

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 7: A Health Promotion and Harm Reduction Curriculum Resource to Address Youth Substance Use, Gaming, and Gambling

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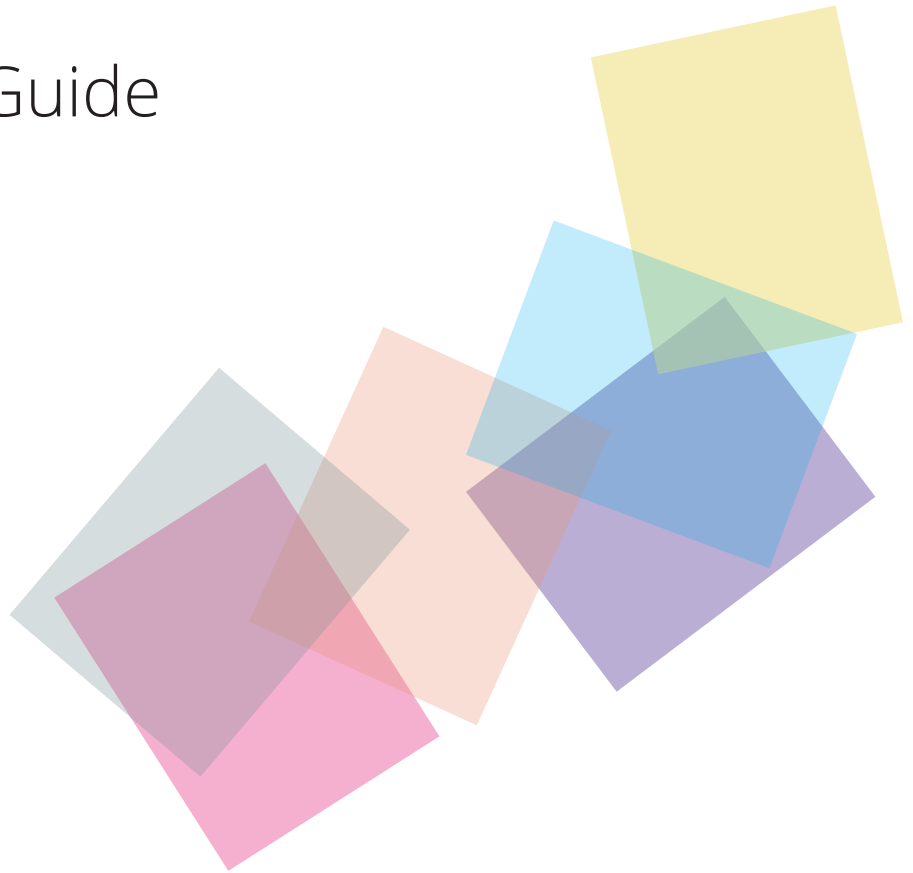
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From the Ground Up

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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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7.1 The Intro



Grade 7: Lesson 1—The Intro

Background

Discussions around substance use are personal 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
- not be adult/teacher focused
- encourage trust, teamwork, and collaboration
- seek different opinions and answers over the right answer

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- Salad, Sandwich, Soup slides
- approx. 20 pieces of large white paper (legal sized or larger)
- tape lines on either side of the room
- Expectations slides
- Check-out slides

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Facilitation Tips

- 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.
- Some of these activities make more sense when you see them in action. They are popular team building activities, so alternative descriptions or recordings of the game can be found online.

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: Salad, Sandwich, Soup

In the middle of the circle and spaced apart, lay down the “sandwich,” “salad,” and “soup” slides. State that every prepared food in the world fits into one of these categories. Explain that you will name a food and they should move to the category that best fits that food. Once you have named a few, ask for students to pick a few as well.

Some suggested foods are: macaroni and cheese, tacos, pizza, cake, omelet, mashed potatoes, stir fry, lasagna.

The goal of this activity is to have a little fun and demonstrate that sometimes there is no correct answer and we learn by hearing what other people think.

Part 3: Peanut Butter River

Before class, lay out two lines on either side of the classroom that represent the banks of the river. This game works best with smaller groups so divide the class into 2 or 3 (groups of 7 to 10 students). Give each group 4 pieces of white paper and explain that their task is to cross from one side of the riverbank to the other without touching the peanut butter sea. They can only use the 4 pieces of paper given to them to transport everyone on their team to the other riverbank. The teacher should monitor for any student who touches the peanut butter river, as they will have to begin again. The teacher can also add paper to teams to help them along.



The goal of this activity is to encourage students to work together, communicate, listen to others' ideas, and have some fun.

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

Take this first week to set up opportunities for students to further engage with the material in the lessons. Ideas include a question or comment box in the classroom or a reflection journal for students to write about their experiences with the lessons.



