

From the Ground Up

A health promotion and harm reduction curriculum resource to address youth substance use, gaming, and gambling

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From the Ground Up 6: A Health Promotion and Harm Reduction Curriculum Resource to Address Youth Substance Use, Gaming, and Gambling

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Facilitator Guide



Inclusion

Creating safety in a classroom is one of the biggest challenges facing teachers. Inclusive language and practices based on gender identity, racial and/or ethnic identity, and sexual orientation are of paramount importance. In this curriculum we hope that students who are on the outside in some situations find a space that welcomes and celebrates their voices. For this to happen, inclusion must be seen through additional lenses—on top of gender identity, sexuality, race, and ethnicity. Some youth feel excluded because of a physical disability, neurodiversity, chronic illness, or the impacts of the social determinants of health, such as issues with food security, or a home environment that is very different from their peers. Teachers will regularly remind youth that the conversations they lead may help them to reflect on their experience and how it differs from others, and that their teachers and school staff are safe people to access for conversations about this. They can connect students with a range of supports in the education and health systems.

Harm Reduction

The pedagogy behind this curriculum supplement is informed by harm reduction philosophy, (which aims to minimize negative outcomes of substance use and gambling/gaming), and prevention of and delaying substance use. These efforts are complimentary and are in contrast with an abstinence only approach. This curriculum meets individuals where they are—acknowledging that some youth are already involved in activities that can cause harm—and provides knowledge and support. Stigma reduction is an important component to this work. Facilitators take a positive, strengths-based approach, for example, teaching refusal skills or encouraging help-seeking. The curriculum does not seek to judge, stigmatize, or pathologize substance use and gaming/gambling and avoids coercive methods like scare tactics. Instead, these lessons will seek to start conversations that are developmentally appropriate and responsive to youth and community needs.

The topics of lessons are predominantly useful in educating about substance use and problem gaming/gambling overall, rather than limited to one substance or behaviour. For youth, this means support coping with stress, and developing identity and values, positive relationships, and communication skills. To do this work effectively, the lessons have been designed to be primarily relational; encouraging students to think about how this is useful in their own lives.

Some harm reduction best practices in health education include:

- Substance misuse education needs to be developmentally appropriate.
- Provincial and local use patterns should be consulted when considering lesson content.
- Address only those substances (and behaviours) for which there is a pattern of use in the community.
- For students over the age of 14, lessons that focus on a single drug seem more effective than lessons about multiple drugs.
- Focus on short-term social consequences rather than long-term effects when providing information on use.
- Ensure that the information is accurate and balanced, including the benefit to people who use drugs and game/gamble.



- Information presented should have utility, helping students build useful skills and abilities.
- Lessons should emphasize student–student interactions more than student–teacher. Teachers must remain non-judgmental and open.
- Social influences should be examined, and students should be equipped to analyze, minimize, and navigate negative social influences.
- Emphasizing how many students are not using, and correcting misperceptions about this, is especially effective for younger groups.
- Refusal skills, assertiveness, and communication skills can be effective tools in reducing use for young people.
- If approximately 40% of a group has used a particular substance in the past year, messaging that promotes safe ways to use, alongside noting that minimizing use is safest, is appropriate.
- To sustain behaviour change, taking opportunities to reinforce messaging should be spread across the year.
- Guest presenters are useful when they can engage with students interactively as part of a larger body of work, rather than presenting an isolated, didactic session.

(Department of Health Promotion and Protection 2007)

Social Determinants of Health

Social determinants of health are the social, political, and economic factors that contribute to inequities in health outcomes. Examples are income, education, food security, racism and discrimination, and housing. The social determinants reflect the inequitable systems through which the most advantaged have better health and vice versa. See the table below for examples of protective factors and risk factors related to social determinants of health across individual, family, community, and societal levels.

Determinants of Population Mental Health for Children and Youth

Determinant level (proximal, distal)	Protective factors/conditions (increase chance of high mental health)	Risk factors/conditions (increase chance of low mental health)
INDIVIDUAL Elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical health and health behaviours cognitive ability emotional temperament social skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good physical health and healthy behaviours (physical activity, sleep) Ability to problem solve, manage one's thoughts, learn from experience; tolerate unpredictability and be flexible Feeling empowered, a sense of control or efficacy, positive emotions, a sense of self and a sense of spirituality Good social skills (communication, trust) A sense of belonging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chronic health condition, physical or intellectual disability, premature birth/ low birth weight/ birth complications/ birth injury, prenatal brain damage, alcohol or drug abuse Weak problem solving skills Low self-esteem Feeling of a lack of control Feeling negative emotions Isolation Weak social skills
FAMILY Elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attachment and relationships physical environments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong emotional attachment Positive, warm and supportive parent-child relationships Safe stable housing, adequate nutrition, and access to childcare 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor attachment, lack of warm/affectionate parenting and positive relationships throughout childhood Domestic abuse/violence Parental substance abuse Parental health status Caring for someone with a disability or illness Inadequate housing Inadequate nutrition Inadequate access to childcare
COMMUNITY Elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> relationships social environments built and natural environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Secure and satisfying relationships that give support High levels of social capital (reciprocity, social cohesion, sense of belonging, ability to participate) Safe urban design and access to green spaces and recreation Supportive school and workplace environments Access to adequate transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insecure or no relationships and isolation Low levels of social capital, belonging and social exclusion Lack of accessible or safe transportation Poor urban design Lack of leisure areas and green spaces
SOCIETY Elements include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> socio-economic status (SES) social structure, discrimination/oppression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Higher levels of education, economic security, and standards of living (housing, income, work) Freedom from discrimination/racism Low levels of social inequality Legal recognition of rights Social inclusion Public safety Political participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low education Low material standard of living (housing/homelessness, unemployment, inadequate working conditions, economic insecurity and debt) Social and cultural oppression and discrimination, colonization or war Poverty and social inequalities Neighbourhood violence and crime

Excerpted from National Collaborating Centres for Public Health, Foundations: Definitions and Concepts to Frame Population Mental Health Promotion for Children and Youth, 2017 ([02_Foundations_MentalHealth_NCCPH_2017_EN.pdf](#)).



The Role of the Teacher

The approach to teaching in this curriculum supplement borrows from the idea of facilitation; it demands a different approach from what we see in many classrooms. It provides an opportunity to listen to young people without judging them, and better understand the world they are living in.

Youth are exposed to frequent and often unhealthy messages about how they should act. It's helpful for teachers to step back and consider what they would be like as adolescents today. Adultism and ageism can easily surface, but teachers can avoid those forms of discrimination by grounding themselves in their experience of being young. This approach is an invitation to engage in a learning opportunity where there is shared authority in the classroom, embodied by the circle style of teaching. The role of the teacher includes creating a safe and welcoming environment, and modelling behaviours that are acceptable in the group; in other words, this starts with modelling behaviour that teachers would like to see from everyone else. Teachers play a vital role in creating a positive group dynamic by doing the following:

- listening without interrupting
- being honest and authentic
- helping the group dig deeper and get more serious, but when needed, also help lighten the mood and have some fun
- helping to create opportunities for everyone to participate
- asking questions and probing for opinions, without pressuring youth to share
- answering questions and sharing their own opinions if youth ask
- helping youth to articulate their thoughts; offering to summarize; and
- checking responses or questions for accuracy
- working to summarize conversations and opinions for common understanding
- creating a unique opportunity for the youth to learn alongside other youth, rather than giving a lecture from the adult in the room
- learning alongside youth
- encouraging students to be authentic with their responses, and not say things to please the teacher
- knowing the group participants and understanding their unique needs

- using language that is inclusive and recognizing there are situations where not everyone in the room has the same racial, ethnic, sexual or gender identity, or similar conditions in their lives
- recognizing that people come from many different backgrounds and a variety of lived experiences
- understanding that attitudes and behaviours come from the conditions that surround youth, and may not represent who the youth really are or want to be
- encouraging people to share their thoughts and opinions and regularly acknowledge participation with positive feedback
- being mindful of their own lived experience and privilege, and how that can influence their own perspective

While working from this facilitative perspective it is important to meet the youth as an equal; acknowledging that teachers may have some knowledge and their own experience but they do not have the particular experience of being a youth here and now. Teachers are a resource for the youth as they address their needs and issues. If you do not know the answer to a question, tell the group that you will find out for them, or bring a speaker in with more expertise in this area to help expand their knowledge. It is okay to admit that you do not know something. This is better than providing possible misinformation.

Circles, Check-Ins and Check-Outs, Community Standards

Meeting in a Circle

Gathering a group in a circle may be new for facilitators and youth. Lessons are conversation-based, with the circle creating a natural space for talking to each other. Students appreciate being able to see each other during conversations. Youth with vision or hearing issues have said that the circle allows them to participate more easily than a classroom with rows of chairs.

Students have also recognized that the circle creates an atmosphere of shared authority. While the teacher may still be in charge, there is no authority figure at the front of the class standing over the students. Every lesson is a circle-based activity.



