

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

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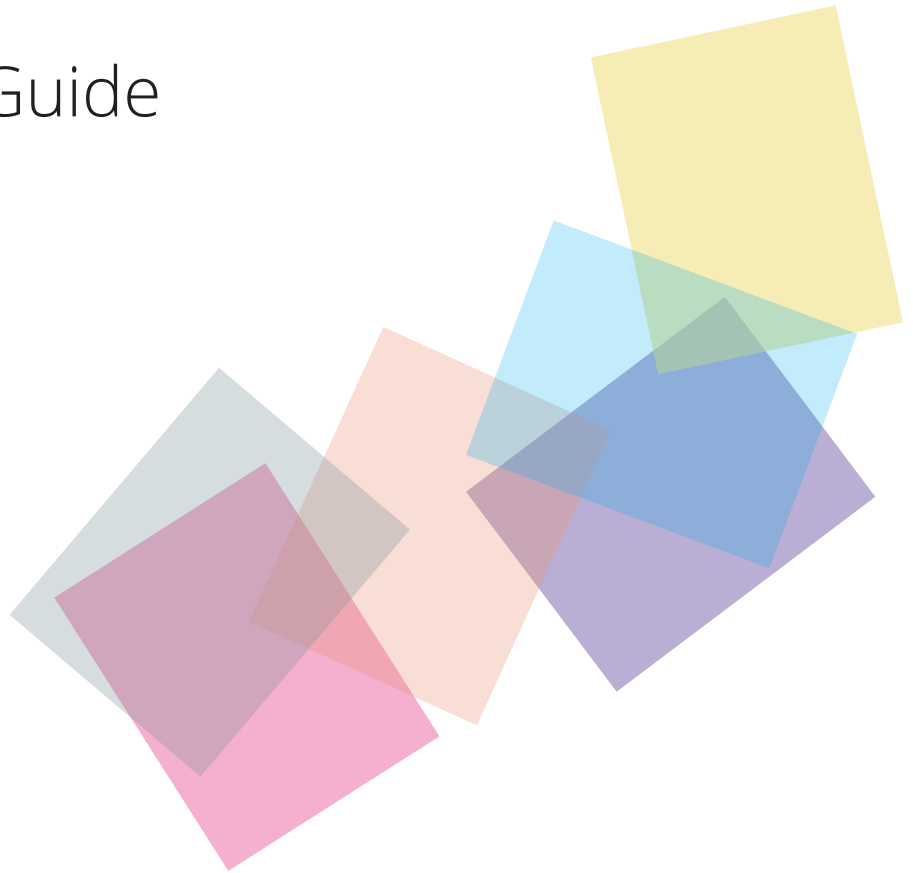
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Facilitator Guide



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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8.1 The Intro



Grade 8: 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
- encourage trust, teamwork, and collaboration within the class
- seek different opinions and answers over the right answer

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- numbers 1 to 40 (cut up separately)
- timer
- 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 try searching online for demonstrations of the activities.

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: Orange or Banana

Play a quick movement-based game called, “orange or banana.” The teacher will ask students a series of nonsensical choice questions, and students will move to one side of the circle or the other to indicate their choice. For example, are you an orange or a banana? When reading the options out teachers should indicate which side of the circle represents each option and students will move accordingly. Teachers can ask some students to explain their reasoning after each question.

Possible questions include:

- Are you a cat or a dog?
- Are you a orange or a banana?
- Are you a pickle or a cupcake?
- Are you a scarf or a hat?
- Are you a finger or a toe?
- Are you a Christmas tree or a jack-o-lantern?
- Are you summer or winter?
- Are you a pizza or a cheeseburger?



The goal of this activity is to get students comfortable with thinking about themselves and not seeking a right or wrong answer. This format is also common in the following lessons and is important to practice as many students may want to share their opinions.

Part 3: Key Punch

The teacher should lay out all of the numbers 1 to 40 within the circle. Numbers should be spread out evenly and face up. The teacher will explain to the students that as a class they need to touch each number from 1-40, in order, as fast as possible. Let them know you'll be timing their attempt and the group will be penalized 5 extra seconds any time numbers are touched out of order or if two numbers are touched at the same time. After the first round, ask them to strategize and try again. If a class is large, this activity will also work with two teams making attempts and competing against each other.

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

Part 4: Expectations

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 expectations, so highlight them in a way that makes the most sense for the class.

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

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8.2 Normalization Nation



Grade 8: Lesson 2—Normalization Nation

Outcome

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

Indicator

- Compare strategies for coping with pressures and difficult emotions.

Guiding Questions

- How can I be aware of the factors influencing my decisions about using substances?
- What social influences and/or pressures impact decisions to use or not use substances?
- How do health behaviours help in coping with stress, difficult situations, and emotions?

Student Goals

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

- describe the passive and active factors that influence someone to begin using substances in a problematic way
- define normalization and explain how it is seen in our cultural mindset on substance use in Nova Scotia

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Materials

- Normal/Abnormal slides
- Categories of Curiosity slides
- Use slides
- Migration slides
- Normalization Strategy slides

Facilitation Tip

Students may be tempted to exaggerate the level of involvement in Part One of this activity. Take their answers at face value: the conversation will still be helpful and by demonstrating you will respond to their input, students may be more likely to respond honestly next time.

Background

How do people move towards use of substances, and involvement in gaming and gambling, and then potentially to an unhealthy or risky level of use and involvement? There are many reasons, and this lesson will surface some of the passive and active dynamics that start people on a journey towards higher risk areas of substance use, gaming, and gambling. This lesson will also help students understand the idea of normalization and how it's an integral part of our culture of alcohol and other drugs, as well as the gaming and gambling industries.

Check-in

In the centre of the circle is a slide that says **NORMAL**. Ask the class for a volunteer to move to the slide and try to explain what normal means. Ask for feedback from the rest of the class in case someone has a different definition or may want to add to what has already been said. Turn over the slide so it says **ABNORMAL**, and repeat the activity, asking for volunteers to explain what it means.

After that's done, the teacher will ask for volunteers to answer the following question:

- Who decides what's normal or abnormal?

There's no need to agree on an answer, but let the circle know you'll come back to this activity later in the lesson.



Activity

Part 1

On the floor in the middle of the circle is a row of slides that represent a journey towards use or involvement:

- **No Interest** (zero interest in, for example, alcohol)
- **Curious** (it's on the radar, and you're wondering about it)
- **Try It** (you give it a try)
- **Go For It** (there's a pattern of use/involvement, but not risky)
- **I'm All In** (a line has been crossed and we have a challenge)

On one side of the line is a pile of "Use" slides—use of alcohol, involvement in gambling, etc., including a silly one, All-You-Can-Eat Buffets.

On the other side of the line is a pile of "Migration" slides—conditions that move people towards use or involvement.

Ask for a few volunteers to pick one of the Use slides for the activity. They may pick gambling, for example. Ask them to predict their journey before the end of high school by moving to stand on or near the slide that best represents where they'll be.

Next, flip over a few Migration slides and explain what they're up against in keeping their use in the lower risk areas. For example, "I've flipped over social media so maybe now you're opening Instagram and Snapchat and seeing ads for sports betting, as well as content showing your friends buying Pro-Lines."