What's said

in this class,

stays in

this class

Take turns
speaking

Share the air
space

You can
always pass

**No
judgment**

Other

Soup

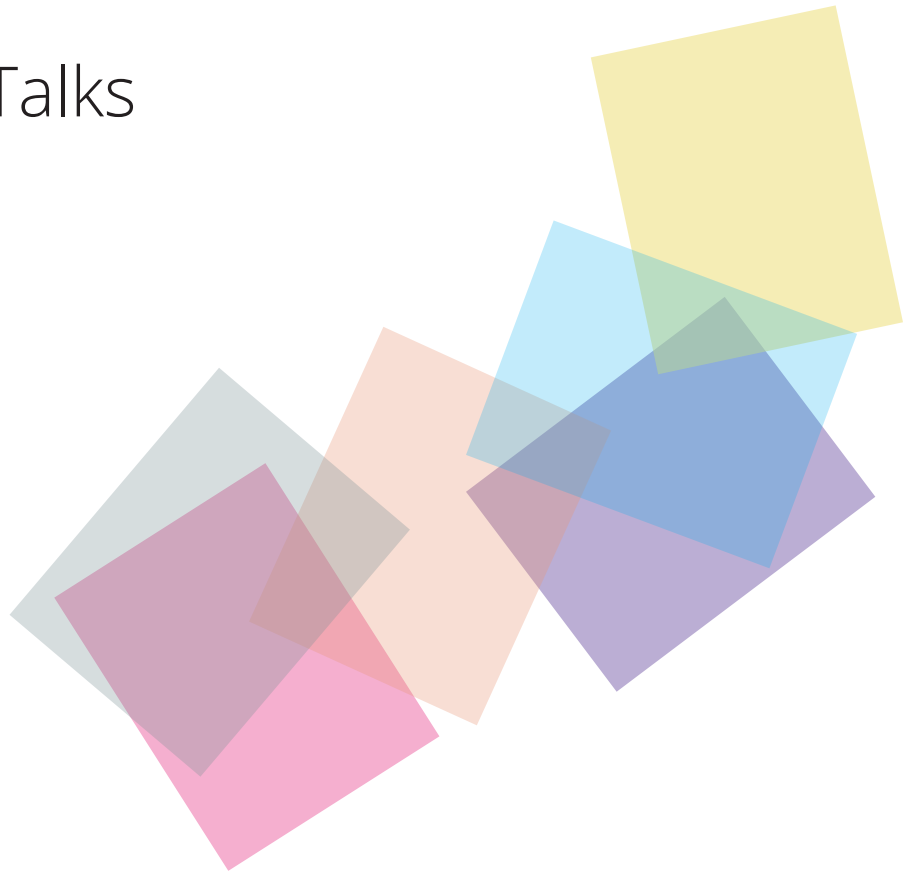
Salad

Sandwich

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7.2 Tough Talks



Grade 7: Lesson 2—Tough Talks

Outcome

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

Indicator

- Investigate the importance of addressing challenges in relationships with family, friends, or peers.

Guiding Question

- How does having healthy relationships with friends, families, and peers help to cope with stress, difficult situations, and emotions?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students will be able to

- develop strategies to address challenges in relationships with family, friends or peers

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- paper and pencil for each student for the first part of this activity
- Relationship slides
- Check-out slides

Facilitation Tip

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.

Background

This lesson deals with having difficult conversations in relationships. Students may share stories during the session that can raise concerns about the health of the student, or the health of other students. Teachers must explain to students that they have a “duty to report”—to break confidentiality—if they hear anything that makes them believe a student is at risk of harming themselves, harming someone else, or being harmed by someone else. This activity should be run on a day when school supports such as a school counsellor are available on site.

Check-in

Ask students to sit back-to-back with a partner. One partner will draw a quick doodle, something simple enough to be replicated, but more complicated than a single shape. Staying back-to-back, the partner that drew the original doodle will have one minute to instruct their partner to draw the same shape without explicitly naming what it is. After one minute, ask partners to compare their drawings. Debrief the activity, asking for a couple of volunteers to answer the following questions:

- How did it feel to describe your drawing without seeing if your partner understood?
- How did it feel to interpret the description without being able to see it for yourself?
- What would have made the process easier?

Remind the class to keep their answers in mind as you move into the activity.

Activity

Let the class know you’ll be discussing difficult conversations in relationships through different examples.

Describe the first example:

Example 1:

You have plans to hang out with your best friend on the weekend, but you’ve just been invited to a party at another friend’s house. The friend having the party doesn’t know your best friend, so if you’re going to the party it’ll be without your best friend. You keep hearing how fun the party’s going to be: tons of people are going, it’s on a lake, and there are enough jet skis for everyone. You decide at the last minute to go to the party and your best friend is pretty upset with you.



Lay slides in the centre of the circle that describe different relationships: friend, parent/caregiver, teacher, health professional, trusted adult, and ask the following questions:

- Who would be the easiest person to talk to about this situation? Why?
- Who would be the most helpful person to talk to?
- What could you do to understand your best friend's perspective? What could you do to help your friend understand your perspective?

There are no wrong answers for this discussion. You're probing the class to generate ideas and help them identify strategies for having difficult conversations. Let the class know you'll be moving into a more complicated scenario:

Example 2:

You're in grade 11. You and your best friend are having the time of your lives—that party you ditched them for is just a distant memory. You're both working now and have money to burn. You've saved up enough for a car and are enjoying your newfound freedom on the open roads. You and your best friend have both started to experiment with alcohol; it used to be once a month but lately you've been drinking most weekends, your grades are dropping and your teachers have started to notice. To top it off, last weekend you drove to a party but ended up drinking and didn't feel like it was safe to drive home. Your friend offered to drive. They don't have their license yet, but at least they weren't drinking. On the way home you were stopped at a checkpoint and your friend was fined for driving without a license. You feel like there's a lot to deal with, and you're not sure where to start.

Ask the following questions:

- Who would be the most helpful person to talk to?
- What makes it difficult to talk to that person?
- What would make it easier?
- How might the conversation affect your relationship?
- How might not having the conversation affect your relationship?

At this point let the class know that sometimes complicated situations require complicated solutions, and that a conversation with one person might not always be what's needed. Part of being in a healthy relationship is knowing when to find appropriate help. Ask the class to use as many of the slides as necessary to chart the path of support for the situation. Who would you lean on, in sequence, to address the situation?

Introduce the idea of Back-Pocket People—people in your life you can turn to in difficult situations. It’s often helpful to have a record of your back-pocket people because you can forget or feel isolated sometimes. Ask students to create a list of Back-Pocket People they can keep with them (on paper or in their phone) to have on hand when they need it.

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

- Share the idea of back pocket people with younger grades or buddies. Create a bulletin board display in the school to normalize the term for students.

