

**TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE****Exploration: Self-Concept Scenarios****Scenario 1: Alex: Will I Lose Weight? - Smoking Cigarettes**

Alex is in Grade 8 and attends dance class every evening after school. They love dancing and consistently receive positive feedback at competitions. Lately, Alex has been feeling insecure about their body. They often compare what they look like to the other students at dance and the dancers they follow on social media. Alex thinks they would feel more confident and even become a better dancer if they lost weight. Alex decides to start smoking cigarettes because they heard online that the nicotine in cigarettes can help with weight loss by reducing appetite. At first, Alex experiences a change in their eating habits and notices they're losing weight, which boosts their confidence. However, after a while, they notice that they get tired easily and have trouble keeping up in practice. Alex has been hiding their smoking from friends, family, and dance teachers because they are worried about getting in trouble. Alex wants to quit smoking but is concerned about gaining weight back. They feel stuck and don't know what to do.

1. What may have influenced Alex to decide to start smoking cigarettes?  
(Consider factors from the Factors Influencing Decision Making Infographic)

- Media: They follow other dancers on social media and often compare their body to others online
- Peer groups: Alex compares their looks to other students in dance class
- Knowledge and Experiences: They also heard online that cigarettes might help them lose weight by reducing their appetite
- Self-concept: Alex feels insecure about their body, which influences their decision to start smoking to lose weight
- Family: Parents/caregivers' relationships with body image/weight may impact their own feelings

2. How might Alex's view of who they are shape their decisions? What are some strategies Alex could use to build confidence?

- Alex is struggling with their self-image and self-esteem, leading them to look for solutions to change the way their body looks
- Building Confidence: Alex could try: challenging negative thoughts, practicing positive self-talk, seeking out support, and practicing self-care

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3. What are the harms of nicotine use that Alex should be aware of?

- Short term: dizziness, headaches, nausea, feelings of faintness leading to anxiety
- Long term: lung damage, breathlessness, persistent cough, increased risk of heart disease and COPD, increased risk of infections like pneumonia

4. How has smoking cigarettes affected Alex? Do you think this was the effect Alex expected?

- Initially boosted confidence as weight loss goal was achieved
- Now they are feeling tired and having a hard time keeping up in practice
- Concerned about health impacts and how that can impede dance performance, worried about getting in trouble
- They expected (or hoped) to lose weight but did not expect it to impact their dance performance or the stress of hiding it from friends and family

5. What are some other things Alex could do to improve their health and wellness? (Consider all relevant components of self-care).

- Seeking Support:
  - Talk to a doctor about concerns around weight/body image
  - Talk to close friends at dance, or coach or family about their struggles
  - Speak with a mental health professional if thoughts of weight loss, desire to be thin is constant, not consuming enough calories and nutrients - could be early signs of eating disorder
- Technology:
  - Limit time on social media or take a break all together
  - Unfollow accounts that make them feel bad about themselves
- Healthy Eating:
  - Making sure they are eating nutritious foods to support their activity levels, including drinking lots of water, and having fruits, vegetables, grains and protein-rich foods

6. As a friend, what could you say or do to help Alex?

- Remind them that they are a really good dancer already and that they look great the way they are
- Highlight Alex's talents/strengths that are not related to physical

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- appearance/performance
- Remind them social media is a highlight reel - people use filters and take pictures at angles to make themselves look a certain way
- Suggest they talk to parents or doctor if concerns about body-image continue or if eating patterns change

**Scenario 2: Taylor: A New School - Smoking and Cannabis**

Before Taylor transferred schools, she had a lot of friends and felt like she belonged. Since changing schools this year, Taylor has been having trouble making friends. One day, some girls in her class invited her to spend lunch with them. Taylor is excited to hang out with the girls, but when she joins them outside, she notices that most of them are vaping cannabis. One of the girls passes her vape to Taylor, and Taylor tries it because she doesn't want to feel out of place in the group. The vape makes Taylor cough, but she begins to feel more relaxed. The girls realize they have a lot in common and they start hanging out regularly at lunch. Taylor feels relieved to have people to hang out with, but she notices that vaping cannabis makes it harder for her to concentrate in class and she struggles to complete her homework in the evenings. She wonders if she should stop vaping cannabis but really enjoys spending time with her new friends and is worried that if she stops, things with her friend group will change. What should Taylor do?

1. What may have influenced Taylor to decide to start smoking cannabis?  
(Consider factors from the Factors Influencing Decision Making Infographic)

- School & Community: She transferred schools and has had trouble making friends since moving
- Peer Groups: She wants to make friends and fit in, her new friends vape cannabis so she joins in
- Self-Concept: Taylor is insecure about not having any friends, and this affects her self-esteem

2. How might Taylor's view of who they are shape their decisions? What are some strategies Taylor could use to build her confidence?

