



## Increasing Our Impact by Using a Social-Ecological Approach

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The Social-Ecological Model is a theory-based framework for understanding, exploring, and addressing the social determinants of health at many levels. The Social-Ecological Model encourages us to move beyond a focus on individual behavior and toward an understanding of the wide range of factors that influence health outcomes. This approach supports building collaboration beyond the adolescent sexual and reproductive health field. It also increases our impact to achieve better outcomes for youth across diverse populations, including marginalized youth and pregnant and parenting teens (Healthy Teen Network, 2014).

### UNDERSTANDING THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL

**Social Determinants of Health:** These are the circumstances in which people are born, live, and work as well as the systems put in place to support health care. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces: economics, social policies, and politics (World Health Organization, 2013).

**Social-Ecological Model:** This provides a theory-based framework for understanding how the social determinants of health influence and maintain health and health-related issues. This can help identify promising points of intervention and provide a better understanding of how social problems are produced and sustained within and across the various subsystems (i.e., an individual's decisions and behaviors result from interactions with his/her social and physical surroundings) (Texas HIV/STD Prevention Community Planning Group, 2011).

**Social-Ecological Approach:** This is the Social-Ecological Model put into practice by developing strategies to address the social factors that impact the health of your priority population (Institute of Medicine, 2003).

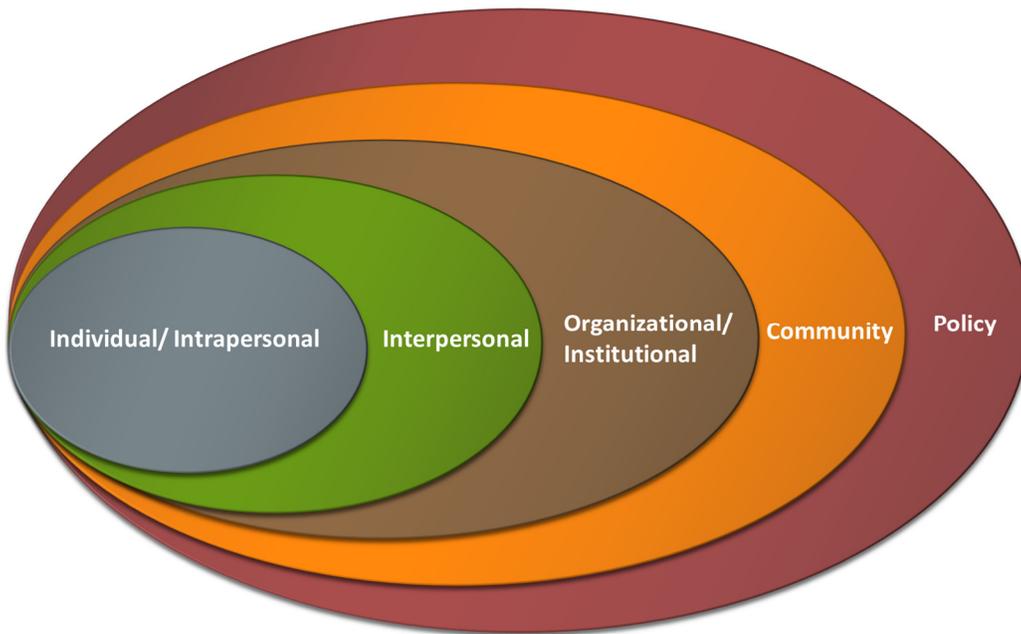
“Ecological” means multiple levels, beyond the individual. Thus, the Social-Ecological Model demonstrates that behavior is the result of the knowledge, values, and attitudes of individuals as well as social influences, including the people with whom they associate, the organizations to which they belong, and the communities in which they live.

The idea behind the Social-Ecological Approach is not new, even in the field of adolescent pregnancy prevention (APP). What is relatively new is the increased attention directed toward this concept at the federal

level (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2010, Department of Health and Human Services, 2010, and Crosby, Salazar, & DiClemente, 2013 ).

Using a Social-Ecological Approach does not mean a shift away from evidence-based interventions (EBIs). This approach is consistent with the many theories (e.g., Social Learning Theory, Theory of Reasoned Action, Cognitive Learning Theory) that inform adolescent pregnancy prevention EBIs. The theoretical framework for most evidenced-based adolescent pregnancy prevention programs recognizes that youth are influenced by various factors—peers, family, community, etc.—and the curriculum developers have built this concept into the programs through activities such as community mapping, demystifying peer norms, and community service components (Kirby, 2007).