friend

**parent/
caregiver**

teacher

**health
professional**

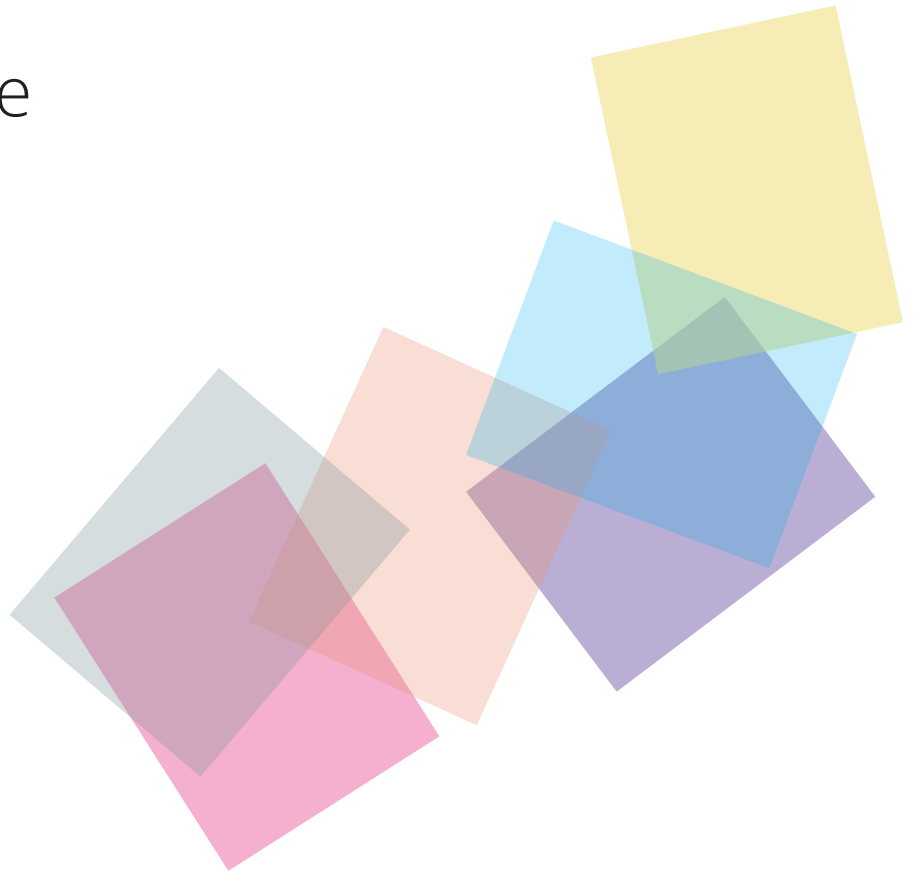
safe adult

other

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7.3 The Line



Grade 7: Lesson 3—The Line

Outcome

- Learners will analyse how life skills influence physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.

Indicator

- Investigate healthy ways of coping with difficult emotions and challenging life circumstances

Guiding Question

- How do I identify and explore problems that I can and can't fix by myself?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- reflect on the differences and similarities between people in their classroom and explain how they felt about this experience
- consider aspects of their life they have control over and no control over and how to cope when they don't have much control to change their situation

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- lengths of string (half as many as there are students)
- tape line across the center of the room
- The Line questions
- The Line slides
- Control slides

Facilitation Tips

- This activity could prompt students to disclose traumatic events. Remind students about the limits of confidentiality, and have a plan to connect students with other school supports if necessary.
- This activity requires a significant amount of space, and could be done outside or in a gym if time permits.
- Slides representing the list of factors are provided for you in the appendix, however if you know specific topics will be too intense or more relevant to your class, alter the list.

Background

We're all the main characters in our stories. Challenges like family circumstances, past trauma, extracurricular opportunities, stress and anger can affect whether a young person uses substances. This lesson encourages students to reflect on how the individual stories of peers and teachers may influence current behaviour and relationships. We will also explore how much control young people have over aspects of their circumstances and end with a conversation about coping skills.

Before beginning this lesson, create a tape line across the center of the room and make space for students to move around. You could also find another location like the gym or library for this activity.

Check-in

The teacher should hold the lengths of string in their hand so that all the ends are showing. Students grab one piece/end each and when every piece has a student attached to it the teacher lets go, revealing who is partnered with who. This may need to be split into two or three bunches of string in larger classes. Once paired, each partner should share a hidden talent or something unique about them. The goal is to keep things pretty light, but to get students thinking about their peers and their own distinct experiences. When you return to the circle, ask for a couple of volunteers to share something hidden or unique about their partner, if they are comfortable. Some may even want to demonstrate their secret skill.



Activity

Part 1

Ask students to line up with you on the tape line that spans the classroom (teachers are encouraged to participate in this activity). Explain that you'll be reading a number of statements and directions, and participants will be asked to move if the statement applies to them (for example, take a step back if you have a pet). Let students know they have the option to not move even if the statement applies to them; only disclosing things they feel comfortable to. Remind students that the activity is personal and they should not comment on their individual peers' movements, but notice when it feels like there is a lot of movement in the class. Read out the statements with a random direction (step forward or backwards) to begin with and then direct students to move in a way that keeps the group from bumping into things (walls, tables, etc.) if possible.

Note: this activity is not about calling attention to the students' level of privilege, but acknowledging everyone came into the room with some major differences and significant similarities.

Questions: The following is a list of questions you can use for this activity. Use as many as you feel is appropriate for the class, or create your own, keeping in mind the questions should start off light and get more personal as they progress.

Take a step forward/back/left/right if you ...

- have been on a plane
- eat at least one fruit and one vegetable a day
- wish you lived in a different house
- would shave your head for \$100 dollars
- eat fast food every week
- have ever been fishing
- have had a crush on someone before
- have a pet
- have step-siblings
- had a pet who died
- are an only child
- were born in a different country
- stayed overnight at a hospital
- find it easy to fall asleep at night

- have switched schools at least three times
- have ever eaten sushi
- have been bullied at this school
- have been a bully at this school
- can play an instrument
- speak a different language than English at home
- wished you were better at a sport
- have felt nervous at school
- have felt out of place at school
- consider yourself an angry person
- feel angry every day
- play a sport 3 to 4 times a week
- have drawn or painted a picture recently
- have ever had someone say something racist to you
- have a hard time saying sorry to people
- don't show your anger when you feel it, and wait until you're alone
- have experienced other people's anger
- have felt hurt by something someone in this class said or did to you
- have felt guilty about something you have said to someone in this class
- spend a lot of time with your parents or caregivers
- worry about the future
- pack your own lunch for school
- have someone who makes supper for you every night
- wish you could change something about your past
- feel like you are not as smart as everyone else
- know there is an adult in this school who cares about you
- wished you had more money for clothes and shoes
- wish your family had more money in general
- are not allowed to be out past a certain time (have a curfew)
- have had someone close to you die
- have had your parent split up or get divorced
- know of a family (not necessarily your own) that is struggling or is having a tough time



- right now
- fight with the people you live with a lot
- wish you could change something about your body or the way you look
- wish you could change something about your personality
- are worried about something right now
- think you're a role model for the younger kids in this school

Have the class pause for a minute and notice how spread out the class is. Ask them to sit comfortably where they ended up or pull them in a little closer if discussion is strained. Ask them what they think the activity was trying to demonstrate and for any thoughts or observations they had during the activity. Here are some specific questions to support discussion.

- By show of hands, was anyone surprised by any of these questions?
- Did anyone notice a time when most of the class moved or stayed still?
- Was there a time when you expected to be the only person moving, but noticed other people moving as well?
- Were you surprised to notice the adults moving at certain times?

Part 2

Explain to the class that we just moved through a long list of factors that have an impact on us, either making our day to day life a little easier, or a little more difficult. At this point in their lives, students are beginning to have more control and power, but some parts of their lives are still out of their control. This does not always seem fair, but understanding this fact can be very helpful in how we choose to cope with things that are hard in our lives.

