

SIN BUSCAR **excusas** **NO** **excuses**

A small-group, video-based behavioral intervention for Hispanic/Latino gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM)

Starter Kit

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Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses

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What is Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is a single-session, small group, video-based behavioral intervention that aims to increase sexual safety and HIV testing and care among Hispanic/Latino gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (MSM). Sexual safety includes having fewer partners, using condoms consistently, engaging in less risky sexual behaviors, using pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) or post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) as needed, and communicating with your partner about monogamy, HIV status and getting tested. Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses can be implemented in a variety of settings, including clinics and community agencies. Group sessions last approximately 60 minutes. The intervention has three core elements:

1. Viewing of a Spanish- or English- language video in a small-group setting that ensures privacy and confidentiality
2. Structured, small-group, brief discussion about barriers and strategies to increase sexual safety and HIV testing and care
3. Condom distribution, the offer of an HIV test, and referrals for services (including, PrEP, PEP, medication adherence, substance use/harm reduction programs, case management, and additional services in linkage to care)

During the intervention, participants view a 20-minute soap opera-style video that models common risks, relationships, sexual safety, condom use, partner negotiation, HIV testing, and HIV status disclosure. A brief facilitator-led interactive discussion following the video reinforces key messages about sexual safety, including condom use and PrEP and PEP, as well as HIV testing, and care. During the discussion, the facilitator encourages participants to brainstorm and share strategies and action steps they can use in their own lives to stay safe and healthy.

The key messages of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses include:

1. Use condoms correctly to protect yourself against HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).
2. Limit your number of sex partners to stay safe.
3. Choose less risky sexual behaviors.
4. Communicate openly with partners about sexual safety, including condom use, PrEP and PEP, HIV testing and early treatment and care.
5. Get support from partners, family, or peers to help you stick to healthy behaviors.
6. Understand that drugs and alcohol can impair your thinking and affect decision-making.

7. Talk to your health care provider about PrEP and PEP to protect yourself and/or your partners from HIV. Please refer to PrEP and PEP CDC guidelines found here: [CDC's PrEP Fact Sheet](#), [CDC's PrEP Questions/Answers/Infographics](#).
8. Get tested for HIV and other STDs; it's the only way to know if you are infected and early treatment can help you stay healthy.
9. If you have HIV, then take your medication and stay in care to stay healthy.

By integrating a broad definition of “sexual safety,” Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses encourages men to think about the range of options and combinations that they can use for reducing their risk for HIV. The protocol is designed to allow participants to think about what sexual safety behaviors would work best for them. This makes it easier for them to consider action steps that seem most achievable for them in their personal situations and lives.

Who is the Intervention for?

We developed Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses as an intervention for vulnerable Hispanic/Latino MSM who are 18 years of age and older. We recognize that there is significant diversity within the Hispanic/Latino MSM population, both in terms of cultural groups as well as gender and sexual identity. We recommend that the agency implementing the intervention consider which of their clients, within this larger target population, to bring together for each group. The intervention was developed so that it could be used with a wide range of Hispanic/Latino MSM and addresses different barriers to sexual safety and HIV testing and care.

During research on the intervention, for which the eligibility criteria is described in more detail below, we recruited only men who were HIV-negative. However, this intervention does not need to be restricted to men who are HIV-negative; in fact, many of the key messages are relevant for men living with HIV. The intervention was not developed for nor tested with transgender men or women.

How Did We Develop Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?

The Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) modeled Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses after VOICES/VOCES, a brief, single-session behavioral intervention for black or African-American and Hispanic/Latino men and women, also developed by EDC. One of the first and most widely disseminated High-Impact Prevention programs, VOICES/VOCES repeatedly has proven to be effective and cost-effective in reducing sexual risk behaviors, and has been successfully in diverse settings, including substance abuse treatment centers, shelters, and clinics (O'Donnell, 1998; Neumann, 2011).

Community-based organizations have extended its reach by developing new videos tailored to multiple populations, including youth, MSM, Haitians, Native Americans, previously incarcerated persons, migrant farm workers, the deaf community, adults with spinal cord injuries, and other populations that range in size and risk profiles.