Check-ins and Check-outs

Lessons start with a check-in activity and end with a check-out activity. A check-in activity is a way to ground the group—together, in a new space and/or configuration, leaving behind where they have come from. It's a way to take the temperature of the group.

During check-in, the youth may be tired, distracted, or even upset. There may be clues during the check-in for the teacher that the planned lesson may not be appropriate given the mood of the youth. A check-in activity also engages the group in doing something together, setting the stage for the ethos of the curriculum. Sometimes a check-in activity is tied to the topic of the lesson and prepares the group for the upcoming activity. And a check-in activity can be silly or serious.

The check-out activity (final part of each lesson) is designed to gauge how everyone is feeling after the activity. Answers can serve as indicators of energy and curiosity, and can inform the teacher's approach to current or subsequent lessons. They can also let us know if the lessons are working as intended. It's natural to have some louder voices in each group, so a check-out is an opportunity for everyone to have space to express something, as a way of sustaining an atmosphere of inclusion. A check-out can continue if the class decides there's more to say or if it surfaces questions for the teacher.

Note: The check-ins provided in this resource may or may not work in every classroom. Teachers are encouraged to modify, adapt, or create new check-in activities that suit their classroom make up. The same goes for check-out activities. Some teachers tell us that they use exit slips, or a simple thumbs up, thumbs down, or thumb midway to indicate how the lesson went for them.

Community Standards

These lessons are unique spaces where there can be freedom to express things in ways that might not always feel invited into classrooms. In the intro lesson of each grade, students and teachers work together to create community standards. These standards are established to guide the group around how they are going to work together and function as a small community. These are not rules imposed by the teacher; rather they are standards suggested and agreed upon by the group. The teacher may suggest some community standards that have worked well in the past.

Some examples are listed below.

- Acknowledge one voice at a time: everyone's voice is important, and we must protect each other's voice so we can hear one another.
- Sustain a respectful atmosphere: we may come from different cultures, have different lived experiences, and/or hold different opinions, but we don't judge each other. We listen and hear each other's thoughts and views to better understand one another.

- Prohibit or restrict use of cell phones: youth may decide to have cell phones placed in a basket at the front of the room to keep themselves from getting distracted, or cell phones placed on “silent” mode.
- Protect confidentiality: we will often say, “What’s said in the circle stays in the circle,” because that allows the group to have deeper conversations without worrying that personal stories will leave the circle. Youth may share a lesson topic with people outside of the group, but not any personal stories that were told.

Here are some other common community standards that have been suggested:

- Be able to leave the room without permission if needed.
- Don’t take all the “airtime.” In other words, remember that your comfort in talking may inhibit others in the circle from participating.
- Never say, “You’re too old to understand this,” or, “You’re too young to understand this.”
- Students can articulate their thoughts and opinions in a way that is comfortable and authentic for them. Their language will not be censored, but everyone should still be mindful of their choice of words and the effect they have.
- Engaging in any activity is voluntary, as is participating in a conversation or answering a question.

What else ends up on a list of community standards is up to the group. To help students build their list, it often helps to ask the question “What do you need to feel comfortable in this circle?” A very long list may be impractical, so be mindful of how exhaustive the list becomes. Community standards will help build trust and safety in the group. Once the list is complete, ask everyone in the circle to commit to the standards. Check in regularly with the group to see how everyone is doing in meeting the standards. The community standards are dynamic and can be revisited and revised at any time.

Duty to Report

There is a qualification to the confidentiality community standard in a school-based setting, and that’s the “duty to report.” If teachers hear things from youth that make them think the young person may be at risk of harming themselves, harming someone else, or being harmed by someone else, there is a legal obligation to break confidentiality and seek support. This is something that should be made clear to all participants.



What About Arguments?

Teachers may wonder if it's okay for arguments or debates to happen inside the circle. Learning how to argue and debate in a respectful manner is an important skill. Teachers should be mindful of how they present themselves during a debate or argument, and to model the kind of behaviour they want to see from everyone else if a conversation gets intense. Using the one-voice-at-a-time rule is crucial during arguments and teachers might have to play a role in designating who talks first when the pressure is mounting.

Emotional Moments

It is normal for the lessons to surface big emotions for some students. For example, a youth participant during the grade 9 Drug Land lesson started crying when thinking about a family member who was impacted by alcohol use. Several of his peers reached out right away to comfort him, and staff followed up afterward to make sure the youth knew they were available for support. In another class, several participants stated that it was valuable to feel vulnerable in a safe space and experience feelings with peers and trusted adults. Many had never had this experience before. Sometimes teachers know in advance if a lesson may get intense because of trauma or an incident in the community; for example, if a community recently had a fatal car crash and youth knew a victim. Sometimes teachers will not be forewarned. It is important to be prepared for students to become emotional during any of the lessons. Teachers should also always follow up and check in with youth after big reactions during intense lessons. There are a variety of supports available both in and out of the school building. Young people should be allowed to have a range of emotions. These moments can help normalize uncomfortable emotions and vulnerability.

Assessment

One of the ways that we encourage earnest participation in lessons is to not apply a formal score or mark to them. Students will not be given a participation score, an attendance score, or be scored on the quality of their responses to the questions. The intent behind this is to remove any potential sense of judgment. We aim to remove incentives that might lead to sharing something less than authentic or sharing more than feels comfortable.

That said, teachers are still easily able to assess the learning of their students in these lessons. One way to think about the lessons themselves is through the lens of assessment for learning. Teachers will be able to assess what information students already know and what they may need some help with. Misinformation and

misunderstandings often surface and teachers can then address them in subsequent lessons. There will also be ample opportunity for teachers to assess for skills, like speaking and listening, and to aim subsequent lessons more precisely at student needs. Some teachers who have used these lessons have created rubrics that demonstrate reflective thinking during circle conversations.

On top of this, we provide further assessment ideas in the Moving Forward section of each lesson. These are not obligatory in order to meet outcomes but offer teachers a few creative ideas about how to extend or assess the learning that took place in the lesson.

Participation

Many of the lessons in this curriculum create a challenging atmosphere that encourages youth to step out of their comfort zone. Some amazing learning experiences can happen when students and teachers take chances, but be mindful that even the act of participating in these lessons with both peers and teachers can be stressful. Although there are opportunities for growth and learning when we step outside our comfort zones, we want students to do this when they feel ready, not when they feel pressured. This can be a judgment call. Does a teacher carefully nudge a student to do or say something, or do they leave them to observe? Getting this right is something that comes with experience. One suggestion is to explain to the class that they should only share what they feel comfortable sharing, and that they are also participating in the lesson by listening to others, even if they're not sharing their own experiences with the group. It's important to validate those who are listening while creating the space for them to share when they feel comfortable.

French Immersion

When implementing these lessons in a French second language classroom, teachers should use best practices for supporting learners' oral language development. The learning environment should support students to build confidence in their French language abilities in order to participate authentically in these lessons.

Teachers are encouraged to implement principles of backwards design by reviewing the content of this curriculum supplement in order to select the vocabulary, grammar, and language structures they will need to model for students.

For further information see:

- *High Leverage Literacy Practices in French Second Language: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RYexSKZ2eWeyTguQI5MPZrNkmquJ11Lf/view>*
- *Ressources de la 7^e année à la 9^e année: <https://curriculum.novascotia.ca/fr/ressources-de-la-7e-annee-a-la-9e-annee>*



Preparing for the Lessons

Lesson plans provide detailed instructions. The lessons require very little material preparation in advance because there is no audio-visual equipment required and few, if any, props. In most cases, teachers will need only to print activities from the accompanying appendices.

The room and chairs can impact the lessons. A cozy and quiet room works well. Chairs should be easy to move around and not have wheels. Desks with built-in chairs don't work very well for the lessons. In some of our test schools, students, excited to be involved in "circle time," knew to help set up the space for circle upon entering the classroom.

There is no strict set amount of time for each lesson to unfold. The amount of time you choose to spend on a lesson depends on the energy and engagement of the group. The lessons accompanying the facilitator's guide can go for as long as 60 minutes (grades 8 and 9) and as little as 25 to 30 minutes (grade 6), but more or less time may be needed. It's the same for the number of lessons. Teachers know their students best, and if one lesson needs to stretch into a second class, that's appropriate. It's the same with the order of the lessons. Each package of lessons has an introductory activity that will typically be run first, but some teachers may wish to start with more classes to help build trust and safety in the group before the formal lessons begin.

The purpose of the introductory activities at the start of each lesson is to help encourage participation in a group. They are there to establish an initial learning environment that supports student engagement as they interact, move around the room, and collaborate in learning. The activities are there as examples, and teachers are encouraged to consider how best to start the lessons. Some lessons require safety more than others, but if you're familiar with the lessons and know your audience, you're in the best position to decide the order of the topics, type of introductory activities, and information to gather through exit ticket/check out. There is also an opportunity in classes, before beginning these lessons, to ask students to share what they know, or have learned in previous classes/years, about substances or gambling and gaming. This can assist the teacher in looking for opportunities to correct misunderstanding or misinformation.