Students will sort some of these factors into two groups: things we have control over and things we have no control over. Pass the factors out (one per student) to student volunteers and instruct them to read them aloud and share their opinion, then allow for the rest of the class to chime in. Based on rough consensus, start 2 piles for those that students feel they have "some control over" and those that they feel they have "no control over."

Discussion

Once students have sorted the slides, ask them to consider how these factors, especially those we have no control over, affect what happens in our lives. Introduce the discussion tool called the "soft shoe shuffle." The teacher will ask a question to the

group and seek a volunteer to answer the question. Students will then move closer to the student if they are in agreement with what they share, or will move further away if they do not feel the same way. Feel free to ask your own questions based on the comments from your class during the activities as well.

- How do you feel when a problem is out of your control?
- Do you think you will have more control over your life as you get older?
- How can you feel better when you know the problem you are facing is out of your control.
- Have you ever found a good way to dealing with a big problem?
- How you ever found a not so good way of dealing with a problem?

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 write their "origin story." What factors or moments in their past shaped the person they are right now?
- What are some things that we can do to help ourselves cope when times are hard and we feel like we don't have much control? Allow time for students to share what they have done in the past and generate a class list that others can pull ideas from and display it in the classroom.

Control

No Control

Eat at least
**one fruit and
one vegetable**
a day

Eat fast food

every week

Easy to
fall asleep
at night

**Switched
schools**

at least

three times

Bullied

at this school

Been a bully

at this school

**Feel out
of place
at school**

Feel angry

every day

Play a sport

3-4 times

a week

Someone

has said

**something
racist to you**

Experienced

other people's

anger

**Spend a lot
of time**

with your

**parents or
caregivers**

**Feeling not
as smart**

as everyone else

**How much
money**

your family has

Parents are
**split up or
divorced**

Fighting a lot

with the

people you

live with

Worrying

about something

right now

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7.4 Firsts



Grade 7: Lesson 4—Firsts

Outcomes

- Learners will analyze how life skills influence physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.
- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Indicators

- Learners will analyze how life skills influence physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual health.
- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Guiding Questions

- How do peer pressure, media, and values impact health-related decision making?
- How does substance use affect adolescent brain development?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- describe the consequences of delaying use of substances
- describe the role of peer pressure on decisions related to substance use and gaming or gambling

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- Firsts slides (x2)
- Timeline slides (x2)
- Discussion slides (optional)
- Check-out slides

Facilitation Tips

- If students are especially quiet, pass out the slides for them to read out loud. Bringing their voice into the circle can help break the ice and get conversation going. Be aware of literacy challenges when making this decision.
- If the discussion goes in a sideways direction, go with it! Anything (within reason) that is brought up by young people is on their mind and important to give some time to. You can be looking for opportunities to link it back to the lesson topic as conversation proceeds.
- Group discussion can be challenging for this age, but it is an important skill to develop. If students are talking over each other, offer a system to make sure everyone in the circle is getting a chance to say something (toss a ball around, make a signal that you have something to say). If they are capable, have the student who just spoke decide who goes next, so that the teacher is not the person controlling the flow of conversation.

Background

Current evidence indicates that substance use is occurring among students in grades 7-12 in Nova Scotia (41.6% alcohol use, 24.9% high-risk drinking, 24.0% cannabis use, 7.1% psychoactive pharmaceutical use).¹ (Canadian Student Tobacco Alcohol and Drug Survey, 2021-22). Past 30-day e-cigarette use for students in grades 7-9 in Nova Scotia is 11.4%, and jumps considerably up to 33.3% for students in grades 10-12.

This means that in this brief period, many students will be having their first experience with using illegal substances. The goal of this lesson is to capitalize on this stage of low use, to explore students' opinions about what is an appropriate age to start drinking or taking drugs before most have engaged with this culture. Hopefully by thinking about this decision in a safe classroom setting, students will be better equipped to make a choice in line with their values and separate from other influences. Delayed use is a powerful harm reduction tool to explore in this lesson.

A key message of this lesson is that delaying substance use during this crucial stage of brain development is associated with positive health outcomes.

¹ Detailed tables for the Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey 2021-2022 - Canada.ca

Check-in

Play a few rounds of Group Count. Ask everyone to look down or close their eyes. The class will attempt to count to the number of people in the room, with one person saying each number (e.g. if there are 25 people in the room, the group will try to count to 25). If more than one person says a number at the same time, they must start again. No one can say anything other than a number once the count starts; no directions or “you’re next!”

Activity

Part 1

Make a point of noticing the students who go first in group count and give them some accolades. Explain that today’s lesson is about ‘firsts’ and sometimes it can be a little scary to go first or do things for the first time. Usually when we do something for the first time it also makes the second time or the third time or the tenth time seem a little less scary. Start with a round of ‘move into the circle’ to get the students to reflect on some of the big firsts that may have already happened in their lives. Pause between each question to ask a few students who move if they will share their memory.

Move into the circle if you ...

- get nervous on the first day of school
- know what your first word was
- remember your first sleepover at a friends house
- remember when you made your first best friend
- have had your first broken bone
- remember the first time you threw up in public
- yanked out your first tooth (as opposed to letting it fall out on its own)
- remember the first time going to the movie theatre
- have had your first crush
- remember riding a bike without training wheels for the first time?
- have had your first cavity

Explain that we don't always remember our first times, but there is a first time for everything. Sometimes they just happen to us, like our first day of school, and sometimes they happen because of a choice we make, like the first time we drive a car. Draw attention to the fact that, as you get older, these choices are increasingly not made by the people who take care of you, but by you. This comes with a lot more responsibility.

Present the group with the 'firsts' slides and explain any that are unclear.

- date
- drink alcohol
- vape/smoke nicotine
- drink coffee/energy drink
- drive a car
- drive an ATV
- stay home alone
- bet money on a sport
- kiss
- see an R-rated movie
- party (without parents)
- consume cannabis
- get a tattoo
- get a piercing
- watch porn
- do your own laundry
- take the bus alone
- stay out until midnight
- get a job

If you are working with a large class, divide the group into two smaller circles (still inside the larger circle of chairs, ideally) and give each group a separate set of slides. In the middle of each circle, display the timeline slides in a line for ages 10 to 20. Ask the students to go through each "first" and decide at what age this should happen. Depending on your group, you may want to ask them to imagine the age they would hope their siblings or future child will engage with the "first" for the first time. When they have a consensus, place the slide on the timeline at the age they have decided.