Migration slides include:

- Advertising/Marketing
- Social Media
- Family Influence
- Peer Influence
- Pop Culture Influence
- Loneliness
- Boredom
- Trauma
- Attention Seeking
- Tradition/Ritual

Ask for more volunteers to do the same with a different Use slide. Repeat until all the Use slides have been used. Make sure to cover all of the migration slides at some point in the activity as well. Remember to invite the students to offer up other ideas for the migration slides.

Ask if there were any surprises in what they observed—and if there are any migration slides that seem to stand out as the most powerful.

Part 2

Remind the students that the lesson started with a conversation about normal and abnormal, and who decides for us what they mean.

Introduce the idea of normalization, and that all the substances/behaviours used in the previous activity are connected to industries that need customers. Explain that one of the tactics that helps them make money is making it seem like people are ABNORMAL if they're not using or involved. And more NORMAL if they're using or involved.

Lay down the normalization slides and ask for volunteers to point to one that they've noticed, but potentially never really considered an intentional strategy.

Normalization slides include:

- Naming a hockey team after a beer
- Covering the inside of a hockey rink with beer advertising
- Giant alcohol bottle balloons
- Gambling sites sponsoring sports on TV
- Festival sponsorship by alcohol industry
- Liquor stores attached to grocery stores

Ask the class if they can identify something either in the community or online that might be intentionally trying to normalize something that could be unhealthy for them. Allow time for multiple students to answer and prompt volunteers to explain their thinking.

Explain that even when people are using or involved in something that can be unhealthy to cope, there can also be a normalization aspect to the use or involvement. For example, there are lots of messages out there saying if we're down, drinking is a normal way of dealing with the emotion.

End the lesson by reminding the class about balance. The discussion isn't about saying never to use a substance or never to game/gamble, but to remind ourselves about levels of risk, and what's behind our use or involvement with something like gaming and gambling.



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

- Normalization can also be used to promote healthy habits. Ask the class to research how decisions like smoke-free areas, raising prices on cigarettes and health education campaigns contributed to declining smoking rates in Canada.

NORMAL

**NOT
NORMAL**

No Interest

Curious

Try It

Go For It

I'm All In

All-You-Can- Eat Buffets

Alcohol

Smoking

Vaping

Cannabis Use

Gaming

Gambling

Energy Drinks

Advertising & Marketing

Social Media

Family Influence

Peer Influence

Pop Culture Influence

Loneliness

Boredom

Trauma

Attention Seeking

Tradition/ Ritual

Naming a
hockey team
after a beer

Covering the
inside of a
hockey rink
with beer
advertising

Giant alcohol

bottle

balloons

Gambling
sites
sponsoring
sports on TV

Festival
**sponsorship
by alcohol
industry**

Liquor stores

attached to

grocery

stores

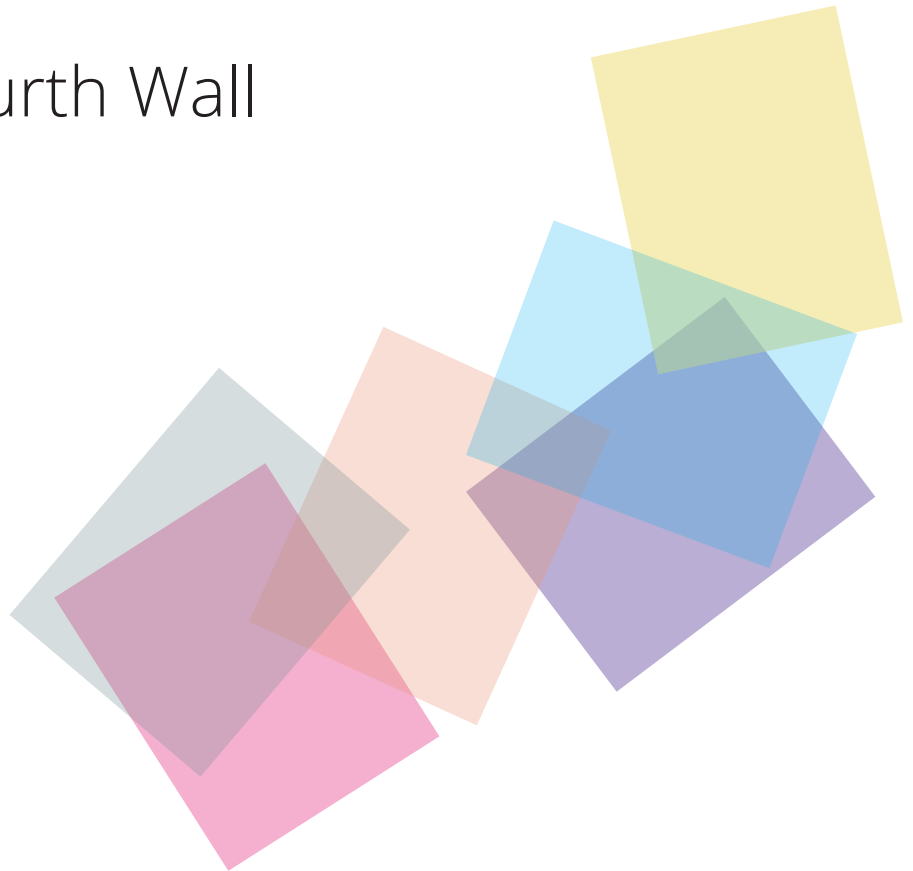
**Alcohol
advertising
on patio
umbrellas**

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resource

8.3 The Fourth Wall



Grade 8: Lesson 3—The Fourth Wall

Outcome

- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Indicator

- Formulate strategies for confronting social influences and pressures to use substances.

Guiding Question

- How does media influence the perception and culture of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, and other substance use?

Student Goals

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

- describe different tactics used to discourage substance use over time and discuss which are the most effective
- demonstrate media literacy skills by discussing how companies sell to consumers using manipulative tactics

Estimated Time: 1 hour

Materials

- chairs in a circle
- Prevention and Health Promotion Tactics slides
- Part Two slides
- Moment of Truth slide

Facilitation Tips

- Think ahead of time about what sort of language you are comfortable with. When young people are talking about their own experiences and expressing themselves it is important to allow them to use the language that they are comfortable with, as long as it remains respectful.
- Try to sit near the quieter students in the circle, often they will participate by sharing some thoughts directly with you.
- This lesson requires students not just to share personal opinions but to think creatively about media and advertisements. It may take some time for them to share, which can feel especially long when sitting in a circle. Allow for pauses and space for thought and challenge yourself to wait a few more seconds when you want to jump in!

Background

This lesson offers two big concepts for students. First a look at best practices around knowledge transfer, attitude change, and behaviour change. Giving students a look at an evidence-based practice to help them achieve better health outcomes, including a look (in a humorous way) at the ineffective practices that are often used with youth. Next is an advertising/marketing 101 giving them some foundational tools around media literacy so they'll know what's being sold to them, and how it's being sold to them, and what sorts of skills are needed to resist a well-funded and science-based campaign to get us to use something more.

Check-in

Invite as many people as possible to share an advertising/marketing campaign they admit was kind of cool. Bonus points if there's something to act out inside the circle.



Activity

Part 1

Inside the circle are six slides. Three of these slides are examples of past health promotion campaigns. The other three slides are common health promotion strategies used by public health and/or organizations.