- Taylor is not feeling confident in her new school and she thinks she would feel more confident if she had a group of friends to hang out with
- Now that she has a group of friends she belongs to, she continues vaping with

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- them because she worries they won't keep hanging out with her if she stops
- **Building Confidence:** Taylor could seek out supportive people to confide in about her concerns - she could talk to her friends at her old school or her parents, or try journaling about it. She could also talk to her friends about not wanting to vape anymore.

**3. What are the harms of smoking cannabis that Taylor should be aware of?**

- Impacts brain development
- Interferes with memory and learning
- Can worsen mental health
- Heart and lung problems
- Cough and sore throat
- Dependence
- Increased risk for schizophrenia, depression, and other psychotic disorders
- Added stress if she is hiding her smoking from her parents or other friends.

**4. How did smoking cannabis affect Taylor? Do you think this was the effect Taylor expected?**

- It made her feel like she had friends, and made her feel cool and like she fit in
- Made her feel relaxed among her new friends
- Impacted her ability to focus on schoolwork and complete her homework, which she did not expect

**5. What are some other things Taylor and her new friends could do to improve their health and wellness? (Consider all relevant components of self-care).**

- **Social Connection:**
  - She could mention to her new friends that smoking affects her school work and ask them if they notice the same thing
- **Fun Activities:**
  - Taylor and her friends can find another activity to do at lunch, like going for a walk to the store or mall or joining a club at school
- **Seeking Support:**
  - She can ask her parents or family members she trusts for advice about how to talk to her friends or what to do in her scenario
- **Reducing substance use:**
  - Reduce her cannabis use (e.g., only use on weekends)

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6. As a friend, what could you say or do to help Taylor?

- Remind Taylor that they're friends with her for more reasons than that she smokes cannabis with them
- Suggest smoking less often, not using it on school days., etc
- Offer help with studying or catching up on assignments if she feels she has fallen behind
- Suggest activities together that don't include cannabis, such as a sport or physical activity

**Scenario 3: Hunter: Mixing Substances Won't Hurt, Will It?**

Hunter and his friends are in Grade 8. They are going to a party at a high school student's house. Hunter had a busy afternoon at band practice and didn't have a chance to eat dinner. His older brother bought him some beer to take to the party because he figured the high school students would all be drinking. Later in the evening, after drinking a few beers, Hunter goes outside and sees his older high school friend vaping cannabis. His friend passes him the vape to try. Soon after vaping, Hunter starts to feel sick and dizzy. He goes into the bathroom and throws up, and then calls his brother to pick him up. The next day, Hunter wakes up with a really bad headache and anxiety about the night before. He's embarrassed he got sick at the party and wonders if anyone at the party noticed and if they were talking about it after he went home.

1. What may have influenced Hunter to make the decision to consume beer and cannabis? (Consider factors from the Factors Influencing Decision Making Infographic)

- Knowledge and Experiences: He was excited to spend the night with his friends and drink, and had curiosity about vaping and trying something new
- Knowledge and Experiences: Hunter may not have known the risks of drinking on an empty stomach/mixing substances
- Peer Groups: His friend offered the vape to him and others at the party may have been vaping too
- Family: His brother bought the beer for him so he had easier access to the alcohol as he could not buy it himself
- Self-Concept: Hunter may have felt like he needed to accept the vape to fit in

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2. How might Hunter's view of who they are shape their decisions? What are some strategies Hunter could use to build his confidence?

- He's at a party with older high school kids and wants to fit in
- Hunter decides to try vaping because his older high school friend offered it to him, even though he had already been drinking beer. He might have felt self-conscious or embarrassed to say no.
- To build confidence, Hunter could practice challenging negative thoughts about what the older kids think of him.
- He could spend more time at the party with friends his own age. He can also practice his "no" so that he feels more confident in declining drugs.
- The next day, Hunter feels very anxious and embarrassed about getting sick at the party. To build his confidence, he could practice positive self-talk, spend time with supportive people like family or friends, and practice self-care (go for a walk, drink water, get lots of sleep).

3. What are some potential harms of mixing alcohol and cannabis that Hunter should be aware of?

- Increased impairment and intoxication
- Worse effects on brain function
- Slower reaction time - higher risk of accident or injury
- The effect of both together is stronger than either alone, which can lead to impaired decision-making and increased risky behaviour.

4. How did consuming these substances affect Hunter? Do you think this was the effect Hunter expected?

- Dizzy
- Stomach sick
- Headache the next day
- Embarrassed and anxious the next day due to getting sick
- It doesn't seem like Hunter expected or considered any of these results when he decided to try the cannabis vape.