As the size of the group increases the opportunities for participation may be impacted, as well as feelings of safety and comfort. If there is capacity, schools have the option of splitting the class and running two groups at the same time; engaging other school staff in the process. It may also be helpful for other school staff to know if a lesson is planned that may bring forward strong emotions. In that way, more adults can be aware of signs of distress among youth after the lessons are over, and make sure other safe adults are in the building if there's an opportunity to connect a youth with a school-based specialist during or after the lesson.

There can be great variability in physical and emotional development within a grade. The more you know your group, the better you will be able to gauge how ready they are for any given topic.

Needs Assessment

These activities use the Health Promoting Schools model to take a whole-school approach to student well-being. Health Promoting Schools is based on four inter-related pillars: Teaching and Learning; Social and Physical Relationships; Policies; and Partnership and Services. This approach requires strong partnerships between school staff and with community supports, and is rooted in the idea that students who are well will do well.

School supports play a pivotal role in student well-being, particularly as students explore issues related to substance use and mental health. Substance use education is most effective when the issues are becoming relevant to students; school support service providers may be able to provide important context to ensure these activities are relevant, and to inform teachers about specific local issues that may affect classroom discussions. Teachers are encouraged to perform the following needs assessment:

Determine what supports exist in/for your school:

- School Counsellor
- Youth Health Centre Coordinator
- SchoolsPlus Mental Health Clinician
- Mental Health and Addictions Adolescent Outreach Worker
- Child Youth Care Practitioner
- SchoolsPlus Facilitator
- SchoolsPlus Community Outreach Worker
- School Social Worker
- African Nova Scotian/Indigenous Student Support Worker
- Family Resource Centre
- School Health Promoter
- Other community organizations



Arrange a meeting with at least one service provider to understand the context of substance use in the school and community. Use the following questions as a guide:

- How prevalent is substance use among students and families on your caseload/in the community?
- To your knowledge, what are the most common substances being used by young people?
- What changes in substance use have you seen in your time at this school/in this region?
- What evidence do you see of students with problems related to gambling and gaming?
- What community supports do you partner with when it comes to youth or family substance use issues?
- What might come up as potentially sensitive issues related to substance use? For example, has there been a recent drinking and driving incident in the area?

Supporting Youth Who Reach Out for Help

One of the goals of this curriculum is to normalize help-seeking behaviour among young people. Some students want support with a health issue but are reluctant to disclose a problem to a parent, elder, or family member, or even a family doctor. Facilitators should be prepared in advance so they can appropriately respond to a youth who asks for help. Some of the lessons provided focus on what to do and how to get help if our substance use is out of balance. This provides an opportunity to do some local asset mapping in subsequent classes so that youth are aware of the formal and sometimes informal supports available in their school, neighbourhood, or larger community. Students and teachers can generate a list together of all the places where people can go to for help with a variety of issues. In an urban area, this may include a school health nurse, a walk-in clinic, a help-line, as well as a list of school-based staff that can be safe as go-to adults. In rural areas and more isolated communities, the task can be more difficult. While teachers may feel the desire to help students who reach out during non-work hours, this is not expected of them. It is important for teachers to adhere to professional boundaries regarding communication with youth.



Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class.

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

The class
was fun

The class
was boring

The class
**helped me
learn
new stuff**

The class
**didn't teach
me anything
new**

**I felt
comfortable
during
the class**

**I felt
uncomfortable
during
the class**

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6.1 The Intro



Grade 6: Lesson 1—The Intro

Background

- Discussions around substance use are sensitive and require trust and honesty to be impactful for young people. This intro lesson is important to establish a foundation for the rest of the lessons, which will rely on students' honesty, participation, and vulnerability. At the end of this lesson it should be clear that these lessons will value youth voice and experience, first and foremost
- Encourage trust, teamwork, and collaboration within the class.
- Seek different opinions and answers over the right answer.

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- one piece of blank white paper for each student
- Check-out slides

Estimated Time: 30 to 40 minutes

Facilitation Tip

- Returning to activities like this can help reset a class when they are off topic or having a hard time focusing. There is a lot of value in having fun together to build class cohesion.

Activity

Part 1: All My Neighbours Who

Start with a quick round of “All My Neighbours Who.” Ask a volunteer to stand in the middle of the circle. This student’s chair should be removed. The student in the middle will say, “All my neighbours who ...” and state something true about themselves. For example, they could say, “All my neighbours who are wearing sweatpants.” Then everyone who is wearing sweatpants has to switch chairs and one person will be remaining in the middle. To make it a little more vulnerable the teacher can select the statement (All my neighbours who are afraid of the dark, wish they were taller, get nervous before a test, etc.).

The goal is to have fun, get accustomed to the circle, and maybe get a little personal. Let the activity run until at least five students have had a chance to be in the middle.

Part 2: Categories

Ask the students to line up according to specific categories you provide them. You will start with categories that have specific answers and intentionally move to categories that are more personal and vague. Students will be challenged to work together to figure out the best way to sort themselves and for extra fun, you can time them.

- Line up according to birthdays.
- Line up according to distance you live from the school.
- Line up according to hours you play video games every day.
- Line up according to how comfortable you feel at school.

The goal is to practice problem solving and working together without the teacher taking the lead. The more personal categories are meant to challenge the students to share about their own experiences and show them that there isn’t always going to be an easy or correct answer to health-related questions.



Part 3: Snowflakes

Pass every student a blank piece of paper and provide the following directions. (You should try to participate in this activity as well.)

- You cannot ask questions.
- Close your eyes.
- Fold your paper in half.
- Tear off the bottom right hand corner.
- Fold the paper in half again.
- Tear off the top right hand corner.
- Fold the paper in half again.
- Tear off the lower left hand corner.
- Open your eyes and open your paper.

Compare snowflakes with each other. Explain to the group that everyone was given the same directions but everyone's snowflake looks a little different. There is no "right snowflake" because everyone interpreted the directions in their own way.

The goal is to show students that sometimes there is not a right or wrong answer and whatever they come up with can be interesting. This applies to conversations about health topics as well.

Part 4: Community Standards

Because these lessons may elicit a student's personal experiences and are structured conversationally, it is important to remind students of some expectations. These may be encompassed in existing classroom rules, so highlight them in a way that makes the most sense for the class. You should think about how best to facilitate conversation between students (hands, talking piece, etc.) and explain this process here. Printouts are provided with community standards to highlight and you can create additional ones that students suggest.

Expectations to highlight:

- What's said in this class, stays in this class.
- Take turns speaking.
- Share the air space.
- You can always pass.
- No judgment.



Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

Moving Forward

- Have students decorate their snowflakes to make them even more different and personalized.
- Create a question/comment box in the classroom, or a reflection journal, for students to write about their experiences with the lessons on an ongoing basis.

What's said

in this class,

stays in

this class

Take turns
speaking

Share the air
space

You can
always pass

**No
judgment**

From the Ground Up

A health promotion and harm reduction curriculum resource to address youth substance use, gaming, and gambling

6.2 Know Yourself, Help Yourself



Grade 6: Lesson 2—Know Yourself, Help Yourself

Outcomes

- Learners will investigate the components of mental health literacy.
- Learners will analyse how relationships impact physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Indicators

- Investigate ways to cope with challenging life circumstances.
- Investigate how changing relationships with self and others can impact the dimensions of health.

Guiding Questions

- How do various coping strategies contribute to my health? How do I know if a coping strategy is healthy or harmful?
- How can changes in and with self, family, communities, and the environment be positive?

Estimated Time: 60 minutes or less

Materials

- identity slides; before the lesson print the list of identities (2 per page) and cut them apart

Facilitation Tip

In Part 1 of the activity you are creating “people” from the different identities on the floor. If you would rather think about this ahead of time, look at the slides before the lesson and make groups of six traits that you think would start a good conversation in the class.

Background

This lesson does not explicitly discuss substance use but provides students the space to explore their identity and how it may be changing as they move into adolescence. Taking the time to think about personal identity may be a challenge at this age but it is an important foundation to self-awareness that will support them as they begin to face new challenges independently. Knowing who you are can also inform how best to reward yourself or cope with challenging things. These strategies are specific to each person and considering them can remind students they have some strategies in their back pocket at all times.

Check-in

Start with a quick round of “Would You Rather,” but with options that point to aspects of students’ identity and values. You will read two options saying “would you rather ____ or ____” pointing at one side of the circle for one option and the other side for the other option. Students answer the questions by moving to the corresponding side of the circle. Alternatively, students could stay seated and put up a hand to indicate their choice. Occasionally prompt a student to explain their rationale as a way to practice talking about how values and relationships inform choices.

Would you rather ...