The original development team at EDC adapted Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses using extensive input from focus groups of culturally diverse Hispanic/Latino MSM and a community advisory board. Advisors included representatives from health departments, community agencies, and prevention practitioners in the Northeast, Southwest, and Puerto Rico. Procedures followed adaptation guidance developed for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Replication of Effective Programs packages, which underscores the importance of getting input from members of the target population and key stakeholders.

Like VOICES/VOCES, Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is grounded in social cognitive theory, which helps explain why people engage in both positive and negative behaviors that affect their health (Bandura, 1986). Social cognitive theory takes into account a person's past experiences, positive or negative reinforcements, expectations, and self-efficacy, all of which shape whether a person will engage in a specific behavior. Through the use of engaging characters in the video, dramatic storylines, and a small-group discussion, participants in the intervention have the opportunity to see and hear from individuals (both in the video and the group) with whom they can relate—and who reinforce positive behavior change by demonstrating how certain behaviors can lead to optimal outcomes.

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses Outcome Evaluation

Sample

A total of 370 Hispanic/Latino men participated in an evaluation of the efficacy of the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention in increasing sexual safety and HIV testing (O'Donnell, L., Stueve, A., Joseph, H. A., & Flores, S., 2014). Men ranged in age from 18 years to 49 years, with 64 percent identifying as gay, 30 percent as bisexual, and 6 percent as other (for example, questioning, straight). At enrollment, participants reported they were HIV-negative or did not know their status. MSM completed baseline assessments and a post-intervention 3-month follow-up. We recruited them through street outreach, listservs, and marketing through an AIDS service organization and a community health center.

Eligibility Criteria

MSM were eligible if they self-identified as Hispanic/Latino, had sex with two or more partners in the previous 3 months, had anal sex without a condom with a male in the last 3 months, were HIV-negative or status unknown, and had no exposure to HIV prevention education (research or non-research) in the previous 6 months. Although all men reported they were HIV- or status unknown to screen into the study, seven disclosed they were HIV+ on the computer survey.

Findings

1. Across the two assessments (baseline and 3 months), intervention participants reported a significantly greater decrease in the total number of condomless anal sex acts with their last two male partners than comparison participants ($F = 4.10$, $p = 0.04$).
2. Intervention participants were significantly more likely to report using condoms at last sex than comparison participants at 3 months post-intervention (adjusted odds ratio = 1.69, 95% CI = 1.02, 2.81, $p = 0.04$).
3. Among MSM who were 40 years or younger ($n = 208$), intervention participants were significantly more likely to report condom use at last sex (42.4% versus 31.7%, $p < 0.05$) and significantly less likely to report condomless sex with their last 2 male partners (14.8% versus 25.1%, $p < 0.05$), relative to comparison participants at 3 months post-intervention.

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses and High-Impact Prevention

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses responds to the National HIV/AIDS Strategy (NHAS) and CDC's HIP approach to HIV prevention because it targets Hispanic/Latino MSM, a group that is affected by the disease disproportionately and severely. In addition, it is a scientifically proven, cost-effective, and scalable intervention.

Through the use of the intervention's protocol (Section 3) and facilitator tools (Section 5), facilitators of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses lead discussions about several HIP-supported approaches to HIV prevention including condom use and access; the use of PrEP and PEP, HIV testing and linkage to care, early treatment, and medication adherence.

There are several activities in the 2-day Training of Facilitators for Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses that are designed to help participants learn how to integrate HIP approaches and components into the small group discussion. These include activities on the video's key messages, using video trigger points to launch discussions about sexual

safety, getting tested and early treatment, and agency planning and considerations on referring participants to HIV testing, care, and resources on PrEP and PEP.

What Resources are on the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses Website?

The Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses website provides all the materials and resources needed to begin and continue the implementation of the intervention. Specifically, the following items are available for download or viewing on the [Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses webpage](#).

- Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses implementation manual
- Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses videos (Spanish and English versions) for downloading or streaming (on Vimeo)
- Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses posters and handouts: Printable/downloadable posters and handouts with screenshots from the video (for character recollection during discussion)
- Starter Kit

Agency Readiness Assessment

By answering the following questions, you can determine what is needed to prepare for the implementation of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses. If you answer “Yes” to most of the questions, then you are well on your way to being prepared to offer the intervention. If you answer “No” to any question, then consider what changes or actions you might need to take so that you meet your pre-implementation needs.

Creating the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses Team

- Is there someone at the agency who is willing to provide hands-on leadership and guidance for the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention, from preparation through institutionalization?
- Is there a decision maker in your agency who is willing to provide higher-level support, including securing resources and advocating for the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention, from preparation through institutionalization?
- Are there two or more staff members who possess the characteristics that would make them effective group facilitators of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses skill-building sessions? We outline examples of these characteristics in the following section.

Working with Clients

- On a typical day of service delivery, how many clients do you serve?
- Which of these clients would be eligible for participation in Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?
- Are there clients in your waiting room whom you could convene in small groups while they are waiting to see a service provider?
- If you see clients by appointment, then are there ways to schedule appointments in clusters so that clients can participate in a Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses session prior to or after their scheduled visit?
- Are there ways to use Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses to supplement services or interventions you currently offer that already convene clients as small groups of four to eight people?

Finding Space/Securing Equipment

- Does your agency have a private room or space that can accommodate four to eight people for video viewing and skill-building sessions? (This can be a space that is shared and used on a rotating basis for other services.)
- Can your agency stream web-based video, download video from an online website, or have at least one laptop with a projector or a television with accompanying DVD player to allow you to show the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses video in a group setting?
- Does your agency have appropriate security for this equipment?

Training Staff

- Have you arranged for staff involved (facilitators and administrator) to attend a 2-day Training of Facilitators on Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?
- Have you scheduled a training/orientation session at your agency for staff on Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?

Identifying Local Support

- Have you told local and state public health officials that you will be implementing Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses? This can help obtain key stakeholder support, promote the intervention, and access additional funds.
- Have you identified other agencies or divisions in your own agency with which you can partner and collaborate to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses? This also can help in recruiting MSM for the intervention.
- Have you identified local resources, such as private businesses in your community, who might contribute resources (for example, laptops)?

Identifying Staff to Facilitate Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses

You only need one staff facilitator to lead each Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses session. However, critical to the successful implementation of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is the selection of at least two staff members who can be available to facilitate the small-group skill-building sessions. This helps to maximize how many sessions you can hold and builds in some safety for typically high turnover among agencies. It also is helpful to have a colleague to help troubleshoot on issues, such as recruitment of MSM into groups. Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses facilitators should possess certain characteristics that promote client learning. A good facilitator encourages clients' active participation in discussions and helps them to draw on their own experiences, knowledge, attitudes, and skills so that they understand and accept new concepts and gain new skills and confidence.

- Effective facilitators can include both men and women who have strong communication skills. They should use clear, simple language; avoid judgmental statements and mixed messages; listen attentively; and give all members of the group a chance to contribute and ask questions, while not forcing participation.
- Effective facilitators know the subject matter, including HIP-supported approaches to HIV prevention, keep up with new information, and are relaxed during skill-building sessions. They focus on client needs and concerns rather than on what to say next.
- Effective facilitators are familiar with the intervention protocol and skilled in moving through all steps of the protocol (e.g., launching discussion, soliciting barriers and moving towards strategies and action steps) without making clients feel rushed.
- Effective facilitators are comfortable talking about sensitive topics and defining sensitive terms in ways that clients will understand. They are:
 - Honest about what they know and do not know.
 - Aware that most people feel uncomfortable talking about sex and sexuality.
 - Nonjudgmental.
 - Respectful of personal boundaries.
 - Alert to issues of privacy and confidentiality.
 - Good, careful listeners.
 - Careful that participants do not inadvertently expose more information than they are comfortable sharing.