It may be helpful to assign roles to volunteers in each group to provide more structure: one student to collect opinions and decide on a consensus, one student to move the slides around. Move between the groups and ask questions about their decisions. Encourage discussion when there is clearly a difference of opinion.

When both groups have created their timeline, have them return to the large circle with the two timelines in the centre of the space, in view of the whole group. Take some time to draw attention to the differences between each group, either by asking students which differences they see or by stating them yourself.

Part 2

Facilitate a discussion with the students. Depending on your class, you could ask questions and have students share their opinions organically, or you could use the following more structured approach to discussion.

Lay down the “discussion slides” around the circle and ask students to move to the slide that best reflects their opinion. Encourage students to move around if their opinion changes and also provide the option to stay seated and just observe.

Discussion slides:

- Yes. For sure.
- Maybe?
- Not sure.
- No way.

Discussion questions:

- Will everyone have every one of these firsts?
- If we eliminated peer pressure, which of these firsts do you think would change position? How do you think it would change?
- If we eliminated social media, which of these firsts do you think would change position? How do you think it would change?
- If we eliminated advertising, which of these firsts do you think would change position? How do you think it would change?
- Do you think all of these firsts will lead to “seconds”? What would stop you from doing something a second time?
- If your caregivers were to create this timeline based on what they hope for you, would it look the same as the one you just made? What would be different and why?

Now shift the focus to the 'firsts' related to substance use (drinking coffee/energy drink, drinking alcohol, using cannabis, vaping/smoking). Eliminate all other slides from the circle and just display the 4 substance use slides with the corresponding ages that were decided by the class. It should look something like this.



Tell the class that we have intelligence from the year 2050 and apparently all of these ages are pushed back 3 years (first coffee/energy drink happens at 7 now, first drink of alcohol at 11, etc.). With each of the substances, ask them to share the consequences of a first that happens 3 years earlier than they said it should.

Shockingly, in the year 2070 all of these ages have moved forward 3 years from their starting places (first drink at 17, first cannabis consumption at 18, etc.). With each of the substances, ask them to share the consequences of a first that happens 3 years later than they said it should.

Make the point that the laws around drinking/smoking ages and warnings for energy drinks are created based on science. And when you choose to drink or smoke sooner, you are taking a risk. Your brain is still developing until your mid-20s, especially the part of your brain responsible for good decision making and planning. Have every student touch their forehead, which is where the prefrontal cortex is located. Our brains can bounce back from a lot of stress, but if you choose to use substances before it is fully formed this can have an impact on its development. Remind the group that firsts often lead to seconds and thirds and tenths, and every year you delay starting to drink is an extra year your brain grows without the influence of drugs or alcohol.

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

- Research drinking ages and laws around consumption of substances in different countries and compare them. Decide on the laws they would enact if they were in government.
- Present or show a video on adolescent brain development and the role of the prefrontal cortex. Share how different substances can impact this crucial stage of cognitive development.

Date
someone

Drink alcohol

**Vape/smoke
nicotine**

**Drink coffee/
energy drink**

Drive a car

Drive an ATV

**Stay home
alone**

**Bet money on
a sport**

Kiss

**See an
R-rated
movie**

Party

(without parents)

**Smoke
or consume
cannabis**

Get a tattoo

Get a piercing

Watch porn

**Do your own
laundry**

**Take the bus
alone**

**Stay out until
midnight**

Get a job

10

12

14

16

18

20

Yes. For sure.

Maybe?

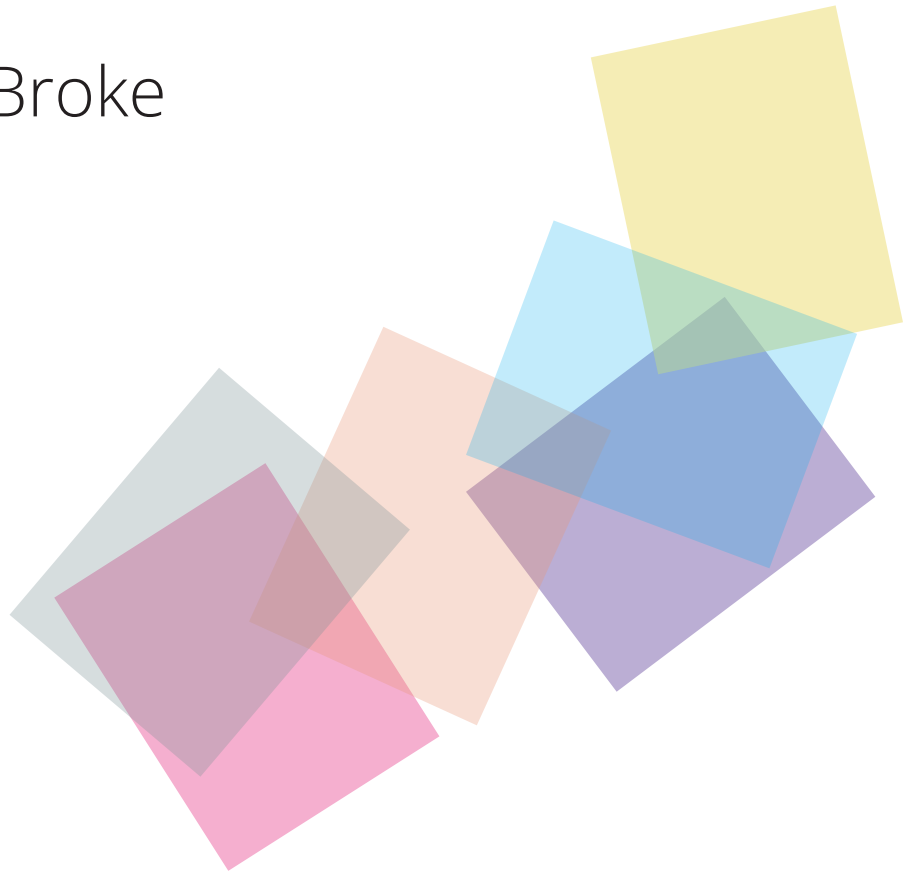
Not sure.

No way.

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7.5 Go for Broke



Grade 7: Lesson 5—Go for Broke

Outcome

- Learners will analyse the relationships between health behaviours and physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual health.

Indicator

- Analyse ways in which peer, media, and social norms influence healthy decision-making.