- **Just Say No** (part of an 80s anti-drug campaign spearheaded by US First Lady, Nancy Reagan)
- **This is Your Brain on Drugs** (another 80s anti-drug campaign with two eggs frying in a pan)
- **Safer Sex is Hot Sex** (90s HIV prevention campaign)

Individual responsibility: Just Say No was based on the idea that if you simply tell people not to do something that's unhealthy they will change their behaviour. It's not an effective strategy.

Scare Tactics: This is Your Brain on Drugs is a scare tactic, which some people still believe will shift attitudes and change behaviours by creating fear. Scare tactics rarely work.

Harm Reduction: Safer Sex is Hot Sex is an example of a harm reduction campaign during the AIDS epidemic. Early strategies asked vulnerable populations to stop having sex and there was no impact on infection rates. Harm reduction strategies were later used with better outcomes - we know you're having sex, so let's talk about how you can have safer sex and prevent the risk of infection. The strategy helped bring down infection rates.

It's the harm reduction strategy that we want to take a closer look at, and here's a less technical definition than the one in the facilitator guide for the youth to hear before moving on:

We know some of you may be using alcohol or other drugs. We know you may be gaming or gambling in ways that can be harmful. We're not here to judge, but to pass along some information that can help with your decision making, and encourage you to think about what you're doing and why, and to feel comfortable talking to a safe adult in the school if deep down inside you may not be comfortable with what you're doing. We care about you and we're always here to help.



Look to the class for their opinions regarding the strategies by asking for some volunteers to move to one of the strategy slides in response to these prompts:

- It makes sense that this strategy is better, and explain why.
- It makes sense that this strategy isn't very effective, and explain why.
- I see this strategy used a lot. How does that make you feel?
- I don't see this strategy used a lot. How does that make you feel?

We want students to be able to figure out what tactics are being used in different types of health promotion strategies, and to help them consider how effective each type is in transferring knowledge, raising awareness, shifting attitudes, and changing behaviours. Ultimately there's a desire to explain how tough behaviour change is—especially if a single tactic is used.

Part 2 : Refusal Skills

Now that students can appreciate which health promotion strategies are most effective there's a chance to look at the tactics and strategies in advertising and marketing.

Open up the second part of this activity by briefly explaining advertising/marketing in all its diversity, from beer advertising in hockey rinks, to an Omega watch on the wrist of James Bond.

Advertising and marketing are the ways industries get us interested in stuff, whether it's food, clothes, traveling somewhere, and hopefully spending money to do it. Advertising is all about the commercials we see, like the 10-second ads before a YouTube video. Or a billboard on a road. Marketing can be many things, but today we often see social media influencers wearing a brand of clothing, or a RedBull car showing up at a festival handing out free cans of the product.

It's not so important to know the differences between the two, but more important to know the companies are very good at making people:

- interested in and wanting a product or service
- spend money on that product or service
- feel a bit abnormal, stressed, or left out if they can't have a certain product or service

See if youth in the group can recall the last time they saw some advertising/marketing and where it was and how it made them feel (thinking about the list above).



The next activity gets the group to throw out ideas for how to get youth their age to smoke/vape/game/gamble/use substances by thinking of sneaky ways to draw them into use. For the purposes of this activity the students will be focused on making money without regard for safety or public health. Start with video games and alcohol—what techniques would you use to manipulate youth into thinking they should try or must try?

On the floor in the middle of the circle are three slides labelled:

- **Mildly Evil**
- **Moderately Evil**
- **Very Evil**

Think about:

- How do you make kids/youth curious about (this substance or behaviour)?
- Where is the best place to advertise and market to kids/youth?
- Are all kids/youth the same? How do you advertise/market to diverse kids/youth?

As ideas are thrown out, ask the volunteer to move to the category of evilness of the tactic, and see if the group agrees.

Close by checking in on how they're feeling about their strategy:

- I want to puke I'm so disgusted with myself.
- I'm totally proud of my creativity!
- I'm not sure what to think.

Feel free to ask youth to elaborate on where they placed themselves.

Part Three (optional)

If there's time, place a slide in the middle of the circle labelled: **Moment of Truth**.

If you were in charge of advertising and marketing yourself, your personal brand, what tactics would you use? If youth are feeling safe, ask them if they are unconsciously advertising or marketing themselves already in the way they act in person or online—and, if comfortable, to stand on the slide and explain how they're doing it.

Suggestions may include the clothes they wear, the stuff they're involved in, for example:

- I want to be known as an athlete.
- I want people to think I'm cool.
- I want people to think I have money.
- I want people to think I'm different.
- I want people to think I'm sexy.
- I want people to think I'm smart.

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

Challenge students to take pictures (or make note) of alcohol advertisements they see in their community and pay attention to the location. They could also look at what sorts of businesses are around the local NSLCs, Cannabis or vape shops in their community. Are any of them near schools or child care centres? Collect the images and observations of the students and look for trends in alcohol, cannabis and vape advertisements. Pretend they are in charge and create some guidelines for how and where these substances should be advertised. If they notice anything very inappropriate, teach them how to advocate for change by reaching out to a local MLA or City Councillor.

Just

say no

This is **your**
brain
on drugs

Safer sex
is hot sex

Scare Tactics

Harm Reduction

Individual Responsibility

**I want to
puke**

I'm so

**disgusted
with myself.**

**I'm totally
proud of
my creativity!**

I'm not sure
what to think.

Mildly Evil

**Moderately
Evil**

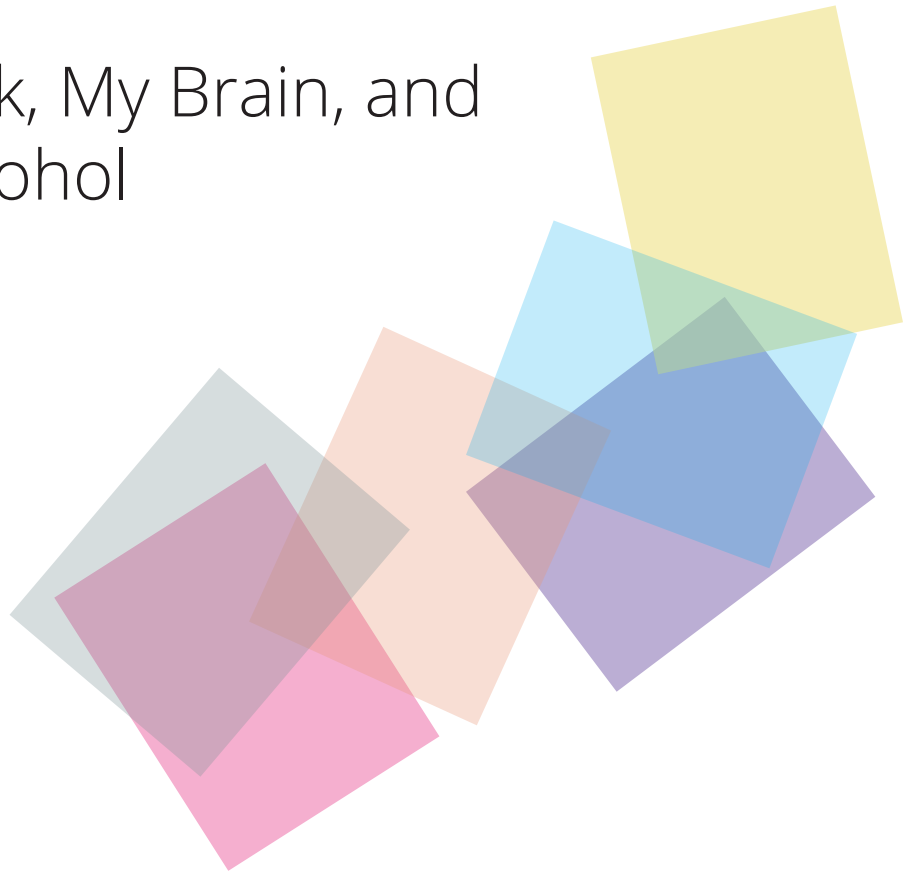
Very Evil

Moment of Truth

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8.4 My Back, My Brain, and All That Alcohol



Grade 8: Lesson 4—My Back, My Brain, and All That Alcohol

Outcome

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

Indicator

- Investigate injuries related to substance misuse.