- Effective facilitators have a positive attitude and feel good about participating in HIV prevention education and helping clients think about strategies for sexual safety and HIV testing and care. They are friendly and enthusiastic, and they accept others as individuals.
- Effective facilitators use humor appropriately to help clients feel comfortable discussing sensitive subjects.
- Effective facilitators are punctual, reliable, and committed. They help ensure that video viewing and interactive group sessions start on time, don't disrupt regular clinic flow, and are scheduled consistently.
- It is not required that facilitators be of the same gender or ethnicity as group members. In most situations, current agency staff can easily learn to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses.

FAQs about Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses

Do we need to implement all of the core elements of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses, or can we use some of the parts separately?

Core elements are intervention components that research tells us make the intervention effective. They must be maintained without change to ensure the effectiveness. In the event that core elements are revised for any reason (to improve the outcomes or reduce/eliminate harm), CDC will post this information at the [HIP website](#), and distribute via direct contact to all trainees and agencies known to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses. Any revisions led by CDC will include the original researchers and will be based on scientific evidence. There are three core elements of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses: (1) viewing of a Spanish- or English-language video in a small-group setting that ensures privacy and confidentiality; (2) structured, small-group, brief discussion about barriers and strategies to increase sexual safety and HIV testing and care; (3) condom distribution, the offer of an HIV test, and referrals for services (including, PrEP, PEP, medication adherence, substance use/harm reduction programs, case management, and additional services in linkage to care).

Our original research revealed the importance of implementing these elements in combination. The video allows MSM to see characters to whom they can relate addressing barriers to sexual safety and HIV testing. Group discussion "brings home" to clients the messages they see and hear in the video, and lets them practice new sexual safety strategies with the support of their peers. It also uses scenes in the video to integrate important messages about medication adherence and the use of PrEP or PEP. Condom distribution and the offer of an HIV test highlights the importance of being prepared, knowing your status, taking care of yourself and your partner(s), and getting linked to medical care early if diagnosed with HIV.

We've run groups before, but never tried to follow an outline like the one used for Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses groups. How important is it that we follow this protocol?

We strongly suggest that Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses facilitators adhere closely to the implementation protocol. Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is a brief, single-session intervention. Because it is so brief—only approximately 60 minutes, including 20 minutes of video viewing—you must spend the time allotted to discussion helping participants develop the skills they need to address barriers to sexual safety and HIV testing, as well as strategies related to other HIP topics such as medication adherence and PrEP or PEP. The intervention protocol in Section Three and the Facilitator Tools in Section Five contain the tools you need to help participants develop these skills. It includes questions you can use to start and guide

group discussion, role-play scenarios to help participants practice different sexual safety strategies, and references to specific scenes and encounters in the videos that illustrate ways participants can use these strategies in different types of relationships. Because the video covers several issues, there is flexibility in which topics you can cover; however, we recommend in the protocol that you focus on at least one barrier to sexual safety and one barrier to HIV testing and care.

We recognize that clients might have other questions or concerns they wish to raise during a Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses session. For example, they might have questions about specific STDs, or about a partners' substance abuse. We suggest that you pursue these important topics after you complete the session, so that these conversations don't sidetrack the session and prevent clients from practicing the skills and getting the peer support they need during group discussion. During the group, it is important that facilitators also decide which barriers to sexual safety and HIV testing are most relevant to group participants as there might not be enough time to address all of them.

Don't people need to participate in multiple sessions to acquire the skills they need to make positive behavior changes?

Research has shown that a brief, single-session intervention, used with men and women at high risk of contracting or transmitting HIV, during a teachable moment—such as while being treated for an STD—can be effective in producing behavior change. Researchers found that, among clients who participated in such interventions, condom acquisition rates almost doubled and rates of new infection decreased.

The Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention is particularly effective in helping participants change their behavior because it focuses intensively on issues related to sexual safety with different types of partners—highlighting the range of options available to them (e.g., condom use, PrEP and PEP)—as well as the importance of HIV testing, treatment, and care. This manual includes an intervention protocol that provides detailed instructions for guiding a focused discussion session (see Section Three). We highly recommend that all group leaders—however skilled or experienced—participate in a Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses training. We designed the training to clarify the purpose of the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses sessions, review the intervention protocol, and help leaders achieve an effective balance between tailoring group discussion to the needs and circumstances of individual group members and maintaining fidelity to the intervention's core elements.