- have 10 good friends or two best friends
- live in a cave or live in a tree house
- never be able to lie again or never be able to cry again
- get the newest iPhone but your friends don’t or all of your friends get the newest iPhone and you don’t
- not have a door on your bedroom or not have a door on your parents bedroom
- perform in a talent show or play in a sports game
- see the future or change the past
- win the lottery or live to 100
- spend a weekend by yourself or a weekend with friends
- write a math test or write a paragraph



Activity

Part 1A: Identity Traits

The purpose of this first activity is to get students to consider their identity in a fun way, by engaging with different identities that may or may not align with them.

- Begin by asking for two volunteers who are comfortable acting.
- Have each student draw one of the identity slides and act out this identity so the other partner can guess what type of person they are. You can choose to allow them to speak or act out silently.
- Do a few rounds of this with different volunteers.
- Give every student a slide and ask them to find a partner to act out their new identity.
- When the students return to the circle. Ask if anyone felt like the trait they had was similar to who they are or dissimilar to who they are (by show of hands).
- Ask every student to lay their slide in the middle of the circle. Discuss the meaning of any identities that are unclear to the class.

Part 1B: Paper People

- Select six of the identity slides (traits) that will form “a person.” You can use the slides to form the shape of a body on one side of the circle. Ask someone to give this person a name.
- Select six other traits and create another person on the other side of the circle. Ask someone to give this person a different name.
- These two people should have distinct identities. Ask students to consider each person against their own identity and to move to the person who is more similar to who they are.
- Create new “people” and repeat this exercise a few times.

When students have selected which person is more like them, ask some questions about their choice:

- What parts of this person are the most like you?
- What parts of this person are the least like you?
- Why did you choose this person over the other person?
- Do you think you will have these traits when you get older (junior high, high school, adulthood)?

- Does anyone see a trait they know they got from one of their caregivers? Or one of their friends?
- Are there any traits here that you are trying to change about yourself? Do you feel like you have control over who you are?
- Do you think your friends or family would agree with the person you picked being like you?

Part 2: Coping Strategies

Materials: identity slides and coping slides

- With the identity slides, make two final “people” who represent someone who may be having a hard time (angry, mean, lazy, nervous, lonely) and someone who seems to be doing very well (calm, caring, happy, positive, friendly).
- Explain to the class that part of knowing who you are and thinking about yourself is knowing when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed and what you can do about this to bring you closer to the person you usually are. How someone acts when they are not doing well can also look different in different people. Some people get angry, some people get sad, some people stop talking to friends, some people try to hide how they feel and act the same.
- “A lot of people are good at thinking about other people (their friends, family, pets) but don’t really think about how they are doing themselves.” Poll the class to see if anyone agrees with this statement.
- Between the two “people,” lay down the coping slides. Try to form a walkway to symbolize the things you can do to move you from one person to the other. Introduce the ideas on the coping slides and emphasize the slide marked “Other,” because how we help ourselves can be very personal and unique.
- Ask students to move to the coping strategy they would choose if they were not feeling like themselves and discuss any ideas they have. If students move to the slide marked “Other,” ask if they would be comfortable sharing the strategy they’re thinking of.

Make two final points, which could potentially be extended on in the “Moving Forward” activities.

- Coping strategies, even those that feel helpful to us, can still be harmful. Quickly have some volunteers sort the coping strategies on the floor into harmful and non-harmful piles. When they’re finished, ask them to explain how they decided whether a coping strategy was helpful or harmful.



- Students may feel like they need money, transportation, or certain opportunities to reward themselves or cope during hard times. These can help, but challenge them to think hard about things like spending time with friends, having a bubble bath, or playing your favourite game and whether those might still help a little.

Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

Moving Forward

- Ask students to draw or write how someone would know if they are “not themselves.” What would they notice about how they act, dress, eat, talk, etc. Then draw or write about how someone would know if they are feeling very well.
- Give each student an envelope they can personalize. Each student will fill the envelope with things that make them feel happy or things they can do to treat themselves when they are not feeling good. Students can draw ideas from the envelope when they need them in the future.

Angry

Friendly

Calm

Caring

Lazy

Energetic

Curious

Creative

Dramatic

Sassy

Funny

Generous

Greedy

Positive

Popular

Smart

Strong

Weak

Nervous

Confident

Sad

Happy

Quiet

Loud

Risk-taker

Lonely

Mean

Bored

Techy

Religious

Rich

Play your
favourite
sport

Have your
**favourite
snack or
drink**

Have

A LOT of your

favourite snack

or drink

Write in a
journal

**Draw/paint/
create**

Play on your
**phone for a
few hours**

Stay up
**all night
gaming**

Hang out
with friends

Hang out
with family

Snuggle a pet

**Spend time
outside**

(swim, bike ride)

Stay in bed

all weekend

Read a book

**Look at
pictures**

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6.3 Sell, Sell, Sell!



Grade 6: Lesson 3—Sell, Sell, Sell!

Outcome

- Learners will analyse the impacts of substances on the health and safety of children.

Indicator

- Analyse tactics used in marketing and advertising to promote and normalize substance use to children and youth

Guiding Questions

- Where do children and youth see marketing and advertising of alcohol, tobacco, vape products, and cannabis?
- How do advertisements of alcohol, tobacco, vape products, and cannabis try to appeal to children and youth?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- identify different marketing strategies used in general advertisements and advertisements for alcohol and other substances
- explain how advertisements can target certain groups of people and specifically consider how they have been influenced by advertisements
- explain if/how advertisements for alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco (vapes) show up in their communities

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- cardboard boxes or fabric to cover two mystery items two mystery items (suggestion, water bottle)
- Ad Tactics slides
- Substance Use Tactics slides
- Sample Products/Experiences slides

Facilitation Tips

- Switch up the products/experiences in Part 2 to make them more personal to the class. Students will have more fun with the activity if they are discussing products that are specific to them.
- Students may get a little loud during Part 2. Use your own energy and volume to model to the class. If you want them to get up and engage you can be louder and faster in your speaking and moving. If you're hoping to bring things into a more serious or thoughtful place you can slow down and get quieter.
- Some students may not have much experience with advertisements for alcohol, cannabis, or tobacco but that is not a reason not to bring awareness to them. Learning to notice the marketing tactics and to think critically about advertisements for these products can minimize their impact later.

Background

Young people are growing up in a society where they are constantly being sold something and sometimes the tactics are subtle, like product placement in movies, endorsements from celebrities, and alcohol branding on everything from hats and scarves to beach towels and sun umbrellas. This lesson aims to bring awareness about the advertising industry and ask the students to consider some of the power they have as young consumers.

This lesson can serve as an introduction to advertising and marketing awareness. If the teacher has the opportunity they can look for (or take pictures of) specific examples of alcohol/cannabis/ tobacco marketing examples in the community to share with the class in Part 3. Students may have difficulty recalling these marketing tactics in their community but will be surprised to see they are present.

You will need to prepare the two mystery boxes prior to the lesson.

Check-in

- Have students gather in a circle. One student stands in the middle and goes around the circle and asks one of the students, "Can I come in?" The middle student then asks another student, "Can I come in?" and so on. Everyone answers the same, "No, see next door."



- Students not being asked should make eye contact to signal readiness (no speaking though!) and then try to quickly switch places without the student in the middle noticing. If the student in the middle notices and gets into one of their spots before they fully switch, the person displaced is in the middle now. Make the point that things are happening around you that you don't always notice, but they can still have an impact on you.

Activity

Part 1: Mystery Box

Before the class begins, prepare two mystery boxes each containing the same item. This can be something simple like a bottle of water. If you have the time, decorate one box to make it more appealing or even wrap the box in nice paper. Display the boxes for the students to see and tell them they have to decide which box they would rather have. You will read descriptions of the boxes before they decide and will really embellish one of the boxes.

Have a little fun with selling the boxes (or not selling), here are some ideas for your sales pitch:

Box 1: This product is used by (name 3 celebrities/athletes/gamers they like). You NEED this product to live and it has been naturally created by perfect chemical reactions. It has saved millions of lives fighting fires and growing food. This product has been transported to you from some of the cleanest and purest places on earth and is low in calories, is paleo, lactose free, sugar free, and gluten free. It is displayed for you in the finest vessel and it won't last long, so buy now!

Box 2: This product is used by (name 3 celebrities/athletes/gamers they don't like). This product is in every toilet in Canada. It has no taste or smell, so what is it doing for you? It is in a container that may also put plastic in your body and is harmful to the environment. It is wasteful to create this product so if you use it, you are not a great person. Ask the students to move to the product they would rather buy. Some students may move to box 2, but that is okay. Ask the students to open the boxes and reveal the mystery items. They are identical (e.g., bottled water). Ask students for their reaction and make the point that this was a bit of a trick, but it showed that advertising sometimes works. The way that these identical products were described made you pick one over the other and neither description was really telling the whole story. If the goal is for us to spend our money on a product, why would anyone advertise the negative parts of it?

Discussion

- Can you think of a time advertising really worked on you? Think back to when you were younger as advertisements targeted at kids (toys, games, theme parks) can have a big impact.
- Does anyone have an example of a product they really wanted because of an advertisement but when they got it, it wasn't all that good or even a total waste of money?