Guiding Questions

- How can I protect my brain against injury?
- What strategies do I need to use to be safe in a social setting with people I don't know?

Student Goals

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

- compare their daily processes through role-playing pre- and post-spinal cord injury scenarios
- investigate their decision making when weighing factors related to risk versus safety

Estimated Time: 1 hour

Materials

- one pair of pajama pants (size XL is helpful)
- one catheter (optional, but easily donated by a local hospital or long-term care facility)
- Age Range slides (10-20)

Facilitation Tips

- This lesson has the potential to trigger strong emotions in some students who may know someone who has a brain or spinal cord injury. It's important to have staff available after the session ends if youth wish to talk.
- Discussion during Part 2 can get heated. Remind students about the importance of listening to each other's perspectives.

Background

Brain and spinal cord injuries are devastating for everyone, but especially emotional for children and youth who are beginning their lives and moving through many new experiences, especially during adolescence. The first part of the lesson will help youth understand the mechanics and some of the consequences of these injuries. Part two involves an activity called Angels and Demons; students will be presented with a scenario where they are challenged to find ways to increase risk of injury as well as find ways to mitigate the risk of injury.

Note: While spinal cord and brain injuries can dramatically impact a person's life, they do not always end life. They are devastating, but many people with brain and spinal cord injuries can continue to function and do many of the activities they did pre-injury.

Check-in

Option 1: Ask five students if they are brave enough to demonstrate a few dance moves in the middle of the circle. They can do it together, or one-by-one. Ask everyone to rank them best to fifth best. We'll come back to the dance moves later in the lesson.

Option 2: Using the age range slides, ask everyone to move to the age/age range when:

- it's okay to go to a friend's house for a sleepover (parents are home)
- it's okay to go to a friend's house for a party (parents are home)
- it's okay to go to a friend's cottage with adult supervision
- it's okay to go to a friend's cottage without adult supervision
- it's okay to go a friend's house for a party (parents are not home)
- it's okay to go to a friend's house for a sleepover (no adult supervision)

During the process ask students to explain their rationale, and allow time for students to develop their arguments.



Activity

Part 1

Explain that we're going to talk about brain injuries and spinal cord injuries: **these types of injuries are very serious because the consequences can last a lifetime. While a muscle injury or broken bone may heal, it's not necessarily the same for the brain or spine.**

Brain Injury

Ask a student to stand up (if possible) and place their hand on their forehead, explaining that an injury in this area can impact personality. Ask the student to touch the sides of their head (the temples), explaining that an injury in this area can impact reading, writing, and speech. Ask the student to touch the back of their head, explaining that an injury here can impact vision. Ask the student to touch the top of their head, explaining that an injury here can impact a person's control over their body. Finally, explain that some injuries to the brain can be so severe that the person can die or lose their ability to breathe on their own. Conclude this quick explanation about brain injury with a simple reminder that many brain injuries can be prevented by wearing the right gear (like a helmet), and when we try risky activities to make sure we've been trained and to do them sober.

The brain controls much of what happens with our bodies, and when it's injured there are immediate changes depending on the part of the brain that is hurt. The spinal cord is attached to the brain and when it's injured it impacts our ability to move parts of the body, as well as other functions.

Spinal Cord Injury

Ask a volunteer in the circle how many seconds it takes them to put their jeans on in the morning, and then have them demonstrate by watching them put on a pair of oversized pajama pants over their jeans with their shoes on or off. You'll need one volunteer with a phone to be a timer. This usually takes a few seconds.



Ask the class if they've ever heard the word **paraplegia** before, and if anyone can explain what it means.

Paraplegia is paralysis of the lower body, usually caused by spinal cord injury. While some people with paraplegia have little or no movement from the chest down, they most often have little or no movement from their waist down.

This time ask the same volunteer to put on the pants without moving their legs (unless they lift their legs with their arms). Be strict on this rule. The rest of the class may give them hints if they're struggling, but also must catch them if they see legs/feet moving on their own.

Time the student again, with the reminder that certain muscles are no longer working. They must lift a leg to move it.

Ask the class if they've ever heard the term **quadriplegia** before, and if anyone can explain what it means.

Quadriplegia is paralysis of the body from the neck down, usually caused by spinal cord injury.

Using the volunteer timer again, see how long it takes to put the pajamas on with that injury. It will be impossible, so after a few 15 or 20 seconds let the students know that there are three special guests in the circle—a parent of the quadriplegic, an older sibling, and a younger sibling. The parent and siblings must help get the child/sibling get dressed. Make sure to keep timing.

Getting dressed is not the only challenge for someone with a spinal cord injury. Basic movements, like getting up off the ground and into a chair can be a big challenge. Ask for a volunteer to lie down on the ground as someone with paraplegia and tell them to get into a chair without using their legs and without help from their peers. You will need a student to hold on to a chair while they do this. Other students may also want to try.

Paraplegia is paralysis of the lower body, usually caused by spinal cord injury. While some people with paraplegia have little or no movement from the chest down, they most often have little or no movement from their waist down.

Quadriplegia is paralysis of the body from the neck down, usually caused by spinal cord injury.



Follow-up with a few short questions for the volunteers:

- Ask the youth playing the parent how they would feel mentally and emotionally and how their life would change.
- Ask the youth playing siblings how their lives would change.
- Pick someone in the circle and tell them they're the injured student's best friend, and discuss how the friendship would change, including how often they would see them.
- Pick someone else in the circle (the gender doesn't matter) and tell them they're in a relationship with the injured student. Would they stay or leave?

Finally, ask the group what else they would have to do for the injured youth each day to get them to school besides getting dressed, for example, getting fed, getting showered/washed. Don't forget having to go to the bathroom. If there's time, you can show students a catheter and explain that many people (of all genders) will require a catheter if they're seriously injured. The catheter is inserted into the urethra for urine to drain out of the body. For spinal cord injured patients, and some brain injured patients, a catheter is something they will need for the rest of their lives.

So where do spinal cord and brain injuries occur? Lots of places, but sometimes at parties, and quite often when alcohol and other drugs are involved. Something we'll explore in the next activity.

Part 2: Angels and Demons

Everyone in the circle is going to learn about a party this weekend at a friend's cabin on a lake without any adult supervision. Everyone can choose to play a role either as an Angel (someone who helps prevent injuries and protect people and themselves) or as a Demon (someone who wants to increase the risk of injury). By the way, it's a party for junior high/middle school students who are graduating and going on to high school, and it's the last week of June.