Can we use the video in one-on-one counseling sessions instead of small groups of four to eight participants?

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is a group intervention. While some of the materials might be helpful to use during individual counseling sessions, the group experience is a critical element of the intervention and one of the reasons it is effective. Group discussion lets participants learn from and help each other; such peer support is essential to the HIV messages of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses. Specifically, small-group discussion permits the following:

- Group members observe others struggling with familiar issues. This counteracts feelings of isolation and helps create positive social norms regarding prevention.
- Peers can encourage safer sex behaviors and suggest strategies for overcoming partner resistance to condom use.
- Group support can enhance self-esteem and self-efficacy.
- Observing others increases the acquisition of new skills through vicarious learning.
- The feedback of others while practicing a skill tends to improve performance.
- Group interaction provides a strong emotional experience that facilitates learning and strengthens motivation.

Do we need to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses every day, with all our clients?

We designed Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses as a single-session intervention because this format is relatively easy to incorporate into routine clinic practice. Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses will have the greatest impact in your setting if you implement it regularly as an ongoing component of the prevention services you provide to sexually active clients.

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses tries to make the most of a teachable moment. The brief, single-session format is particularly useful for reaching a high volume of vulnerable MSM. Incorporating this intervention into routine practice can help improve and provide quality assurance to your HIV prevention services.

What can Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses do for the adopting agency?

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is an approach that can work for everyone. It benefits not only the clients you serve but also the agency as a whole. Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses helps agencies accomplish the following:

- Meet Federal funding requirements for adopting innovative, research-based, high-impact HIV/STD prevention education programs that are client-centered and tailored to cultural and gender needs—in this case for Hispanic/Latino MSM who are a vulnerable group for acquiring HIV.

- Offer an intervention specifically targeting Hispanic/Latino MSM, which is a high-risk group for acquiring HIV.
- Save time and money through more efficient delivery of effective HIV/STD prevention education
- Attract and sustain additional funding through use of a proven prevention intervention
- Offer clients prevention education at the moment they are seeking health services—a critical teachable moment
- Offer staff strategies for making prevention a priority
- Offer an intervention that focuses on continuum of sexual safety and promotes strategies for skills-building across this continuum

How does Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses build on current activities and programs in our agency?

Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses provides an easy way for most sites to improve the consistency and quality of their prevention education and to integrate HIP-supported approaches into this education. For those services that have primarily used one-on-one counseling, Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses encourages clients to learn from one another, brainstorm and think about different options for sexual safety, and to practice strategies they can use to protect themselves. This type of peer education is one of the most effective strategies for promoting behavior change. For those services with experience in running client groups, Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses provides new materials that have been enthusiastically received by both providers and clients.

Do we need to hire new staff to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?

In most situations, current agency staff can learn easily to implement Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses. Key to the success of Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses is the selection of a staff facilitator and intervention manager. The staff facilitator should have the skills to identify and recruit clients to participate in a small-group intervention, to show the video, and to conduct the small-group skill-building sessions. Current staff members probably are qualified to undertake this new responsibility. Most health educators, counselors, and outreach workers can adapt easily to the facilitator role, which also might be filled by trained peer educators, such as volunteers and other staff in community-based agencies.

Also critical to the adoption and success of the intervention is an administrator or manager who is willing to act as an intervention "champion." In this role, the

manager oversees maintenance, quality control, and documentation. The administrator/ manager introduces the intervention, supports it through implementation, and sees that it becomes a regular part of services. The manager also can help secure resources, work in partnership with local and state public health agencies, identify and address potential problems, answer questions, and, in general, serve as an advocate for improved prevention services.

What kind of preparation does staff need to deliver Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses?

We strongly recommend that two to three staff members per organization attend a Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses training. Staff who will facilitate the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses sessions should attend training. We also recommend that, in addition to facilitators, program coordinators who provide oversight or supervision to the group facilitators and are responsible for coordination of the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention, and a program manager or executive director of the organization attend training as well. This will facilitate agency internal capacity building and commitment to the Sin Buscar Excusas/No Excuses intervention. You can find more information on these trainings at the [HIP website](#).

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