

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

Exploring Influences on Substance Use Decisions

Influence	Protective Factors	Risk Factors
Media	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical thinking skills. • Awareness of media influence (media literacy). • Strong personal values. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians discussing and debunking unhealthy ads. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public health campaigns that promote safe choices. • Regulations limiting youth-targeted marketing. • School & community education programs. 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comparing oneself to unrealistic images on social media. • Curiosity sparked by ads. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians not discussing or challenging media messages. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Widespread advertising of alcohol/vaping. • Normalization of substance use in movies/TV.
School & Community	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involvement in clubs, sports, or volunteering. • Academic or career goals. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents/guardians supporting school and community involvement. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safe recreational spaces. • Strong school culture. • Mentorship opportunities. 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of engagement in school. • Academic struggles. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited family involvement in school/community activities. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bullying; unsafe neighbourhoods. • Limited youth programs.
Family	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open communication with parents/guardians. 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strained relationship with parents/guardians.

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sense of belonging at home. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong parent/guardian involvement. ● Positive role models. ● Family routines (e.g., meals). ● Open communication about substance use. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Access to family support services and counselling. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of guidance from family members. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parent/guardian substance use. ● Limited communication about substance use. ● Conflict or neglect. ● Poor supervision. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Few family supports or resources for families
Peer Groups	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confidence in decision-making and refusal skills. ● Friends with similar values. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents/guardians encouraging healthy friendships. ● Strong family bonds. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Opportunities to form positive peer groups (sports teams, youth leadership, arts). 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Desire to fit in. ● Low confidence resisting peer pressure. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents/guardians unaware of peer group influences. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Peer culture in community or school normalizing substance use.
Knowledge & Experiences	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learning accurate, evidence-based information. ● Positive experiences coping with or managing stress. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Family sharing knowledge and setting clear expectations. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School programs (like DECYDE!). 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of accurate knowledge. ● Experimenting early. ● Misconceptions about substance use. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents/guardians not talking about substance use or sharing misinformation <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Exposure to substance use in

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community workshops and campaigns. 	neighbourhood
Self-Concept	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strong self-confidence. Positive self-image. Future goals. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encouragement and recognition from family. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inclusive environments that support youth identity and belonging. Access to mental health services. 	<p>Individual:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low self-esteem. Hopelessness. Lack of goals. <p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of affirmation or recognition at home. <p>Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social stigma. Exclusion or bullying. Lack of mental health resources or support.

Reflection Questions:

- Which risk factors seem most influential on youth decisions about substance use? Consider individual, family, and community examples.
 - Emphasize that the combination of several risk factors increases vulnerability.
 - Answers may vary, some possible considerations:
 - Peer pressure and influence of friends who use substances.
 - Family environment, especially Parent/guardian substance use, conflict, or neglect.
 - Mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, or trauma history.
 - Media and advertising that glamorize substance use.
 - Low self-esteem or lack of personal goals.
- Which protective factors seem most effective in preventing use? Consider various protective supports at the individual, family, and community levels.
 - Highlight that protective factors often “buffer” against risk, even if some risk factors are present.
 - Supportive family relationships and open communication.
 - Positive peer groups who avoid risky behaviours.

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

- Strong school/community engagement (clubs, sports, volunteering).
 - Healthy coping strategies for stress (exercise, art, mindfulness).
 - Confidence, refusal skills, and a positive self-concept.
3. If someone has many risk factors, how could they, or people around them build protective factors to balance those risks? Consider how individuals, families, and communities can each play a role.
- Stress that protective factors don't eliminate risks, but they help reduce their impact and increase resilience.
 - Encourage involvement in structured activities (sports, arts, leadership groups).
 - Strengthen supportive relationships with trusted adults or mentors.
 - Build problem-solving and decision-making skills (like the FACE model).
 - Connect youth with school or community resources (counsellors, safe spaces, youth groups).
 - Promote healthy routines (regular sleep, balanced diet, physical activity).