Guiding Question

- What are the safety concerns associated with gambling?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- identify the inherent risk involved in gambling
- identify aspects of gambling that show up in games for children

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- blank sheets of paper
- 60+ small prizes (individual stickers, bubble gum, erasers, pipe cleaners, etc; ideally all the same type)
- Games slides

Facilitation Tip

- For this activity, teachers can use persuasion to get students to take a turn, if necessary. Offer a free first try or a temporary bonus prize for the first few participants. You can use this to later discuss advertising and the gaming and gambling industries.

Background

It's important for students to learn about gambling and gaming in an age-appropriate and responsible manner. The concepts of risk and decision-making that are inherent in these activities are important to highlight for young people who are becoming more independent. Gaming and gambling industries are increasingly targeting young people by introducing the principles of gambling into games marketed to children. By discussing these topics early on, students can develop critical thinking abilities, learn about the potential consequences of their choices, and grasp the difference between games of chance and skill. The goal is to foster healthy habits and prevent problematic behaviours in the future.

Check-in

Ask for volunteers to step up and imitate an animal, and to remain imitating the animal until there are 10 volunteers and 10 very different animals inside the circle:

- dog
- cat
- elephant
- crow
- lion
- cow
- snake
- spider
- alligator
- kangaroo

Activity

Part 1

Prepare one piece of paper with a star drawn on it; making sure it isn't visible through the paper. Make sure you have enough small prizes to give every student two and still have 30+ in reserve.



Lay down six pieces of paper in the centre of the circle, one of which is marked with the star. Flip over the star and shuffle them around well. Let the class know that for the price of one prize they can take a shot at flipping over the star and that if they successfully find it they win three prizes.

As students approach the game, ask their peers to do a drumroll, cheer, clap, or pump their fists in the air. When a student wins, be sure to celebrate loudly as a group and encourage others to try. It is absolutely voluntary to participate in the game but encourage students to try it out. Once everyone who wants to has had a chance to play you can allow people to play multiple times in a row. You can even offer a double-or-nothing option if they win. Inevitably some students might have more than their original two prizes but most who have played will have lost (if your shuffling is good!).

Run a quick “move into the circle.” Ask the class to move into the circle if:

- you have more prizes than you started with
- you have fewer than two prizes
- you won at least once; stay in the circle if it felt good to win
- you lost at least once; stay in the circle if it felt bad to lose
- you would have played less (kept what you had) if this was real money
- you would have played more (tried to win more) if this was real money
- you felt jealous of someone who was winning

Point out to the class that what all types of gambling have in common is that the “house always wins”; that the chances of you winning in the long term are rigged against you. Ask the class what the long term effect of gambling your real money every day or every week could be knowing this new fact. See if anyone knows any reasons why someone might gamble so often.

Part 2

- Hand out the Games slides to willing volunteers in the circle.
- Let them know that one side of the circle, on the floor, will represent games that are “gambling” and the other side will be “not gambling.”
- Go around the circle and allow each volunteer to read the game and then place the slide on the side that they think corresponds best.

- Ask them to describe their reasoning, if they can, and offer them the chance to “phone-a-friend” if they want to. This is an opportunity for other students, or for the teacher, to query some of the games that might not immediately be associated with gambling in their minds. Blind bag toys or trading cards, for example, do involve a pay-to-play element that offers a chance (although a small one) of uncovering something rare and valuable. Video games with loot crates often allow you to pay for a chance of the same. Make the point here that some things that are aimed at children and adolescents have elements of gambling involved in them for the same reason a casino operates—to make money.

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 journal about the games that they play and any aspects of gambling that show up in them.

Loot Crates

Blind Bags

Trading Cards (Pokemon, Magic, etc.)

Video Games

Video Game DLC behind a Pay Wall

Poker at a Casino

Slot Machines

Arcade Games

**Fair Games
(Skeeball,
etc.)**

Sports

Betting on Sports

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7.6 Risk



Grade 7: Lesson 6—Risk

Outcome

- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance use on adolescent health

Indicators

- Investigate injuries related to substance use.
- Investigate the harms associated with the use and co-use of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, vaping products, caffeine, and prescription drugs.

Guiding Questions

- How can I predict the short-term and long-term impacts of use and co-use of substances?
- How can adolescent substance use affect physical, mental, and emotional health?
- How does substance use affect adolescent brain development?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- describe the risks of short and long term use of various substances as well as problematic gaming/gambling
- reflect on their own use (or potential future use) in the context of these physical and mental health risks

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- blank sheets of paper (on the floor in the shape of a human; make sure they have a neck and a head, arms, torso, and legs)
- squares of pre-cut paper with a red X
- squares of pre-cut paper with a black X
- 100th Birthday slide

Facilitation Tips

- If the discussion goes in a different direction, go with it! Anything (within reason) that is brought up by young people is on their mind and important to give some time to. You can look for an opportunity to get back onto the lesson's original subject as conversation proceeds.
- Group discussion can be challenging for this age, but it is an important skill to develop. If students are talking over each other, offer a system to make sure everyone in the circle is getting a chance to say something (toss a ball around, make a signal that you have something to say). If they are capable, have the student who just spoke decide who is next, so that the teacher is not the person controlling the flow of conversation.
- This lesson may be distressing to students who have family members or friends who use substances, especially long term use. Remind students they are able to take a break anytime and check-in with students afterwards who have shared about family use with you in the past.

Background

In youth health promotion work we often talk about risk in the context of intentional and unintentional injury (violence, self-harm, car crashes, etc.), but the grade 7 class on risk will concentrate on other physical harms, with special focus on brain health. Students will learn about short-term and long-term (chronic) health issues.

Check-in

In the middle of the circle is a single slide that says "100th Birthday." Ask for volunteers to move to the slide and share what their ideal 100th birthday will be like.

Activity

Part 1

A 100th birthday is not impossible. More and more people are reaching that milestone, and some continue to be in very good health. This lesson will explore some of the short and long-term risks to our health from using a range of substances and being involved in gaming and gambling.

On the floor is a human made of sheets of paper. Next to the human is a pile of squares, each with a red X on them.



A list of harms connected to the substances/behaviours below will be read. The teacher should ask for a volunteer for each substance. The volunteers will pick up one of the squares and place it on the part of the human body that's impacted (e.g., teacher says "stroke" and volunteer puts a red X on the brain/head region).

- tobacco/vaping
- cannabis
- alcohol
- prescription drugs (with disclaimer: we are talking about people using them who have not been prescribed them)
- gambling
- gaming

The information in the beginning of this lesson is a bit heavy, but the second part will be a time for reflection and conversation.