5. What could Hunter do to protect his health and wellness in future situations? (Consider all relevant components of self-care)

- Healthy Eating and Time Management:
  - Drink plenty of water to prevent dehydration
  - Set aside time to eat a substantial meal before consuming alcohol,

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- could reduce his chances of getting sick
- Social Connection:
    - Hanging out with friends his own age rather than going to high school parties
  - Reduce or Avoid Substance Use:
    - Sticking to one substance (alcohol or cannabis but not both) or no substances

6. As a friend, what could you say or do to help Hunter?

- Most people at the party were too distracted to notice anything
- No one remembers anyway
- If you're concerned, maybe try to avoid using both substances next time
- "Mixing substances always makes me sick, so I try to only stick to one at a time"
- Asking why he chose to drink and use cannabis in the first place - is it something he really wants to enjoy, or would he rather find a way to abstain but not feel left out?

**Scenario 3: Parker: Vaping Nicotine to Stay Focused**

Parker is a grade 8 student. Parker is autistic and sometimes feels uncomfortable and overwhelmed in class, making it hard to focus. He finds this frustrating and dislikes feeling different from his classmates. One day during lunch, Parker sees his classmate Sam vaping. Sam tells Parker how vaping nicotine really helps him stay alert and focused and offers it to him to try. After trying the vape, Parker notices that he can focus a little better in class that afternoon. He decides to buy a vape from another student and starts vaping with Sam and his friends before class.

Parker enjoys vaping with Sam and his friends as it makes him feel like he fits in more with the kids at school. After a few weeks, Parker is not sure if the vape is still helping him focus, but now notices that he feels anxious and irritable when he doesn't vape. While he really enjoys spending time with Sam, he is now spending all his allowance on vape cartridges. He is curious if there are other things he could try apart from vaping that would help him focus in class, since vaping is expensive and he is worried that he relies on it too much. He is also worried that if he stops vaping Sam won't want to hang out with him anymore.

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1. What may have influenced Parker to decide to start vaping nicotine? (Consider factors from the Factors Influencing Decision Making Infographic)

- Peer Groups/School and Community: Parker's classmate Sam tells him that vaping helps him stay focused in class
- Knowledge and Experiences: Parker is frustrated that he feels overwhelmed in class and is curious to find a solution
- Self-Concept: Parker doesn't like feeling different from his classmates, so tries vaping because he thinks it will make him feel more like his peers

2. How might Parker's view of who they are shape their decisions? What are some strategies Parker could use to build his confidence?

- Parker does not feel very confident or comfortable in class, which leads him to try vaping to help him focus and feel better
- To build his confidence, Parker could try positive self-talk, set realistic goals about his schoolwork, talk to his teachers or parents, or practice self-care such as mindfulness techniques

3. What are some of the potential effects of vaping nicotine?

- Short term: dizziness, headaches, nausea, feelings of faintness leading to anxiety
- Long-term: lung damage, breathlessness, persistent cough, increased risk of infections, addiction and dependence

4. How did vaping nicotine affect Parker? Do you think this was the effect Parker expected?

- Vaping helped Parker focus a little at the beginning, but after a few weeks, he feels anxious and irritable without it. He didn't expect to feel so bad without it.
- He is also spending all of his allowance because it is more expensive than he thought
- He made some new friends because of Sam, but is worried he won't keep these friends if he stops vaping with them
- Parker seems to be developing a dependence on nicotine (feeling anxious and irritable when he doesn't vape may be signs of withdrawal)

5. What are some other things Parker could do to improve his health and wellness? (Consider all relevant components of self-care).



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- **Seeking Support:**
  - Talk to a teacher, parent, or doctor to find other solutions to his concerns in school. Ask if they could explore some environmental changes, such as finding a quieter space for Parker to work if he gets overwhelmed in class.
  - Reach out for help about quitting vaping (e.g., supports, guidance counselor, Kids Help Phone, Lifewise Peer Support)
  - Seek professional help - a counselor or therapist could help Parker explore why he feels overwhelmed and could help him identify coping skills for managing his anxiety and overstimulation
- **Focus Strategies:**
  - Practicing mindfulness or exploring other focus strategies could help him feel more at ease in class. This could include deep breathing or wearing noise-canceling headphones.
- **Social Connection:**
  - Telling Sam he doesn't want to vape anymore but he still wants to hang out with him and his friends

**6. As a friend, what could you say or do to help Parker?**

- Tell him his friends will still want to hang out with him even if he stops vaping
- Encourage Parker to talk to an adult now that he feels anxious without vaping
- Offer to go with Parker to talk to his parents or teacher about the challenges he is having for extra support
- Suggest that Parker talk to a healthcare professional if he feels he has developed a dependence on nicotine
- Hanging out with Parker doing activities other than vaping, such as playing a sport, listening to music, or doing homework together