Describe the party:

A guy in school has a lakefront cabin in the woods about an hour from town. 25 people have been invited for a Saturday night party, either staying inside the cabin or tenting outside. They've requested no alcohol or other drugs—just non-alcoholic drinks and food for the bbq.

News of the party is traveling around, so many more people will show up. They're bringing alcohol and other drugs, and one of them is bringing a drug to put in people's drinks to make them pass out.

NOTE: an opportunity to make the point that these drugs exist, but the drink itself is a concern too.

The shed has canoes, lots of tire tubes, and a crate full of fireworks. There's also a big fire pit for bonfires. There's no beach (that's a five minute boat ride away), just a dock with a motorboat.

The guy hosting the party has invited a friend of his older brother to come DJ in exchange for food and use of the cottage for a few days after the party.

Two friends of the DJ are also coming (uninvited). One of them is bringing alcohol and weed for himself and anyone else who wants to join in. The other is bringing his gear to make a video of the party.

Take five minutes to get some ideas rolling from the class about increasing or decreasing risk. Ask students to put their hands up and introduce themselves either as an angel or demon and note their suggestion. Check in with the class quickly to see if folks agree that risk is increased or decreased.

Next, on the floor will be questions for anyone to answer:

- Would you want to be at the party, and why?
- Who do you think wins, the angels or demons, and why?
- Would you want your own children (in the future) going to the same party? If not, why?
- Do you think gender plays a role in how likely we are to be an angel or a demon, and why?

Finally, ask everyone to participate in this last part (if comfortable):

- In this activity, demons are interested in making life riskier for themselves and others. Angels are more interested in making life safer for themselves and others.
- Without judging each other, stand up or raise your hand if you think you're more of a demon than an angel.
- Without judging each other, stand up or raise your hand if you think you're more of an angel than a demon.

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 a reflection based on this activity: what is a real-life situation that you can help make safer so that you can have fun without risking injury? What can you do to reduce the risk of injury?

10

12

14

16

18

20

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8.5 Balance



Grade 8: Lesson 5—Balance

Outcome

- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Indicator

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

Guiding Question

- How do I know if a way of coping is healthy?

Student Goals

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

- describe signs of problematic substance use and gambling
- reflect on strategies to access support and to be a supportive peer

Estimated Time: 1 hour

Materials

- Too Much! slide
- Risk Activity slides (printed double-sided)
- Levels of Risk slides

Facilitation Tip

- While this activity has some silly elements, conversations about substance use always come with the potential for disclosures about students' or their families' histories. Remind students about the limits of confidentiality and be prepared to support students who might make a disclosure.

Background

We want youth to consider how much of something is too much through a variety of perspectives while building some literacy around risk when it comes to substances, gaming, and gambling. The key awareness pieces we want to surface with students include:

- There can be risks involved with doing too much of something.
- There are ways to recognize when you or someone else is doing too much of something.
- There are categories of risk, for example, no risk, low risk and high risk, as well as associated consequences.

We also want to reinforce knowledge about dependency and what it means to go beyond use to a place where you lose some or all control over what you do with a substance or gaming and gambling.

The conversation will end with a closing point about normal and normalization.

Check-in

A few minutes of Simon Says.

Activity

Part 1

Lay down the Too Much! slide in the middle of the floor, surrounded by a bunch of slides turned over, with eight labelled SERIOUS and three labelled SILLY. The class will work through the silly slides first, with each one—when turned over—presenting a challenge to the class about how to tell when someone is doing too much of something.

We want everyone to think about what signs or signals there may be of unhealthy use and when someone might be having a tough time because of their patterns of use. What would we observe in ourselves? What would we observe in others?

The SILLY:

- Singing Karaoke
- Collecting Hamsters
- Cartwheels



Here's an example: When you wake up and there are hamsters in the bed with you, it might be a sign there's too much collecting hamsters going on! For someone else, maybe you notice they have HAMSTER BREATH!

The SERIOUS:

- drinking alcohol
- using cannabis
- gaming
- cigarettes
- vaping
- gambling
- energy drinks
- prescription drugs

Here's an example: When you can't get to sleep at night maybe you're having too many energy drinks. When a good friend has started drinking every day and posting videos of him drinking alone, maybe that's a signal you should worry about them.

Part 2

Keep the Serious Risk Activity slides on the floor and lay down the four Risk Level slides:

- No Risk
- Low Risk
- Medium Risk
- High Risk

These slides are meant to illustrate higher risks to our health.

We want everyone to understand that with substance use, as well as gaming and gambling, the risk to our health is not always black and white. There is generally a rising scale of risk to our health when we do something more frequently.

For example, any amount of tobacco can cause harm, but when tobacco is used in traditional ceremonies and other rituals we don't think of it as unbalanced or high risk.

For another substance, alcohol, there is a lot of evidence of increased risk with increased use of the drug.

For every substance/activity on the floor there is a connection between how much and how frequently we use or are involved with it, and teachers are happy to connect any student with a professional to know more.

Before checking out, take a moment to explain the difference between using too much vs. dependency and addiction.

Using too much example: A person may enjoy playing the latest popular video game. They play it a lot, but could stop playing it they felt like it. It could be a challenge, but they could eventually find ways to move from playing it too much to enjoying it a little bit. To stop the habit of playing a video game too much, a person can usually replace the habit with a healthier activity or pass time on their own.

Substance use disorder example: Unlike playing too much of a favourite video game because it has become a habit, when a person has a substance use disorder, something can change in the brain (alters physiology, mood, etc.) and the person must have that substance or they may feel sick, both physically and mentally. To stop this “dependency,” a person will usually need support and treatment.

Can you think of a habit that you in your life that feels a little too much that would be a challenge to change, but you could do it without treatment?

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 reflect on the co-use of substances and behaviours listed in this activity. Imagine you or a peer were engaged with 3 or 4 of these that, when taken as a whole, combined to a significant frequency. How would you know when to look for support?

Silly

Singing Karaoke

Silly

Collecting Hamsters

Silly

Cartwheels

Serious

Drinking Alcohol

Serious

Using Cannabis

Serious

Gaming

Serious

Cigarettes

Serious

Vaping

Serious

Gambling

Serious

Energy Drinks

Serious

Prescription Drugs

Too Much!