## THE SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MODEL



Adapted from McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz (1988).

This figure illustrates one example of the Social-Ecological Model, which includes five levels: the individual/intrapersonal sphere, the interpersonal sphere, the organizational/institutional sphere, the community sphere, and the policy sphere (McLeroy, Bibeau, Steckler, & Glanz, 1988).

Social-Ecological Model of McLeroy et al.	
Level	Examples of Contributing Factors
<b>Individual/Intrapersonal:</b> The individual characteristics that influence behavior, including knowledge, skills, motivation, and personality traits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skills</li> <li>• Knowledge</li> <li>• Attitudes</li> <li>• Sexual Orientation</li> <li>• Biology</li> <li>• Motivation</li> <li>• Gender Identity</li> <li>• Spirituality</li> </ul>

<b>Interpersonal:</b> Relationships with others and effects on social identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social Support</li> <li>• Social Networks</li> <li>• Associations</li> <li>• Culture</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Peer Influence</li> <li>• Family Environment</li> <li>• Emotional Support</li> </ul>
<b>Organizational/Institutional:</b> Rules and regulations of organizations and institutions that can impact behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Incentives Policies</li> <li>• Confidentiality/Privacy Rules</li> <li>• Stigma</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referral Systems</li> <li>• Parental Consent Regulations</li> </ul>
<b>Community:</b> Availability and location of resources that promote health, social networks, and social norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transportation</li> <li>• Health Care Services</li> <li>• Poverty</li> <li>• Tolerance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social/Cultural Norms</li> <li>• Recreation Facilities</li> <li>• Mobilization</li> </ul>
<b>Policy:</b> Local, state, and federal policies and laws that impact health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding and Resources</li> <li>• Cultural Norms</li> <li>• Curfews</li> <li>• Gender Equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drinking Age</li> <li>• Racial and Ethnic Equity</li> <li>• Infrastructure</li> <li>• Political Priorities</li> </ul>

## TIPS FOR APPLYING THIS APPROACH TO OUR WORK

Interventions are most effective when they target multiple levels to support behavior change (DiClemente, Salazar, & Crosby, 2007). APP grantees are uniquely positioned to target multiple levels of an individual’s life to support changes in behavior.

The following are some less-intensive ways to apply the approach:

- Provide child care, food, and transportation during sessions with youth.
- Facilitate access to health care (e.g., by creating effective referral systems).
- Establish partnerships within your sector (e.g., other positive youth development organizations).
- Connect individuals with social supports (e.g., WIC, food banks, home visits by nurses).
- Recognize the multi-directional influence of individual behaviors:
  - Healthy relationship skills, such as developing communication skills, can have impacts on interpersonal interactions and influence community-level social norms.
  - Financial literacy skills, such as money management skills, have positive implications for families, communities, and individuals, and teaching entrepreneurship can impact a whole community.
  - Educational and career success, such as developing skills for employment preparation, job seeking, independent living, financial self-sufficiency, and workplace productivity can impact individuals and family systems.

The following are some more-intensive ways to apply the approach:

- Expand partnerships with other sectors (e.g., housing, education).
- Expand the program to offer “wraparound” services, such as food, shelter, tutoring, legal aid, etc.

- Develop a coalition to support adolescents and young adults and include new partners from other sectors to address their needs as a community and through a more holistic lens.
- Encourage public and private dialogue to highlight and promote why it is important to use a Social-Ecological Model as an overarching framework for community and partner buy-in.

APP grantees are uniquely positioned to adopt a Social-Ecological Approach, as many grantees already utilize a positive youth development approach. Furthermore, PREP grantees integrate adulthood preparation subjects (APS) into their programs. The integration of youth development principles and/or APS requires an understanding of and commitment to the holistic nature of working with and supporting adolescents using a Social-Ecological Approach.

## EXAMPLES OF FEDERALLY FUNDED PROGRAMS AND SUGGESTED RESOURCES

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Dating Matters

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/datingmatters/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: Violence Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/>

Healthy People 2020

[www.healthypeople.gov](http://www.healthypeople.gov)

StopBullying.gov

[www.stopbullying.gov](http://www.stopbullying.gov)

Office of Adolescent Health: Think, Act, Grow

<http://www.hhs.gov/ash/oah/tag/>

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