Part 2: Tactics

Place the ad tactics slides/pages on the floor and randomly spread them out so everyone can see them. Explain each slide. Ask students to think of examples of products that have used this tactic.

- **The Cool Kids:** Ads showing attractive, popular kids having fun with the product with friends
- **Wholesome Family Fun:** Ads showing fun times with the whole family
- **Celeb Power:** Ads using celebrity endorsements
- **Excitement!!!:** Ads with a lot of loud voices, bright colours, and energy
- **Heart Strings:** Ads that make you feel empathy or sadness as a way to sell
- **Cartoon Characters:** Ads using cartoon endorsements
- **Leaving Out the Bad ... :** Ads that only show the positive side of a product
- **Attractive Packaging:** Ads that use packages that appeal to certain demographics
- **Piggybacking:** Sponsoring something good, like kids' sports, to make the company seem good
- **Targeted:** Ads that appeal to a particular group, for example race and sexual identity
- Ask students to pretend they are media executives and to decide which tactic they want to use to sell certain products or to certain people.

Invite around five volunteers to move to the tactic they would choose. Pause to ask the volunteers questions about their sales pitch. The rest of the class can decide if they are “buying what they are selling” using thumbs up or thumbs down.

Products/experiences to sell:

- How would you sell energy drinks?
- How would you sell the newest Xbox?
- How would you sell Iced Lemonade from McDonalds?
- How would you sell a \$10 bottle of water?
- How would you sell a family trip to Magic Mountain?
- How would you sell something to your parents?
- How would you sell something to your best friend?
- How would you sell something to a primary student?
- How would you sell something to your principal or teacher?

Part 3: Substance Use

It should be clear from the last activity that the students would use different tactics to sell to different age groups of people (e.g., adults versus young children). However, we often see alcohol or vape products being advertised in ways that we know work on young people.

Place some of the sample products/experiences slides on the floor and talk about some of the examples, such as:

- **Alco-pops:** high sugar, fun flavours similar to pop so the transition to drinking is easy
- **Celebrity alcohol or vape collabs**
- **Vape ads on Cartoon Network:** Juul
- **Alcohol ads on TikTok**
- **All natural, low calorie alcohol/energy drinks:** capitalizing on young people being health conscious
- **Bright, juice carton packaging alcohol/energy drinks:** looks like a juice box, easy to open

Ask students if they have noticed any advertisements for alcohol, cannabis, or tobacco products in their community and challenge them to pay attention to where they are located. Are they close to school? After-school programs? Playgrounds? Do they notice any tactics/strategies for the unhealthy in Part Two?

Make the final point that the people who make substances and the people who advertise are often more interested in making money than protecting young people from harmful substances. We have to be aware these advertisements are out there and to think critically about them to protect ourselves.

Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done "Move into the Circle" style.

The
Cool Kids

Wholesome
Family Fun

Celeb Power

Excitement!!!

Pulling the
Heart Strings

Cartoon Characters

Leaving Out
the Bad ...

Attractive

Packaging

Piggybacking

Targeted

Alco-pops

Celebrity

alcohols/

vape collabs

Vape ads on Cartoon Network

Alcohol ads on TikTok

**All natural,
low calorie
alcohol/energy
drink**

Bright, Juice
Carton
packaging

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6.4 Using and Refusing



Grade 6: Lesson 4—Using and Refusing

Outcomes

- Learners will analyse the impacts of substances on the health and safety of children.
- Learners will analyse how relationships impact physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Indicator

- Investigate how boundaries keep relationships safe and healthy.

Guiding Questions

- How would you recognize unhealthy use of substances in others?
- How do you express assertiveness to establish personal boundaries?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students will be able to

- list some of the common substances that can impact how they think, feel, or act
- talk about how they would approach a friend who needs help with substance use
- explain what peer pressure is and share ideas for refusal strategies to assert personal boundaries

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- Substance slides
- masking tape for obstacle course (tape line, X's on the floor in a random pattern, etc.)
- envelopes numbered 1 to 5
- Escalation slides
- Refusal Ideas slides

Facilitation Tips

- Use your needs assessment as a guide (see the “Needs Assessment section of the Facilitator’s Guide) and pay particular attention to students who have known experience with familial substance use. Discussing use with the class may be harder for these students and you should discreetly offer them space or extra support if needed.
- Many students are confident in their ability to resist peer pressure when removed from the situation but may still struggle when faced with these decisions in the moment. The teacher should gently challenge these students in a fun but realistic way throughout this part of the lesson.
- For the demonstration in Part 2, select a student who will be comfortable experiencing “peer pressure” from the class and who will take input from the class in making their decision.
- The 3 substances selected for the activity in Part 2 should change based on the experiences of the students.

Background

This lesson is meant to be a soft introduction to some of the substances we will discuss in the years to follow. At this age, many students are learning about the effects of substances from pop culture and family/community use. This lesson is meant to unearth some of these learnings so teachers can assess what sort of preconceived notions students have. Part 2 of this lesson aims to discuss peer pressure and refusal skills. By thinking about these future experiences and practicing them students have the chance to reflect on how they will respond.

Grade 6 students can be at very different levels of experience with substance use depending on the class makeup or the time in the year when these lessons are presented. Teachers can use the Needs Assessment tool (see Facilitator’s Guide) to gauge students’ knowledge or experience with different substances and let this information inform how you present this lesson. For example, if a majority of the class is aware of cannabis (through family, community or personal use) include cannabis in the discussion. But if most students have little knowledge of the drug, leave it out.

Before the lesson, the teacher should create a short obstacle course out of tape in the center of the circle. Some suggestions are a tape line students have to walk across, X's to circle around, a finish line to cross. Have fun with it!

Before the lesson, the teacher should also label five envelopes 1 to 5. In four envelopes, place blank paper and in the final envelope write a class prize that you decide upon for your class (outdoor class, longer recess, etc.).

Check-in

A quick activity to see who the last person is to assertively decline something. Everyone stands up. The teacher has prepared a list of offers that students can say yes or no to. It starts off with things many wouldn't say no to and moves toward things most everyone would. If the students say yes they keep standing and those who sit down can be asked what they might say to decline the offer (e.g., "No way I'm doing that!").

- Keep standing if you'd say yes to a signed jersey from your favourite athlete.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to spending Christmas at the north pole.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to meeting the Prime Minister of Canada.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to playing a game of tug-of-war in the mud.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to lending your favourite item to a friend (e.g., Xbox, favourite sweater).
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to holding a friend's purse while they shop.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to lending a family member \$100.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to brushing your teeth with white glue.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to eating roasted beetles.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to sleeping in a damp, bat-filled cave for a year.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to flying a plane blind-folded and wearing baseball gloves on both your hands.
- Keep standing if you'd say yes to being abducted by aliens and being opened up so they can see how your heart works.

If you're still standing now, you might just have some trouble saying no!

Activity

Part 1: Substance Use

Tell students the activity will focus on “substance use,” and define it specifically as “substances you consume that change the way you act, think, or feel.” Based on this definition, ask students to name substances they have heard of before and lay down the corresponding slides as they think of them.

- vitamins
- prescription or non-prescription medication
- steroids
- melatonin
- milkshake (high sugar)
- coffee/tea (caffeine)
- energy drink/café drinks (caffeine and high sugar)
- sports drink (sugar, electrolytes)
- tobacco
- alcohol
- cannabis

Poll the class to see if anyone has experience with 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc., of these substances. Reiterate that a substance is something we consume that changes how we act, think, or feel. Explain that we are going to take a closer look at each of these substances and how they might impact our bodies.

- Show the obstacle course you have created in the center of the circle and demonstrate how to move through it (tightrope walk across the tape line, go around the X's, jump over the finish line, etc.). Ask for a few volunteers to quickly move through the course while embodying one of the substances. For example, if a student is acting like they have taken steroids, they may move through the course as though they are strong and have big muscles. Some substances may be easy for students to act out and some may require the teacher to explain a bit about the substance. This activity is a little silly, but after each demonstration of the substance ask the participants if they thought how they were acting was healthy or unhealthy. The teacher should note and gently challenge any major misunderstandings students have and note that some unhealthy aspects of a substance are not observable such any mental or spiritual impacts of substances. The next lesson, Balance, will build on these ideas more.



- Now get the class to think back to when they were in grade primary and poll them to find out how many of these substances they consumed regularly at that age. Make the point that as we get older we get more of a say in what we put in our bodies. Our caregivers don't make every meal for us anymore and we are often in situations where we decide if we consume something or we don't.