No Risk

Low Risk

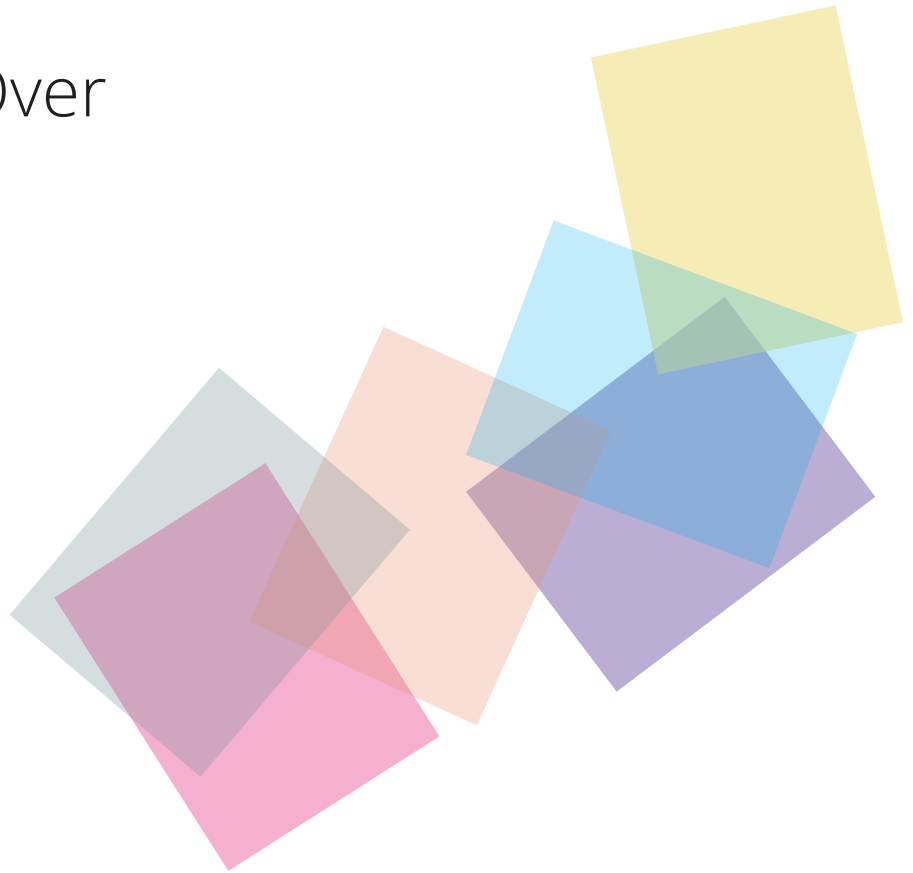
Medium Risk

High Risk

From the Ground Up

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

8.6 Move Over



Grade 8: Lesson 6—Move Over

Outcome

- Learners will reflect on the impact of substance misuse on adolescent health.

Indicators

- Formulate strategies for confronting social influences and pressures to use substances.
- Compare strategies for coping with pressures and difficult emotions.

Guiding Question

- How can social pressures play a role in adolescent substance use?

Student Goals

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

- describe what factors in their lives create a protective forcefield around them and reflect on areas they may want to improve upon
- describe what the enabling factors in their lives and community are and consider their impacts
- describe the role of the government and industry in enabling substance use for Nova Scotians, both of drinking age and below drinking age

Estimated Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Materials

- Alcohol Land slides
- Forcefield slides
- Enabling slides
- Government Action slides

Facilitation Tips

- There is a lot of information contained in this lesson. Don't worry if you forget to say everything written in this guide or if the students ask questions you don't know the answer to. The experience is where the learning is, and it can be valuable for you to say you don't know something and will look it up and find the answer.
- Remind students about school support staff and the option to take a break if the discussion becomes too personal or intense.
- Students may become a little silly with the jumping activity. That's okay! It is probably a good idea to have a few more slides ready in case anyone can really jump over all seven slides.

Background

This lesson precedes the Grade 9 lesson Drug Land, and is designed to help identify the factors that help build a forcefield around youth to better protect them from misusing alcohol. While alcohol is the focus drug of the lesson, there is time to see how the forcefield idea applies to other substances, as well as gaming and gambling.

Check-in

Ask if there's a volunteer who's up for a quick stealth challenge—if they're okay being transported to the opposite side of the circle by two friends who will ask permission to each hold on to an elbow and shoulder and as quietly as possible move them a couple of metres to the other side. It should be done so quietly that you could hear a pin drop on the floor.

Ask if there's a new volunteer for a second stealth challenge. This time the volunteer stays in their chair, and four friends will each take a corner of the chair and transport them as quietly as possible to the opposite side of the circle. Again, this is a stealth challenge, so you should be able to hear a pin drop.

Do a quick round of applause for the volunteers and the stealth teams, and let everyone know we'll come back to this activity at the end of the lesson.



Activity

Part 1

On the floor on one side of the circle are two areas created from the Alcohol Land slides with a space in between. In area one, lay down the Social Drinker and Weekend drinker slides—this is the lower risk area with adults consuming no more than two drinks each week. In area two, lay down the Regular Drinker and Regularly Trashed slides—this is the higher risk area with adults consuming seven drinks or more each week (one each day; or binge drinking which is five to six drinks within a few hours).

In area one, you are likely to avoid alcohol-related consequences for yourself. In area two, your risk of developing several types of cancer, heart disease, and stroke increase significantly.

The risk levels are based on evidence from the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction ([ccsa.ca](https://www.ccsa.ca)) in their newly released [Canada's Guidance on Alcohol and Health](#).

Briefly explain the categories:

- **Social Drinker:** You're having a drink a few times each year, like a birthday or other celebration.
- **Weekend Drinker:** You're having a couple of drinks on the weekend, for example, watching a hockey game with friends, but you're not getting drunk. For some, the two drinks may happen during the weekday.
- **Regular Drinker:** You're drinking every day, but not getting drunk, for example, having a beer or glass of wine with supper.
- **Regularly Trashed:** You're getting drunk every weekend, for example, binge drinking on a Saturday night.
- **Non-drinker:** Lay down the "Non-drinker" slide off to the side and share with the class that before we begin the activity, I want to say that many youth and adults alike are in a no risk category and that is non-drinker. This might be you, and this might be some or all of the adults in your life. A person may choose to be a non-drinker for lots of reasons.

Ask for a couple of volunteers (up to four, if you wish) for the first part of the activity.

Tell the volunteers that their relationship with alcohol can take them to different places in their lives. Public health experts want people to be in the lower risk area, because that means a healthier population. **We know that when it comes to alcohol, less is better. Any reduction in alcohol use has benefits.** The alcohol industry makes money from alcohol sales, so it's interested in selling as much product as possible.

From here on, you'll be laying down Enabling Factor slides in a column, starting from the higher area and moving toward the lower risk. As each slide goes down, explain what the enabling factor means and ask a volunteer if it may influence them to start drinking or drink more. If they think they have the strength or forcefield to prevent the enabling factor from influencing them, if they can resist, ask them to jump over the slide.

This may sound silly at first, one slide is small, but ask for patience to see what happens.

Repeat with another slide added now, quickly explaining how the enabling factor may influence drinking patterns, but if the force fields are strong enough they might overcome the enabling factor. Once again, if they think they can resist, jump over both slides now.

As the jumps get bigger so is the challenge to reach the lower risk area of drinking. See the table below for help explaining each enabling factor.

The enabling slides that will challenge their navigation include:

- **Peer Pressure:** Can they withstand peer pressure?
- **Advertising and Marketing:** Can they ignore advertising and marketing?
- **Access:** Can they ignore the fact that there's a place to buy alcohol minutes from where they live?
- **Social Norms:** Can they ignore the feeling that their friends may be drinking, and feel comfortable not drinking?
- **Alcohol to Cope:** Can they find healthier ways to cope with stuff, rather than alcohol?
- **Cultural Influences:** Can they resist or moderate those cultural influences around alcohol?
- **Biology/Family History:** Do they understand that biology and family history is not fate, that their drinking patterns can be very different?
- **Dependence:** Can they get support and treatment for their dependence (previously referred to as alcoholism/alcoholic)?



