

High School Drug Education - Lesson 3: Navigating Substance Use: Understanding Choices, Stigma, and Support

This lesson, which is aligned with NL Health curriculum outcomes, contains necessary background information, substance snapshots, learning activities, scenarios, and discussion guides to support delivery of material.

Health Learning Curriculum Outcomes

Drug Education

1. Identify and analyze the impacts of substance use on health and well-being.
2. Demonstrate an understanding of the substance use spectrum, including patterns of use, addiction, and recovery.
3. Analyze the social, personal, and environmental factors that influence why youth may begin using substances, including both protective and risk factors.
4. Explain how stigma affects individuals, families, and communities, and evaluate its impact on seeking help and accessing support.
5. Recognize the importance of help-seeking and explore available supports for individuals experiencing substance use challenges.
6. Demonstrate decision-making and goal-setting skills that support mental health, well-being, and safer choices.

Emotional and Social Well-being

7. Demonstrate knowledge, skills, and behaviours related to health-related decision making.

Technology and Communications

8. Utilize information technology to access, present, and communicate information on substance use.

Environmental Health and Safety

9. Demonstrate skills and behaviours which enhance personal safety, the safety of others, and the protection of the environment.

[Link](#) to Newfoundland and Labrador (NL) Curriculum Outcomes

Lesson Snapshot:

Lesson 3: Navigating Substance Use: Understanding Choices, Stigma, and Support

Norms & Expectations

- Learning Activity 1: Substance Use Spectrum
- Learning Activity 2: Why do Teens Start Using Substances?
- Learning Activity 3: What is Addiction?
- Learning Activity 4: Stigma
- Learning Activity 5: How to Seek Help for Substance Use

Lesson 1: Substance Use Policies and Regulations

Lesson 2: Be Prepared: Understanding Harm, Safety, and Emergency Response

Lesson 3: Navigating Substance Use: Understanding Choices, Stigma, and Support

Lesson 4: Mental Health and Substance Use: Understanding the Connection and Building Resilience

Background Information



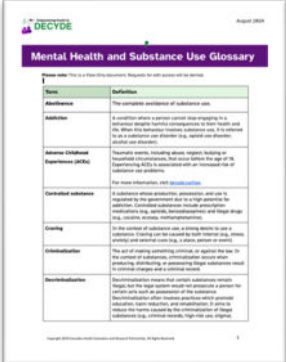
Definition of Drugs

Drugs are substances or chemicals that affect the way our bodies and minds work. Some drugs are medications that help people feel better. They can be used to prevent, cure or alleviate symptoms. Drugs can also be used in unsafe ways. They can affect how the brain works and can have negative effects on the way our body develops and functions. Drugs used unsafely can change the way people feel, think, or behave.

Examples of drugs include:

- Alcohol (e.g., beer, coolers, vodka, whisky, wine)
- Caffeine (e.g., energy drinks, coffee, tea, soft drinks)
- Cannabis or Marijuana
- Hallucinogens (e.g., LSD, Mushrooms)
- Medications (e.g., puffers, epi-pens, fever medications, anti-nausea medications, anti-anxiety medications)
- Nicotine (e.g., tobacco, cigarettes, nicotine vapes)
- Opioids (e.g., codeine, morphine, fentanyl, heroin)
- Over-the-counter medications (e.g., cough syrup, pain medications)
- Stimulants (e.g., nicotine, amphetamines [e.g., Adderall, crystal meth], methylphenidate [e.g., Ritalin], cocaine)
- Vaccinations (e.g., flu, COVID-19, tetanus)

The [DECYDE Mental Health and Substance Use Glossary](#) provides a comprehensive collection of key terms and concepts related to substance use. Designed to support educators and mentors, this glossary provides definitions to enhance understanding and communication around substance use topics that are relevant for DECYDE.



Term	Definition
Abstinence	The complete avoidance of substance use.
Addiction	A condition where a person cannot stop using a drug despite the negative consequences to their health and life. When the behavior becomes compulsive and the person is unable to stop using the drug, it is considered an addiction.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	Adverse events, including abuse, neglect, household dysfunction, parental divorce, parental mental illness, parental substance use, and parental incarceration, that are associated with poor health outcomes.
Controlled substance	A substance whose production, possession, and use is regulated by government and is illegal for recreational use. Medications (e.g., opioids, benzodiazepines) and illegal drugs (e.g., cocaine, heroin) are controlled substances.
Craving	The desire for a substance, often a strong desire to use a substance, which can be triggered by cues (e.g., people, places, things, and emotions) associated with the substance.
Intoxication	The state of being under the influence of a substance, often resulting in impaired judgment and behavior.
Withdrawal	Physical and psychological symptoms that occur when a person stops using a substance after regular use. Symptoms can include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, and anxiety.



[Substance Snapshots](#) aim to provide educators with information about the various drugs that are incorporated throughout the learning activities. Each snapshot summarizes how the drug is used, its effects, when to seek emergency help, and how to stay safe. The Substance Snapshots are intended to support educators in the delivery of drug education and are not for direct student use unless deemed appropriate.