Part 2: Peer Pressure and Refusal Skills

- Set up a short demonstration to illuminate some of the challenges of peer pressure. Display the five numbered envelopes and let the students know that one of these envelopes has a prize inside. Tell the class what the prize is and select one student to guess the correct envelope. The student has 30 seconds to make their selection and the other students can provide all of the input they want to try to convince them to select the prize envelope. Once they have selected the envelope, ask them why they picked the envelope they did and to open it to reveal if they won the prize.
- If you have the time, you could repeat this with the remaining envelopes and a new volunteer or just reward the class with the prize anyway. Make the point that it can be hard to make a decision when all eyes are on you and everyone is telling you what they want you to do, and this experience is similar to what you may feel when friends are pressuring you to try a substance, go to a party, sneak out of your home, etc. Explain that peer pressure is the pressure you may feel to do something because you'll feel more accepted, cooler or a part of the group if you go along with it.
- Select the slides Energy Drinks, Milkshakes, and Alcohol and put the rest of the substances to the side. To demonstrate this next element of the learning experience, take on the role of the source of peer pressure and ask the the students to practice their refusal skills. Move around the circle and try to offer one of the substances to students and see how they react. Have a little fun with this and use some of the strategies below to turn up the pressure. Some students may take one milkshake or one energy drink and that's okay. If they accept the offer, give them the slide. Next, show the student the level-up slides, representing 5 energy drinks, milkshakes, and alcoholic drinks. Use the same peer pressure tactics to try to get someone to drink 5 of the items. Place down the level-up slides representing 20 energy drinks, milkshakes, and alcoholic drinks and use peer pressure tactics to try to convince their peers to drink that many of the items.

Peer pressure strategies (for teacher):

- Everyone is doing it.
- Ask over and over (be annoying).
- I won't be your friend anymore.

- If you won't have some, why are you even here then?
- It's just one night. Who cares!
- It barely does anything.

While you are applying pressure to the students, note any distinct refusal strategies students come up with. Afterwards, recap them to the class and ask students if they have any refusal strategies they have used before, seen on TV, or thought about. Lay down the refusal slides for the students to consider. Make the point that, while clearly stating what we want or don't want may seem best, sometimes a passive refusal can be just as helpful. Ask students if any of these would be hard for them to do, or say to their friends, and discuss why.

- carrying an empty can all night
- hanging out with other people who are not drinking
- "My parents would ground me forever."
- "I'm an athlete." [or musician, etc.]
- "I already had like 10 of them!"
- "Maybe later, I just have to go pee."
- "No thanks."

Make the final point that the more we surround ourselves with people who have the same values as us, and think about who we are and what we want in the future, the better equipped we are for making decisions like this. You are also not defined by a choice you regret and can always get help to change your relationship with a substance.



Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

Moving Forward

- Have students research community supports and programs for someone who is struggling with substance use. How would someone get help if they are still in school, or a grown up? What does the school/teacher recommend as a first step for students?
- Assertiveness and refusal skills are transferable to many other facets of life. Create an assertiveness board in the classroom with students' ideas for how to say no when they are not comfortable.

Vitamins

Prescription or Non- prescription Medication

Steroids

Melatonin

Milkshake

Coffee/Tea

Energy Drink

Sports Drink

Tobacco

Alcohol

Cannabis

Milkshake

Milkshake

Milkshake

Milkshake

Milkshake

Milkshake

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Alcohol

My parents

**would ground
me forever**

**Carry an
empty can**

all night

I'm an
**athlete/
musician**

I already had

like 10 of them!

Hang out with
other people

**who are
aren't
drinking**

Maybe later,
**I just have to
go pee**

No thanks

From the Ground Up

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6.5 Well Balanced



Grade 6: Lesson 5—Well Balanced

Outcomes

- Learners will analyse how health behaviors enhance physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.
- Learners will analyse the impacts of substances on the health and safety of children.

Indicators

- Investigate factors that can impact sleep
- Investigate when, where, and how to ask for help for problematic substance misuse in family environment

Guiding Questions

- What food and beverages impact sleep?
- How does alcohol, tobacco/vaping, and other drugs affect the brain when a brain is not yet fully developed?
- How is traditional medicine used across many cultures?
- How might we recognize unhealthy use of substances in others?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students will be able to

- describe the potential risks of dependency on alcohol, tobacco, energy drinks, sugary drinks, and video games
- explain how tobacco and alcohol can be safely used in traditional medicine or religious ceremony
- reflect on the balance they feel with these substances and video games in their own life

Estimated Time: 30–45 minutes

Materials

- Jenga game or set of stackable math manipulatives
- extreme substance use slides
- energy drink slide (Copied 10 times)
- impact slides
- closing slides

Facilitation Tips

- Prior to this lesson, refer to the needs assessment and consider whether any students have known personal or family experience with these substances.
- Approach this lesson from a place of non-judgement as a way of creating a space for an honest conversation about how students currently engage with these substances/video games. Allow students to come up with the impacts of use and only provide examples and intervene when necessary.

Background

This lesson should be presented after Substance Use (Lesson 4). The goal of this lesson is for students to think about their own level of balance with the things they consume and do. At this stage of identity formation, students can become fixated on the things they love. This can make them feel happy and connected to a culture, but can also have impacts on aspects of their life when they become “out of balance.” We will explore the impacts of heavy use of substances and video games and lead into the next lesson on help seeking (Surface and Support, Lesson 6).

Teachers can also take this opportunity to present subsequent lessons on traditional medicines, as outlined in the outcomes for Health Education 6.

Check-in

- Give every student a block and build a tower as high as it can go by adding one block at a time. The purpose of the check-in is to demonstrate that even things that begin very stable can become off balance and unstable as they grow. Draw attention to the students’ comments as the tower becomes less stable. Often we know when things are getting off balance, and this can apply to a tower or our own lives.



Activity

Part 1: Too Much

Ask for six volunteers who like to role play to move into the centre of the circle. Ask them to pair up and assign each of them a relationship dynamic (parent-child, friends, or dating). Ask each partner to quickly role play someone in the partnership who is doing something too much.

For example:

- The parent REALLY wants to know what's going on in the child's life. Tell me everything.
- One friend asks to come over or talk on the phone every single night.
- One partner loves to be holding hands all the time. Even when it doesn't make sense.

After the demonstrations ask the volunteers to return to their seats and ask the class if anyone can relate to any of these scenarios. Ask students to share how they know when something becomes "too much" and how they usually deal with it. Explain that "too much" issues don't just happen in relationships, they can also be solo problems. Like playing a sport too much, practicing too much, too much of your favorite snack. Even things we love, when taken to the extreme, can cause problems.

Part 2: Out of Balance

We are going to explore "out of balance" use for several substances, but we'll do a longer demonstration with energy drinks first.

Lay down the energy drink slide and explain that we all have a time when we decide to try something for the first time. The first time we try an energy drink, for example. Poll the class to find out what makes us want to try it again (it tastes good, gives you energy, lets you stay up later, etc.).

Now say that this person really loves the taste and feeling they get from energy drinks. Continue to lay down energy drink slides until you have about three slides on the floor. This person has 3 energy drinks a day. Ask students to put up their hands if they think this person is "out of balance" with their use. Ask for a few volunteers to share how they would know this person is "out of balance." Slowly add more slides to the floor, this person now has 10 energy drinks a day. Ask students if this person is out of balance with their use.

Now lay down the “impact slides” and ask students to think about how they think each area will be impacted if a person consumed energy drinks in this way. Ask for a volunteer to move into the circle and step onto one of the slides and then explain how the person will be impacted. Continue by inviting more volunteers to add onto what the first student said or select a new impact slide.

Share any insights you may have if students are unsure of the impacts. For example,

- money—spending about \$40 a day on energy drinks
- relationships—friends find them harder to be around
- school—hard to concentrate at school, getting in trouble more
- extra-curriculars—less interest in them, more nervous
- physical health—dehydration, tooth decay, irregular heartbeat, heart failure
- mental health—increased anxiety and nervousness
- sleep—struggling with falling and staying asleep

Now explore these same impacts with heavy use of the other substances (sugary drinks such as pop, iced caffeine, and sports drinks, tobacco, video games, alcohol). Lay down the “extreme use” slides (students might recognize them from the substance use lesson as well) to represent someone using multiple times a day. It may be helpful to describe what this use looks like so students can better understand. For example, “A person plays video games from the second they get home from school until 4 am when they can’t stay awake anymore. They also skip school to play, when they won’t get caught.”

Discuss with the students:

- Are there possible benefits from occasional substance use? Mention traditional medicine with tobacco and alcohol, as a way to connect people to religion and culture. Consider how industry promotes the idea that certain substances have benefits and critically think about whether the benefits are really true or are true for everyone. How would you know? Be certain to note that not engaging in substance use is part of certain cultures (e.g., Muslims do not consume alcohol).
- How would each of the impact slides be affected by extreme use?
- Do you think some of these impacts may show up before someone gets to a point of extreme use?



End by introducing the idea of problematic use (when you are no longer in control of doing or taking something, to the point that it is harmful to you). Share that many people don't plan to get to a point of problematic use or dependence (when you need to do/use something to continue to function) when they start drinking, smoking, or playing video games. These things can make people feel good during hard times. Some people are predisposed to problematic use or dependence by family history.

Explain that the next lesson is on getting help when you need it (Lesson 6: Surface and Support,), but if someone feels like they want to talk more about these things now, to let a safe adult in the school know.

