, you may believe you are still in control, but in fact your judgment can become quite impaired. It is simply not smart to make life and death decisions when you are not in control. And, make no mistake, deciding to have sex without latex protection can indeed be a life or death decision. As we've discussed in previous chapters, the only way to completely prevent any harm is to abstain from drugs and sex. However, if you do continue to use drugs and if you are sexually active, then if you're smart, you will negotiate with your partner when you are both sober, before you have any sexual contact—not when either of you are high or when you are in the height of passion. Do not be like our friend in the illustration at the beginning of this chapter who waited until he was in bed with his partner, about to have sex, before presenting her with a long list of demands about safer sex. Be smart, have open discussions with potential partners about your attitudes towards safer sex before you have any sexual contact and when you are both sober. But what do you do if your partner still refuses to use latex?



If your partner refuses to use latex protection, suggest an alternative to sexual activity that does not involve the exchange of bodily fluids (for example, massage, showering together, mutual masturbation). If your partner refuses to use latex protection for oral, anal, or vaginal sex, and also rejects any alternative activity, leave the situation. No latex, no sex, no harm to you or your partner. Be smart, be safe, insist on latex protection.

Practice Exercise: Latex Negotiation Role-Play Exercise

Below you will find four different potentially high risk scenarios. Role-play these situations with a partner using the strategies outlined in this chapter.

SCENARIO No. 1

You are HIV-positive, single, and have not had sex for a long time.

You are at a party. You meet someone whom you find very sexually attractive who comes on to you, and wants to leave the party and have sex with you. This person is high and has been drinking and using cocaine. You have just arrived at the party and have not yet used any substances, but are about to have a drink. You want to have sex with this person. What do you do?



Role-play instructions:

Two team members role-play negotiating safer sex:

One person plays the person who is high who does not want to use latex protection. The other person plays the person who is not high and does want to use latex.

SCENARIO No. 2

You are HIV-positive. Your partner of 5 years has left you. You are feeling extremely depressed and rejected.

You get together for a drink and chat with an old friend with whom you have been sexually intimate in the past (without using condoms or other latex protection). You are talking and being comforted by this old friend when he or she suggests having sex again for old time sake. You find this person sexually attractive. What do you do?



Role-play instructions:

Two team members role-play negotiating safer sex:

One person plays the old friend who argues that no latex is needed because you had unprotected sex in the past and he or she did not get infected. The other person plays the person who is depressed, and wants to be with this old friend, but feels they should use latex.

SCENARIO No. 3

You have been in a serious relationship with someone for one month. You have not yet been sexually intimate with each other and you both want to have a committed sexual relationship. You are both HIV-positive.

One person has been an injection drug user for several years; the other person has just ended a long-term relationship with someone else who is HIV-positive. You want to talk to your partner about having sex for the first time. What do you do?



Role-play instructions:

Two team members role-play negotiating safer sex:

One person plays the person who has been an injection drug user and suggests using latex protection; the other person plays the person who has just ended a long-term sexual relationship with someone else who is HIV-positive and sees no reason to use latex protection.

SCENARIO No. 4

You are HIV-positive and have been in a serious relationship for several years.

You and your partner have always used condoms for vaginal sex but do not use any latex protection for oral sex or for hand-to-genital contact. Your partner enjoys receiving and giving oral sex and intimate touching, but does not want to use latex. You have been in a treatment program for your drug use where you have learned a lot about risky sexual practices and how they can effect your health and the health of your partner. What do you do?



Role-play instructions:

Two team members role-play negotiating safer sex:

One person plays the HIV-positive person who knows the benefits of latex protection for oral sex and hand-to-genital contact. The other person plays the person who does not want to use latex protection for these sexual activities.

Quiz

1. **Your success in negotiating safer sexual practices with your partner depends on:**
 - a. mutual **trust**
 - b. the strength of your **intention** to be safer
 - c. your ability to **persuade** your partner
 - d. all of the above

2. **If your partner refuses to use latex protection for penetrative sex, you should:**
 - a. refuse to have unsafe sex
 - b. suggest oral sex without latex
 - c. suggest vaginal or anal sex without ejaculation (no coming inside partner)
 - d. none of the above

3. **You are more likely to persuade your partner to use latex protection if:**
 - a. you show respect for your partner's concerns
 - b. you know how to eroticize latex products
 - c. you have accurate information about risks and risk reduction
 - d. all of the above

4. **Safer sex negotiation discussions should begin:**
 - a. in bed, just before you have sex
 - b. after you discover that your partner is HIV-positive
 - c. when you are sober
 - d. after your partner discovers that you are HIV-positive

5. **If both you and your sexual partner are HIV-positive, condom negotiation is unnecessary.**
 - a. True
 - b. False

Exercise: Stress Management/Relaxation

We recommend that you conclude each chapter by doing a ten-minute relaxation exercise. Use this time to practice meditation or deep breathing, or to play an audiotaped relaxation or visualization technique. Dim the lights, get comfortable in your chair, uncross your legs, and sit quietly with your eyes closed. Remember that learning to relax is a skill that takes practice, so if you feel restless at first, just remind yourself that this is a ten-minute gift of quiet time that you give to yourself. With practice, you can use meditation and relaxation in many areas of your life. For example, as we discussed in the previous chapter, reducing risk in intimate sexual relationships requires being focused and being able to demonstrate that you care about yourself and your partner. Use your relaxation time to practice maintaining your focus on reducing risk and protecting health, and soon you will be able to remain focused even when you are in the height of passion.