Tobacco/Vaping

- Stroke, heart disease, diabetes, emphysema, erectile dysfunction, reproductive issues, cancers of the lung, throat, mouth, stomach, liver, kidney, and colon. There are also dermatological (skin) problems. Let students know that this is only a partial list.
- Tobacco use plays a role in causing disease and other serious health outcomes, including cancer, respiratory ailments, and heart disease, not only for the person who smokes, but for anyone exposed to second-hand smoke.
- Vaping e-cigarettes is not a harmless form of smoking. E-cigarettes contain chemicals that can be harmful to health. The long-term risks of inhaling the chemicals in e-cigarettes are unknown and continue to be researched.
- Nicotine is a naturally occurring chemical in tobacco and most vaping substances available for sale in Canada contain nicotine. A vaping product can deliver more or less nicotine than a cigarette.
- Nicotine is a highly addictive substance and can cause short-term increases to blood pressure and heart rate in the minutes and hours after use. It can produce negative effects in the brain, such as mood changes. The developing brains of youth and young adults are particularly vulnerable to long-term nicotine exposure. Adolescents can become nicotine dependent faster than adults. The addictive nature of nicotine is the main reason people continue using tobacco and e-cigarette products.

Cannabis

- Limited evidence of an association between smoking and lung cancer, and other cancers, as well as cardiovascular (lung and heart) issues. Brain health and mental health issues. Injury connected to driving while impaired.
- The short-term effects of cannabis use include impaired ability to drive safely or operate equipment; impaired ability to learn and remember things; effects on mental health. Though cannabis can cause euphoria (a high) it can also cause anxiety or panic. In rare cases, cannabis can trigger a psychotic episode (not knowing what is real, experiencing paranoia, having disorganized thoughts and, in some cases, hallucinating).
- The long-term effects of cannabis use include damage to lung health; addiction (cannabis use disorder); worsening mental health such as anxiety and depression.
- Youth and young adults are more likely to experience harms from cannabis because their brains develop until about age 25. The earlier you start consuming cannabis, the more harm it can do.
- Starting as a teen, consuming frequently (daily or near daily) and over a long time (several months or years) increases the risk of mental health problems. These problems include dependence and disorders related to anxiety and depression.
- Frequent use of cannabis over a long time can also harm important aspects of your thinking, like learning and memory. Stopping use can help improve these deficits.

Alcohol

- Drinking alcohol beyond low-risk levels can seriously affect many different areas of your health and well-being. It can also contribute to premature death from a wide range of diseases and other alcohol-caused harms.
- No amount of alcohol is good for your health.
- Alcohol is a carcinogen that can cause at least seven types of cancer, including breast, colon, rectum, mouth, throat, liver, esophagus, and larynx. There can also be dermatological (skin) problems. Drinking alcohol is a risk factor for many types of cardiovascular disease, including hypertension, heart failure, high blood pressure, atrial fibrillation, and hemorrhagic stroke.
- Drinking is a leading cause of death and social issues in young people. Intoxication is associated with: high risks of injuries; aggression and violence; dating violence; and worsening academic performance. It is linked with unintentional injury connected to falls, drownings, burns, and motor vehicle crashes, as well as intentional injury like suicide.
- There are circumstances when no alcohol use is safest. For example, when: driving a motor vehicle; using machinery and tools; taking medicine or other drugs that interact with alcohol; doing any kind of dangerous physical activity; being responsible for the safety of others; when pregnant (Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder); and when making important decisions.

(Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health, Public Summary: Drinking Less Is Better (Infographic) | Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction (ccsa.ca))

Gambling

- mental health issues, dependency issues, intentional injury (self-harm and suicide)

Prescription Drug Misuse

- risks to the cardiovascular (heart and lung) system, brain function, as well as coma and death, overdose/poisoning

Gaming

- sleep deprivation and associated consequences on the heart and brain health, mental health, as well as dependency issues

Remind students that many of the harms identified, and marked on “the body,” are longer term, but not necessarily decades away. Some of the serious issues are showing up younger and younger (30s, for example, with certain cancers).

Now mention shorter term harms: coma, sudden death, serious injury, and brain and spinal cord injuries. The teacher can mark these with the black Xs.

Once all the Xs are down, ask everyone to look at the person on the floor and invite anyone to share a word or a sentence that describes how they feel now that so many consequences have been identified. Teachers should share their thoughts as well, if comfortable.

- **Tobacco/nicotine:** Remind them that with one of the substances—tobacco/nicotine—there is no safe amount, although we also respect that tobacco is used for ceremonies and rituals and those traditions can be connected to a person’s good health.
- **Alcohol** is never considered no-risk, but there can be low-risk consumption for adults, and like tobacco, it is sometimes used for ceremonies and rituals.
- **Cannabis** is newly legal and still being studied, and while there is emerging science about some areas where its use can have benefits, there are also consequences that must be considered.
- **Prescription drugs** are only to be used under the direction of a health professional for illness or injury, with potential life-threatening consequences for others who use them.
- **Gambling and gaming** can both be used recreationally without risk, it’s the amount of gaming and gambling that matters when considering whether we’ll see health consequences.

Part 2

Why did we want to lay down all the consequences? In this part of the lesson, we'll think back to the check-in activity about turning 100. At this stage of the lesson there may be some pushback from youth who talk about a person they know, perhaps a family member, who is much older and smokes and/or drinks, maybe even uses cannabis or gambles, and is doing fine. It's true, there are people out there like that, but they are almost always in the minority.

Problematic substance use and gambling increases the number of health issues we may be faced with. Some of the health impacts can happen early on, such as trouble in school because sleep and mental health are impacted; physical health impacts can include respiratory issues and potential for injuries. Relationship problems are common health impacts associated with problematic substance use and gambling and can involve violent and aggressive behaviour that can lead to intimate partner violence, domestic violence, and sexual violence. Problematic substance use also decreases life expectancy.

Reflection Questions

- What's an acceptable number of Xs for you in the future?
- What's an acceptable number of Xs for your best friends in the future?
- Imagine you could speak to 50-year-old you. What advice do you think they'd give you about how you guard your health?
- Add some drama and invite a few volunteers up for a bonus, and yet unnamed, question. Once they've moved close to the person on the floor get them to pat it on the head or blow it a kiss. This is now your future child—how do you feel about all the Xs on them?

Also, remember that everyone is doing their best with what they have, so some of the use and involvement represents coping strategies for people with challenges in their lives, and they're not "asking for" or to be blamed for the consequences we've identified. They may be doing their best to navigate tough conditions.

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

- Discuss the term “co-use” and how this can impact the short- and long-term impacts on physical and mental health.
- Invite a school nurse or health care professional to visit the class to discuss these risk realities in more detail and to answer student questions.