Peer Pressure	Sometimes friends influence you to start drinking or drink more than you want.
Advertising and Marketing	Companies spend money on effective strategies to get people to start drinking and drink more.
Access	We know that the more places there are to buy alcohol, the more likely children and youth will have access to alcohol.
Social Norms	Lots of young people “think” most of their friends are drinking, and feel abnormal if they’re not, and so they start; even though in reality most of their friends are not drinking.
Alcohol to Cope	Everyone has lousy stuff to deal with, and hopefully we have support and healthy ways to cope, but sometimes youth and adults use alcohol as a way to cope with tough stuff.
Cultural Influences	Sometimes the pressure to drink doesn’t come from friends, but from inside a culture where it’s traditional for families to drink together.
Biology/Family History	Sometimes we may be at risk of drinking more because of addiction in families, which can be family history or partially genetic.
Dependence	Some youth begin drinking at an early age, and can develop a dependency on alcohol.

By the end of the exercise, it will be apparent that it’s impossible to step over or even jump over all eight of the enablers (or at least very challenging).

The main point is that the challenge to get to a lower risk area gets tougher when more of the enabling factors are at play in your life. The jump to the lower risk area becomes much more challenging.

There's good news though. Think about jumping over a mud puddle. A small one is easy, but a bigger mud puddle is more challenging, unless you can jump on some rocks and branches to help get across. Just like rocks and branches in a big mud puddle, there are protective factors that build a force field around us and help us move over to the lower risk area—and stay there from the get-go. One-by-one, insert protective factor slides in between the enabling slides so that students can navigate their way to the lower risk area by stepping on the forcefield slides. Those protective factors include:

- **Knowing who you are and being yourself:** Be the person you want to be with alcohol.
- **Help-seeking:** If you're concerned about your drinking or being pressured to drink, ask for help.
- **Understanding advertising and marketing:** The alcohol industry's main goal is making money. Learn the tactics the industry uses to influence people to drink.
- **Refusal skills:** Becoming comfortable saying no takes practice.
- **Normalize not drinking:** Be comfortable sharing that you don't want to drink, and don't need to drink.
- **Supportive social environment:** Do your friends encourage you to drink? Do they support you not drinking?
- **Healthy coping strategies:** If you're having a tough time do you have healthy ways to cope and safe people to talk to?

After the volunteers move across the circle to the lower risk area, thank them for helping and have them sit down before asking a few questions to everyone in the circle.

- Would anyone feel comfortable disclosing which of the enabling factors they think will be the biggest challenges for them, now and into the future? Remember, no pressure to share.
- Does anyone feel like they already have parts of the force field as described in the slides, or think there are some force field slides they need to work on?
- Do you need every piece of the force field, or is there a combination of one or two that would be most effective for you?



Part 2

Check in and see if they see similarities in how youth may protect themselves from the risky use of other substances, and not developing an addiction to gaming/gambling. For vaping, tobacco, cannabis, gaming, and gambling:

- What's the same?
- What's different?

Before ending the session, let the students know that there's a measure of unfairness in asking youth to navigate all the challenges alone, and governments can change the conditions around kids and adults that make it less likely they'll use substances. Lay down the following slides showing ways a government could help:

- **Fewer places to buy alcohol**—limiting access makes it more difficult for youth to access alcohol
- **Restrictions on advertising and marketing**—limiting when, where and how alcohol is advertised reduces the chances young people will be influenced by advertising
- **Price/taxation**—raising the price of alcohol can reduce consumption
- **Enforcement of age restrictions**—alcohol can have harmful effects on the developing brain and enforcement is often ignored

A final message to students. Remember the stealth challenge at the beginning? No matter how hard the alcohol industry tries to pressure us to drink, or whatever pressures we may feel to drink, there is always the power—in ourselves and with the support of our friends—to resist and move to lower risk areas, and not be what the industry wants us to be.

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

- Display the forcefield slides on the board and have everyone participate in a reflection activity individually. They can select one of the forcefield slides that they feel they already have and the one that they would like to work on. Provide students with step-by-step goal setting templates to explore how they can develop this protective factor by breaking it down into smaller, more attainable steps.
- Through this lesson hopefully the students have seen that the factors that contribute to someone using substances are complex and sometimes out of their control. Share with the students some community agencies and government programs that offer help to people with substance use challenges. An internet search or speaking with someone from Mental Health and Addictions will provide this information. You could also arrange a guest speaker with first-hand experience supporting people with substance use challenges.

Social Drinker

Weekend Drinker

Regular
Drinker

**Regularly
Trashed**

Non-drinker

Peer Pressure

Advertising and Marketing

Access

Social Norms

Alcohol to Cope

Cultural Influences

Biology/ Family History

Addiction

Knowing
who you are
and being
yourself

Help-seeking

Understanding advertising and marketing

Refusal skills

**Supportive
social
environment**

**Normalize
not drinking**

Healthy coping strategies

**Fewer places
to buy alcohol**

Restrictions on advertising and marketing

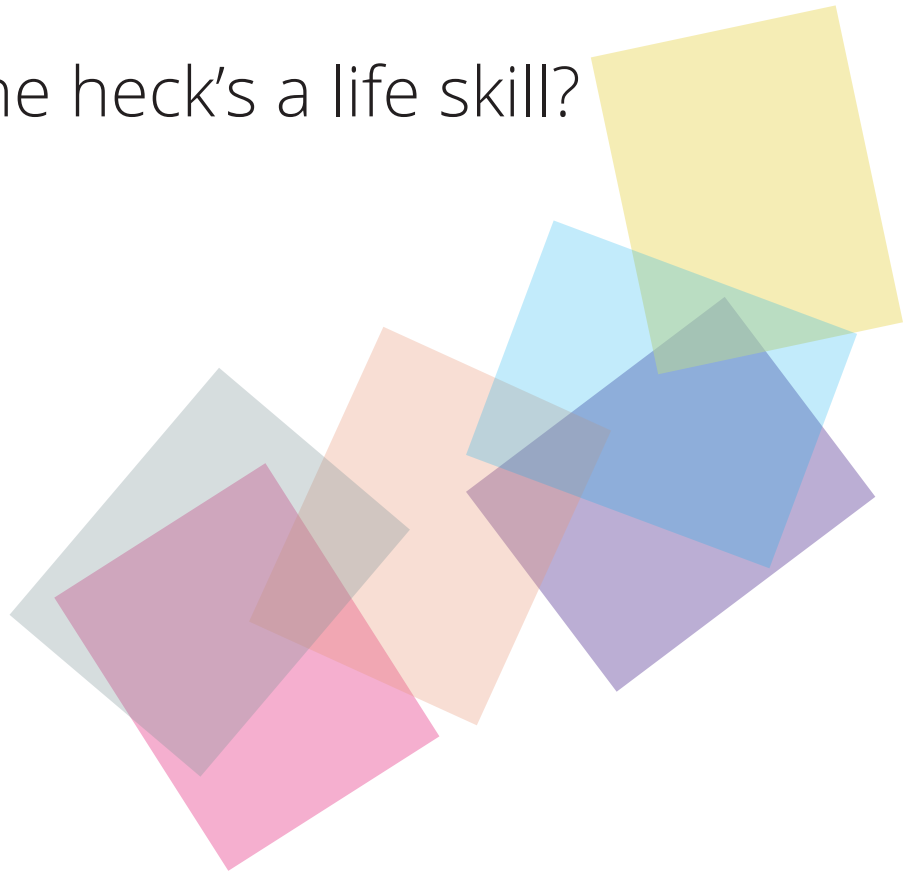
Price/ taxation

Enforcement of age restrictions

From the Ground Up

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

8.7 What the heck's a life skill?



Grade 8: Lesson 7—What the heck’s a life skill?