Part 3: Self-reflection

End with a brief Move into the Circle session to allow students to self-reflect. Read the statement aloud and have students move into the circle (or put their feet into the circle) if they agree. After each question, pause to ask students to elaborate (when appropriate).

Move into the circle if:

- you know how someone could get help for heavy use of substances
- you know how someone could get help for excessive gaming
- you worry about someone in your life using these substances in an unbalanced way
- you think you would notice if you were out of balance with one of these things
- you think you are out of balance with one of these things
- you think there is a safe way to use any of these substances
- you think you will never have a problem with substance use or gaming



Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

Moving Forward

A lesson on traditional medicines and other substances in religious ceremony.

Additional Resource: <https://www.fnha.ca/wellness/wellness-for-first-nations/wellness-streams/respecting-tobacco> (BC resource on tobacco as traditional medicine)

Energy Drinks

Pop Iced Caffeine Gatorade

Tobacco Tobacco Tobacco

Video Games

Alcohol Alcohol Alcohol

Money

Relationships

School

Extra- curriculars

Physical Health

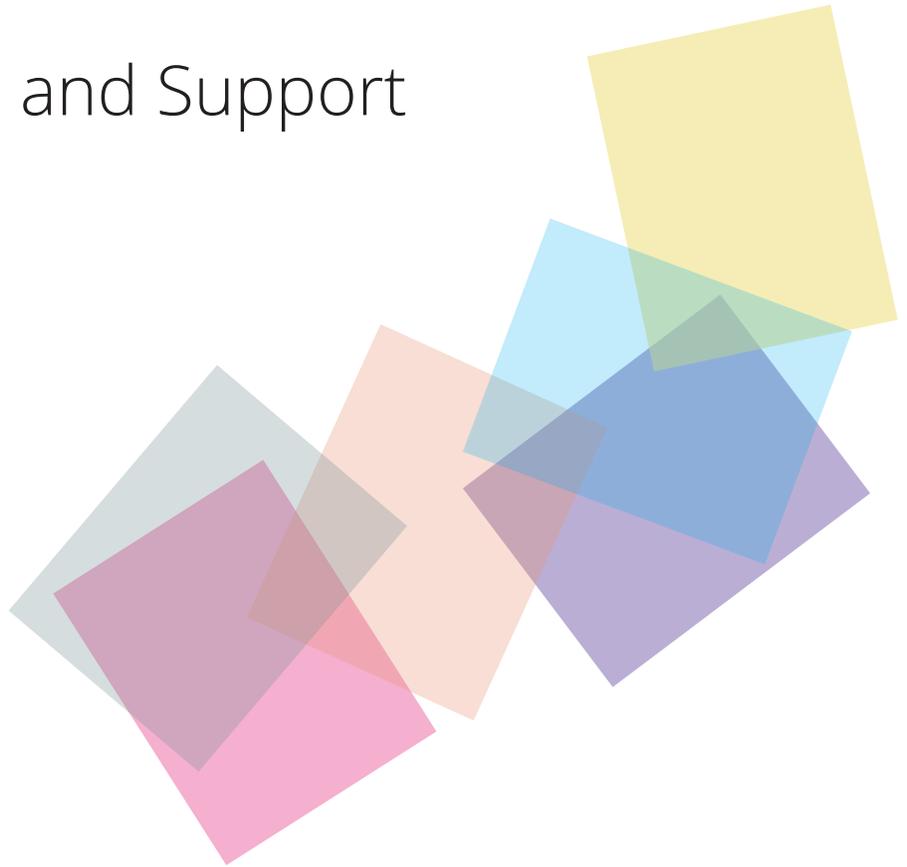
Mental Health

Sleep

From the Ground Up

A health promotion and harm reduction curriculum resource to address youth substance use, gaming, and gambling

6.6 Surface and Support



Grade 6: Lesson 6—Surface and Support

Outcome

- Learners will analyse the impacts of substances on the health and safety of children.

Indicator

- Investigate when, where, and how to ask for help for problematic substance use in a family environment.

Guiding Questions

- What are words you can use to ask an adult at school for help with a problem?
- How could sharing a problem with a teacher or other adult at school improve a problem at home?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- identify key support people in their school and how they can seek support from them
- differentiate between solutions and support during challenging times
- understand privacy and the boundaries of confidentiality

Estimated Time: 30–45 minutes

Materials

- rope/yarn for every student (optional)
- I would and I wouldn't signs
- help-seeking slides

Facilitation Tips

- When students disclose something vulnerable/personal to the class it is often appropriate to note it; thanking them for their contribution, mentioning their bravery, and/or letting them know that if they ever need help you are someone they can come to.
- Self-disclosure is a tool. Different teachers will have varying degrees of comfort talking about their own experiences but some level of personal sharing builds trust. Even as little as “I know that feeling ...” or “I’ve been there ...” are powerful ways to build relationships. Make sure not to go too far with the disclosure, though. Keep it short and related to the message of the lesson.
- Try to take the moments before and after the activity to check in with individual students; especially those you worry might need extra support based on your experience of them in these lessons. Adjust the scenarios in the activities if you feel they are too personal for some students.
- Often after this type of lesson, students will feel more comfortable sharing something personal with the teacher. How the adult responds is crucial to relationship building and validating the choice the student made to seek help. The teacher can use their professional judgment or consult with other professionals in the school to support or refer the student appropriately.

Background

As students enter into adolescence they begin to find some independence and form identities separate from their caregivers. During this time school supports also open up to students as they are able to self-refer and provide informed consent for services. Students no longer have to rely on family for help and are able to seek support independently. The goal of this lesson is to introduce the idea of looking for support, both when you need help with something specific or when life is generally challenging and there isn't an obvious solution.

Before this lesson, find out which support people are available to students at your school (e.g., Community Outreach Workers, school counsellor, school social worker, child youth care practitioner, African Nova Scotian Support Worker, Indigenous Support Worker, YMCA support workers, community youth supports) and be ready to share their names.

Tape the “I wouldn’t” and “I would” signs on opposite sides of the classroom for the activity in Part 1. Prep string for each student if you have opted for that check-in activity.



Check-in

There are two options for a fun check-in activity, one which requires prepared materials and one which does not.

Human Handcuffs (materials): Ahead of time, cut about 24 inches of rope/yarn for each student. Students will work in pairs and tie their ropes to one wrist, cross the ropes so that they will be attached to each other, and then tie the other wrist. Explain to the students that they are to separate from each other, but don't provide further direction except to say that it is possible (it is a complicated series of steps). The purpose of this activity is to reward the students who ask you for help. If students ask you to undo the rope, cut the rope or slip their hands out you will say yes. The task is very challenging but students who seek help will have success relatively quickly.

Line Up (no materials): This short activity is purposefully vague to encourage students to ask for help. Ask the class to stand up and then direct them to "line up according to a number." The class will likely be confused at first but some students will begin to ask questions (what number, how do we line up, etc.). You can be vague with your answers at first to extend the fun (e.g., say something like, "you have all of the information you need"), but similarly to the activity above, the purpose is to help when asked; rewarding help-seeking behaviour.

Activity

Part 1: I Would or I Wouldn't

Debrief: Discuss the check-in activity with the class and specifically ask the students who were very quick to ask for help how they made that decision. Then ask the students who did not ask for help (despite the activity seeming impossible), Why did you decide to stay quiet? Remind students that when we are younger, asking for help is so common, we need help to do just about everything. But as we get older, asking for help becomes more difficult. Students may surface reasons for this in their previous answers (e.g., nervous, makes them look stupid, makes them look weak, means they have to rely on or trust someone else). Why do you think some people feel afraid to ask for help? What actions create safe environments for help-seeking?

Instincts: Explain to the class that regardless of whether we decide to ask for help, we all have instincts. Your instincts are a way you feel or act that is not learned. There are lots of examples of instincts in all animals (migration, caring for young), but as humans we have instincts that can tell us when things are not right. Our instincts are like our internal voice that tells us when someone seems sad, when something seems dangerous, or when something is not right at home. Paying attention to our instincts, our gut feelings, can help us stay safe and also be a guide for when we may need a little help.

Scenarios: For the first activity, you will read a scenario in which people may seek help or support from someone. Then ask the students to use their instincts to move to one side of the room if they “would” get help for this and to the other side of the room if they “would not” get help. You should pause after each scenario and ask students on opposite sides of the room to explain their choice.

- There is a hippo living in my backyard.
- When I fart it sounds like people singing.
- I am home alone most nights.
- I can’t see the whiteboard in class anymore.
- I only want to wear the colour orange.
- I’ve had a sore ankle for a few weeks.
- All I want to do is play video games.
- My dog died and I am really sad.
- I have a friend whose parents/guardians aren’t very nice to him.
- I feel nervous before I go to school every day.
- I am not getting to start in (sport) anymore.
- My dad went to jail.
- I hear my parents/guardians arguing about money a lot.
- My best friend moved away.
- My mom is sick and doesn’t leave the house anymore.
- My parents/guardians seem to have a substance use problem (specifically probe how students would know this).