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7.7 Super Sticky Stuff



Grade 7: Lesson 7—Super Sticky Stuff

Outcomes

- Learners will analyze how life skills influence physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health.
- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Indicators

- Investigate healthy ways of coping with difficult emotions and challenging life circumstances.
- Compare strategies for coping with pressures and difficult emotions.

Guiding Questions

- How do I identify people in my life and/or community I can ask for help and support?
- How does having healthy relationships with friends, families, and peers help to cope with stress, difficult situations, and emotions?

Student Goals

By the end of this lesson students should be able to

- assess current risk in the grade level when it comes to substance use and project forward to consider future risks of substance use, gaming, or gambling
- explain the factors that may contribute to someone using substances or problematic gaming or gambling
- list “super habits” that can protect us from problematic use and consider their own helpful habits

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- painter's tape (or any tape that is easy to pull off clothes or skin)
- Unhealthy sticky slides
- Forcefield slides
- Check-out slides

Facilitation Tips

- You'll need an easy-going student to be the sticky volunteer with pieces of paper stuck to their clothing with painter's tape.
- You'll also need a reasonable and careful person to be the volunteer who will gently stick new pieces of paper to the sticky volunteer. That may be less fun than letting anyone in the class do it, but it will be calmer this way.
- As with any lesson, when talking about substance use or problematic gaming and gambling, there may be disclosures that need a follow-up by a teacher after the lesson. Teachers should be clear about their duty to report child abuse and/or imminent harm to self or others.

Background

This lesson will help students create a view of the present and future when it comes to substance use and problem gaming and gambling, and the chances of these posing a risk to their health. It will build on the grade 6 lessons "Shielding" and "Surface and Support" and the grade 7 lesson "Firsts" by boosting messages about the forcefield we create to help prevent health issues from sticking to us. We then discuss when it's time to ask for help, and the appropriate ages for some behaviours.

Check-in

Ask for some volunteers to quickly imitate how a parent or grandparent dances.



Activity

Part 1

Identify a student to help in the centre of the circle, with their permission, because they must be okay with another student gently taping pieces of paper to their clothes. A second student volunteer will be asked to tape the pieces of paper to their peer's clothes.

On the floor are a bunch of sticky slides that can be unhealthy and it's the job of the circle to raise their hands and pick the first substance or problematic activity that could already be happening, or likely to be the first risky thing to happen in middle school or early high school.

- alcohol
- cannabis
- tobacco
- vaping
- gaming
- gambling
- prescription drugs

It doesn't matter which order they are stuck to the student—just allow for opinions/points to be shared about when and why, and wherever possible seek consensus on the order they are taped to the volunteer. Thinking back to Firsts, see if they surface the timing as well: middle school, high school, post-secondary, etc.

As each one is taped to the volunteer, check in for opinions about how big a deal it is for the person if they've got one problem stuck to them, and then two, etc; if there's a combination that is especially problematic; and if one is far more serious than the others.

Withhold any comment until later when we want to pass along important messages about individuals and their lives and how these substances and other problems can vary from person to person.

Questions

There are a few questions to ask before moving to the second part of the activity, once all the slides are taped to the volunteer:

- **Who is this person? In other words, can you predict anything about this person who has several of these substance/behaviour issues happening at the same time?** (This shines a light on the unpredictable nature of who may later develop problems with substance use and/or gaming and gambling and may expose some internalized stigma or misinformation, providing a chance to provide some counter-messaging.)
- **How did this happen?** (This is a chance to surface/review the pressures or influences that lead to substance use and gaming/gambling that the group can identify.)
- **Is it their fault? Why or why not?** (This is a reminder about empathy, that sometimes these are ways to cope with big challenges in life.)

Optional

When our lives are impacted by substances or gaming and gambling there are other health issues that may surface and stick to us. Those health issues can also be taped to the volunteer with a short explanation about the connections with substance use and problem gaming/gambling.

- **Depression**—ongoing substance use, lack of sleep contribute to mental health issues
- **Stress**—loss of money and where to find more
- **Anger and aggression**—frustration from losses and impacts of substances
- **Loneliness**—substance use and problem gaming/gambling can lead to isolation
- **Sexual health stuff (STIs, pregnancy)**—safer sex practices may be ignored with substance use
- **Relationship issues (family, friends, and intimate partners)**—conflict caused by substance use and problem gaming/gambling

Part 2

Now it's time to figure out ways to remove the unhealthy sticky slides by replacing them with the stuff we know gives us a forcefield to help reduce the chances the sticky slides get stuck or stay stuck (there's an option to keep some of the slides stuck if students can articulate a case for lower risk use/involvement. This may include traditional and ritual use of substances).

On the floor, face down are some SuperStuff slides. When we talk about SuperStuff it could be super people in our lives, or super things, or super habits – which help us flourish, build a strong shield/forcefield and avoid the unhealthy stuff in our lives from sticking to us in ways that cause harm. Have volunteers turn the slides over one at a time and cover up or replace something stuck to the “sticky” volunteer.

- hobbies/passions (hunting, fishing, sports, drama, art, etc.)
- one or more close friends
- one or more close family members
- feeling like your needs are met
- a safe adult in school or the community
- asking for help
- saying no when there's pressure to say yes
- connecting with your culture
- other

Closing messages should surface the following:

Every individual's life is different, and for each person the most serious substance or behaviour is the one that is causing them the biggest health problems. Just one of the substances or behaviours listed can be devastating to a person's life but the health risks multiply with additional substance use and gaming/gambling piled on top.

What is the same for all of us though is that it's always okay to ask for support, or even reach out just to share something that's going on in your life that is making you feel bad or simply feels weird for you.

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

Discuss options for getting help with substance use, gaming, or gambling in the school (support staff) and community. Explore what supports are available if someone in your family or community is struggling with substance use.

Have students reflect in a journal entry on which super habits they already have and which they would like to work on.

Alcohol

Cannabis

Tobacco

Gaming

Gambling

Prescription Drugs

Vaping

Depression

Stress

Anger and aggression

Loneliness

Sexual health stuff

(STIs and
pregnancy)

Relationship issues

(family, friends,
and intimate
partners)

Hobbies/ passions

(hunting,
fishing, sports,
drama, art, etc.)

One or more
close friends

One or more
**close family
members**

Feeling like
**your needs
are met**

A safe adult
in school or
the community

**Asking for
help**

Saying no
when there's
pressure to
say yes

Connecting
with your
culture

Other