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 Questions

- What leisure activities enhance a sense of well-being in my life?
- How can I cope with and manage difficult emotions to keep relationships in my life healthy?

Student Goals

By the end of the lesson students should be able to

- differentiate between different types of coping strategies (healthy, unhealthy, distraction)
- reflect on their own life skills and coping strategies and areas that need more personal development
- draw a connection between these specific skill sets and challenging times in their life and reflect on how these personal strategies helped them

Estimated Time: 1 hour

Materials

- Coping Strategy slides
- Coping Category slides
- Other Life Skill slides

Facilitation Tips

- 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.
- When students disclose something vulnerable/personal to the class it is often appropriate to note it; thanking them for their contribution, mentioning their bravery, and/or letting them know that if they ever need help you are someone they can come to.
- This activity relies on the class listening and also helping a single peer volunteer. Remind the class about expectations of sharing the space and talking over one another whenever you feel it is appropriate. This is a skill they are learning as well!

Background

The World Health Organization has identified core life skills that help people navigate new and ongoing challenges in their lives. The lesson will focus on one of those skills—coping with stress and emotion—and naming the others and how they’re connected through the lens of substance use and problem gaming and gambling.

The more core life skills a person has, the more successful they’ll be at predicting situations that may impact their health in negative ways and explore alternatives, or better manage situations in the moment that may impact their health in negative ways.

Today’s lesson will give students a chance to sort through activities that youth and many adults do when they’re stressed or emotional and identify which ones are used to distract/ignore the issue, which ones are unhealthy and can make the situation worse, and which ones are healthy and help build resilience and improve the situation.

There’s also time to consider empathy, and that some people have fewer options with their coping skills because of conditions in their lives.

Many challenging situations young people face are connected to substance use as well as activities that pose some risk to health, like gaming and gambling. If we’re better able to understand what life skills we have, and what life skills we need we’re taking an important step to becoming stronger and more resilient in the face of pressure to use substances in risky ways and engaging in other activities that pose a risk to our health.



Check-in

Take a few minutes and ask everyone to stand up, if possible. The teacher will describe three skills they have—but one of them is false. For example, they're good at starting campfires, doing their own plumbing, and making pizza from scratch. The class must guess which skill is false. Now ask for volunteers to step in and name one amazing skill they have, and the class must quickly guess if it's true or false.

Thank everyone for the fun, and let them know we'll be talking about other skills in today's lessons.

Activity

Part 1

Disclose a fake substance use issue to the class—all the information you're sharing is a role-play:

You are eating five frozen ice-cream cakes every day. Ask everyone who thinks that's a problem to stand or raise their hands. Canvas a few volunteers to explain why.

Explain that the reason why you're eating five frozen ice-cream cakes every day is that you have another problem that started first, and the ice-cream cakes are a way of coping with the problem.

The real problem, explains the teacher, is that your father was diagnosed with cancer. A few friends and family know. It's super sad. They don't really know how to deal with it. So that's where the ice-cream cakes come in.

The teacher has some choices in how they cope with the sadness and helplessness—and many other issues as well that come along because of the illness, like loss of income, how the family copes, etc. (the coping category slides are already on the floor) and they'll move to each one of them for a moment:

- Do things that distract me from thinking about my dad (example, gaming for hours).
- Do things that help me cope, but make the problem worse (starting to drink alcohol in my room).
- Do things that help me cope and help me deal with sadness in a healthy way (talk to others about how I feel, journal, meditate).

All the categories are important to be aware of, but it's the last category that we really want to think about today. Those life skills that help us cope with all sorts of challenges in our lives, and don't make our health worse.

We're going to leave the categories on the floor, spread out a bit, and throw down a bunch of slides, face down, and try an activity that will help youth differentiate between the three choices of coping reviewed above. The coping strategy slides are labelled:

- **Healthy Life Skills**
- **Unhealthy Ways of Coping**
- **Distraction/Ignoring the Problem**

Ask for a volunteer to come up and read the coping strategies slides one-by-one and get direction from the circle which category they think they belong in, and why. Multiple people can explain their rationale, especially if there is disagreement.

Coping Strategies Slides

- spend way more time gaming than usual
- gamble
- vape
- smoking
- start using cannabis
- start drinking alcohol
- masturbation
- working out
- getting a pet
- making art
- talking to friends you trust
- talking to a safe adult
- listening to music
- write music
- binge watching YouTube or tv
- playing an instrument
- writing in a journal every day
- go a little wild on the atv for a few hours
- ask friends over to watch some movies
- prescription drugs (not prescribed for you)
- going to your family doctor
- planting a garden
- eating in a way that's not normal for you
- becoming reclusive
- find a part-time job
- find some volunteer work
- learn how to make bread

Canvas the class to see if there are other ideas they want to throw out and suggest where they should go. Sometimes there may be some overlap between categories. For example, learning how to make bread can be a pleasant distraction, but you're also learning an important skill—a healthy skill. The teacher may also bring back some learnings from previous lessons that talked about balance; when something can become too much, and not helpful.



Part 2

There is an opportunity here to take another step in the lesson that creates some healthy vulnerability in the space. Students and teachers may take this opportunity to share what helps them cope with past or ongoing challenges. Everyone should be mindful of keeping details about the challenge to themselves - no one has to describe the challenge, but rather share the ways that help them deal with the situations (past and present). The teacher might begin and then ask for volunteers to share if they'd like to.

Next, lay down some additional life skill categories that we know can help a person navigate tough challenges:

- Problem solving (how to navigate difficult situations)
- Critical thinking (how to better understand a situation and what to do about it)
- Effective communication skills (improving the way you talk to people and listen to people)
- Interpersonal relationship skills (learning how to have healthier friendships and other relationships)
- Self-awareness skills (thinking more about yourself and your role in making situations more or less challenging)

That can help move the class to a second opportunity, which is for volunteers to share what life skills they think they need or would appreciate having to help with present and future challenges. They can also name a life skill they appreciate in others (family, friends, etc.).

Check-out



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

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

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

Moving Forward

Have students interview an adult in their life about their journey with different coping strategies through challenging experiences. Have students develop questions ahead of time and present on their adults coping and life skills story.

Healthy **Life Skills**

Unhealthy Ways of Coping

**Distraction/
Ignoring
the Problem**

Spend way
more time
**gaming than
usual**

Gamble

Vape

Smoke

Start using
cannabis

Start
**drinking
alcohol**

Masturbation

Work out

Get a pet

Make art

Talk to
**friends you
trust**

Talk to
a safe adult

Listen to
music

Write
music

Binge watch
**YouTube or
TV**

Write in a
journal
every day

Play an
instrument

Go a little wild
on the ATV
for a few
hours

Ask friends over
to watch
some movies

Prescription drugs

(not prescribed
for you)

Go to your
family doctor

Plant
a garden

**Eat in a way
that's
not normal
for you**

**Become
reclusive**

Find a
part-time job

Find some
**volunteer
work**

Learn how to
make bread

Problem solving

Critical thinking

Effective communication skills

Interpersonal relationship skills

**Self-
awareness
building
skills**