Part 2: Solution or Support

In some of those examples, if you look for help you may get a solution that makes the problem a little better (like go to the doctor for a sore ankle). Lay down the “solutions” slide.

In other examples, there may not be a solution but talking about the problem with a safe person can make it feel a little smaller (like if a parent/guardian is incarcerated). Lay down the “support” slide. There are people in this school who can help you find solutions or help support you through hard times, and everyone will go through a hard time in their life.

Begin a Move into the Circle to explore the people in this school that can help with solutions or support. Move into the circle if

- you know who the school counsellor is
- if you know how you can see the school counsellor
- if you have talked to your school’s CYCP
- if you have met your schools community outreach worker
- if you know your doctor’s name
- you think you can’t get help for your family from someone at school
- you think you have to be ready to talk about a problem when you see one of these people
- if you have ever emailed a teacher
- you think if you are allowed to get help from a teacher you don’t have anymore
- if you think you could get help from someone at school without your parents/ guardians knowing
- if there is one adult in this school that you could go to with a problem
- if you would actually go talk to that person
- if you have been in the principal’s office
- if your school has a social worker
- if your school has an Indigenous Support Worker
- if your school has an African Nova Scotian Support Worker
- if your school has a nurse

Take time during this activity to explain who the available support people are in the school and name them if possible.

Lay down the “privacy” and “confidentiality” slides. Explain that students are entitled to their privacy and do not need to share things about their life that they are not comfortable with people at school knowing. However, certain people at school, like your counsellor, social worker and nurse, follow something called confidentiality. This means that what you share with them will not be shared with anyone else, even your parents/guardians, unless you or someone else are not safe and need immediate help.

Check-out

There are five slides on the floor which help surface feelings about the class. The teachers remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment. Examples of slides are:

- The class was fun.
- The class was boring.
- The class helped me learn new stuff.
- The class didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done “Move into the Circle” style.

Moving Forward

- Invite school support staff in to talk to the class, introduce themselves, and share their role. Invite community support people (specifically youth-oriented support) in to talk about their roles.

I would

I wouldn't

Solutions

Support

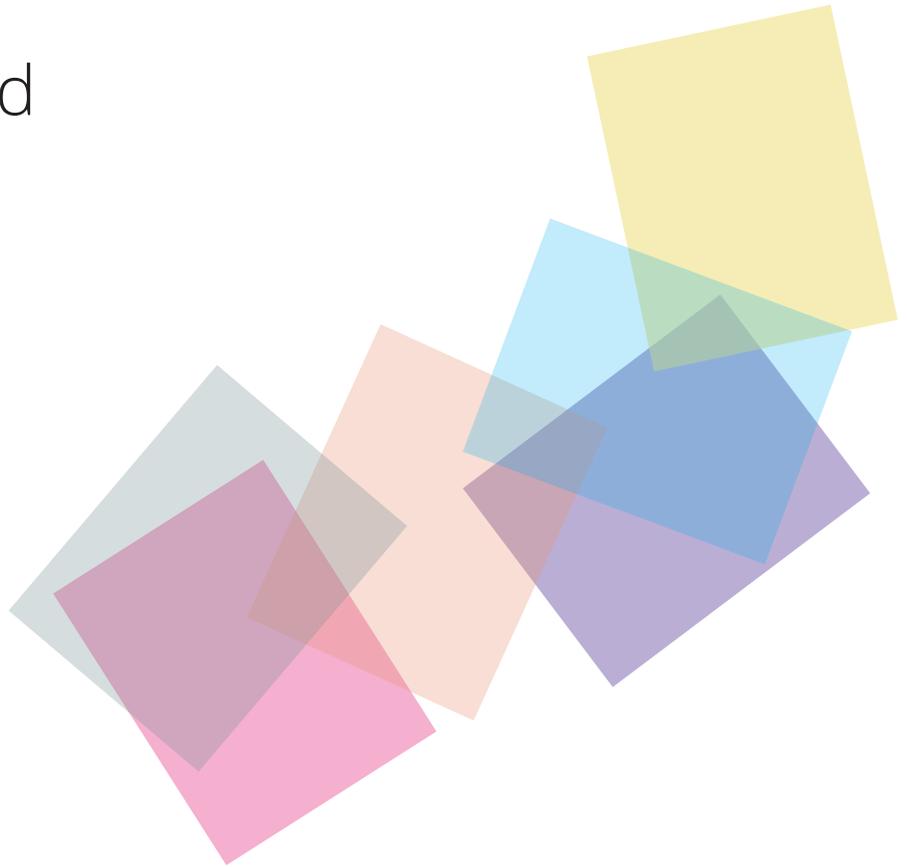
Privacy

Confidentiality

From the Ground Up

A health promotion and harm reduction curriculum resource to address youth substance use, gaming, and gambling

6.7 Shielded



Grade 6: Lesson 7—Shielded

Outcome

- Learners will analyse how relationships impact physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Indicator

- Investigate how changing relationships with self and others can impact the dimensions of health

Guiding Questions

- How can changes in self, family, communities, and the environment be positive?
- What are ways families can differ?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to

- identify protective factors in their lives that can build resilience
- think creatively about ways to support themselves and their peers when confronted with difficult situations

Estimated Time: 30 minutes

Materials

- blank paper for every student
- extra paper for balls
- markers

Facilitation Tip

- Teachers can bring in stuffed toys or beach balls to increase the fun factor of the group shielding exercise.

Background

This lesson highlights protective factors and resilience. It is meant to normalize hardships and raise awareness about what students might already have (or have the ability to build) to deal with it.

Before the lesson, have one piece of blank paper for each student, plus 10-15 extra pieces.

Check-in

- Ask the class: What's something that helps when you're feeling stressed? Solicit a few answers and ask the students who answered to stay where they're standing in the circle (if they're very close to each other ask them to spread out a bit).
- Now ask the rest of the class to stand near the person they most agree with on this question.
- Repeat with two more questions:
 - » What's the most challenging thing you've had to deal with this week?
 - » What's the thing you think you're best at; your top skill?

Activity

Returning to the circle of chairs, give each student in the circle a piece of blank paper. Let them know that everyone is born with a "shield," a set of factors that protect us from being knocked down by the hard things in life. Some people start out with bigger shields, and some people have smaller shields. Some people have to use their shields a lot and they can get a bit beat up, whereas some people rarely have to use them and they'll be pretty shiny and new by the time they're in grade 6.

Part 1

Ask each student to fold, crumple, or otherwise scuff up their shield for each of the following that apply to them.

- I have had to eat food I don't like.
- I have lost a friendship.
- I've been insulted by someone else.
- I knew someone who has died.



Ask the class if there are more hardships that kids their age might have used their shields to get through and continue to modify the shields for each one.

Let students know that there is good news too—our shields can be built up and reinforced. Ask them to straighten out/unfold their shields if the following apply to them.

- I have an adult in my life who cares about me.
- I have a connection to my culture or religion.
- There are things that I think I am very good at.
- I have friends here at school.
- I can look on the bright side and think about positive things.

Ask the class if there are more factors that might make going through life a little easier at their age and build a shield for each additional one as well.

Part 2

Remind the class that for the past few lessons you've been talking about substance use. Ask for examples of experiences or situations related to substance use where they may need to use their shield. For each example, crumple up a blank piece of paper into a ball.

Ask for a volunteer in the circle who's willing to stand up and test their shield, and a volunteer to throw paper balls. While the student throws the balls at various speeds, make comments on how their shields, even if they're not in perfect shape, still seem to do a decent job of shielding them through a hard time.

Next, let the class know that there is a way that they're even better protected and that is if they help each other and work together. Ask the whole class (or a subset of willing volunteers, depending on the available space) to enter the circle and hold their shields close together to form one larger shield. While one student throws paper balls, make the point that each of their individual shields from the hard things in life is even more protective when it works together with the shields of others.

Ask the students to return to the circle and finish with some debrief questions. Ask the original shield volunteer how it felt when they had to try to block all the paper balls on their own versus when they had the support of the group. Ask the thrower how it felt throwing paper balls against one shield versus a group of shields.

Ask the class how they might have changed their strategy after being hit by a paper ball. Remind them that nobody's shield is perfect, and a paper ball will occasionally get through, but we can learn from those experiences to prevent being hit again.

Final Lesson Check-out

This is a spin on the traditional check-out as this is the final lesson. For this final check-out, ask the students to reflect on all of the substance use lessons and the experience of sitting in a circle with their peers. Remind students not to stand on or near a slide if they don't mean it. We want authentic responses, without judgment.

- These classes were fun.
- These classes were boring.
- These classes helped me learn new stuff.
- The classes didn't teach me anything new.
- I felt comfortable during the class.
- I felt uncomfortable during the class.

If you sense safety in the room, feel free to quickly probe and ask students some quick questions about why they chose to stand where they were. The activity can also be done Move into the Circle style.

Moving Forward

Ask students to journal or draw about their own experience. When have they had to use their own shield or when did they rely on someone else's shield?