Key Considerations

An understanding of the following resources will assist educators as they implement the learning activities.



Use a Skills-Based Health Education (SBHE) Approach

SBHE is a learning approach that uses interactive learning methods. This approach is used throughout the learning activities so students can learn skills that will promote and protect their health and well-being. Refer to the [SBHE infographic](#) for more information on SBHE and examples of interactive teaching methods and evaluation.



Incorporate the FACE Decision-Making Model

Throughout all lessons the FACE decision-making model is used to guide discussions and activities. The questions associated with each step of the FACE decision-making model are intended for educator use to probe students during scenario-based learning activities. Refer to the [FACE infographics](#) for more information.



Consider Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and implement Trauma-Informed Practices (TIPs) that support harm reduction principles

ACEs are traumatic events that occur before the child reaches the age of 18. Students who experience ACEs have an increased susceptibility to try drugs. This may impact their ability to engage in learning about substances. The [ACEs infographic](#) highlights the types of ACEs that may impact youth and offers strategies for educators. Incorporating early drug education and [harm reduction](#) principles may encourage youth to make safe and informed choices and reduce potential negative consequences. Understanding the impact of trauma resulting from ACEs will better equip educators to support student learning. The [Trauma- Informed Practices \(TIPs\) infographic](#) provides information on this strengths-based approach for educators.



Support Students Emotional Wellbeing

Discussion about drug or substance use may provoke a range of feelings. Building a positive rapport is vital to effectively engage youth in learning conversations. Respect for students' comments, questions, and concerns surrounding drug use is important regardless of personal opinions. If needed, encourage students to speak with the school's guidance counsellor or another trusted adult. Additional supports are located on the [DECYDE website](#).



Use First-Person Language

Using first-person language that is non-stigmatizing can create an environment that encourages students to engage in conversations or seek help. For more information about stigma and tips for educators, refer to the [infographic on Stigma](#).

Lesson 3: Navigating Substance Use: Understanding Choices, Stigma, and Support



Learning Activities and Teacher Background Resources

- Learning Activity 1: Substance Use Spectrum
- Learning Activity 2: Why do Teens Start Using Substances?
- Learning Activity 3: What is Addiction?
- Learning Activity 4: Stigma
- Learning Activity 5: How to Seek Help for Substance Use

Teacher Resources:

- **Infographics:** [Substance Use Spectrum](#), [Substance Use Disorder](#), [Factors Influencing Decision-Making](#), [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#), [Promoting Protective Factors for Youth, Stigma](#), [Caregiver Substance Use](#), [Harm Reduction](#)
- **Substance Snapshots:** [Alcohol](#), [Benzodiazepines](#), [Cannabis](#), [Caffeine](#), [Cocaine](#), [Nicotine](#), [Opioids](#)



Norms and Expectations

While abstinence from drugs is the safest choice for youth to make, discussions about harm reduction are also important. Engaging in educational discussions about substance use can be a protective factor and can positively impact the decisions made by youth. These conversations may touch on sensitive topics for some students. Educators should consider the following: reasons why youth use substances; the harms of substance use; the age and cognitive development of youth; and the context of the school, community, and/or family situations. The sensitive nature of these discussions means teachers should place utmost importance on establishing a safe, supportive, and judgment-free environment. The teacher must promote positive and effective exchanges with students by co-establishing classroom norms that are revisited often.

During these discussions, all participants agree:

- The opinions of everyone are listened to and respected.
- Discussions about the content are factual, open and honest but do not use the names of individuals' experiences. (e.g., refer to "someone I know" rather than using names)
- Boundaries of individuals are recognized and respected.
- Discussions are free of judgemental language and challenge ideas, not individuals.
- Words matter. Avoid stigmatizing language. There should be an established understanding of the term [stigma](#). Teach and model respectful language used during discussions.
 - Important examples include using person-first language. For example, "a person who uses drugs or substances"

Learning Activity 1: Substance Use Spectrum



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Explain the components of the Substance Use Spectrum.
- Differentiate between non use, low-risk, high-risk, and harmful substance use using real-life examples.
- Apply their understanding of the Substance Use Spectrum to analyze different scenarios and identify where each example fits.
- Engage in respectful and nonjudgmental discussions about substance use.

Materials:

- Introduction: Introducing the Substance Use Spectrum
 - Discussion Prompts
 - Substance Use Spectrum Activity
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Infographics: [Substance Use Spectrum](#), [Substance Use Disorder](#)
- Pre-Activity: Substance Use Vocabulary
 - [Crossword – Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Word Scramble – Student Worksheet](#)
- Exploration Activity: Malik, Billie & Zion’s Story
 - [Canva Presentation](#)
 - Infographics: [Substance Use Spectrum](#), [Substance Use Disorder](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Understanding the Substance Use Spectrum
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
- Substance Snapshots: [Cannabis](#), [Alcohol](#), [Cocaine](#), [Caffeine](#)

Introduction: Introducing the Substance Use Spectrum



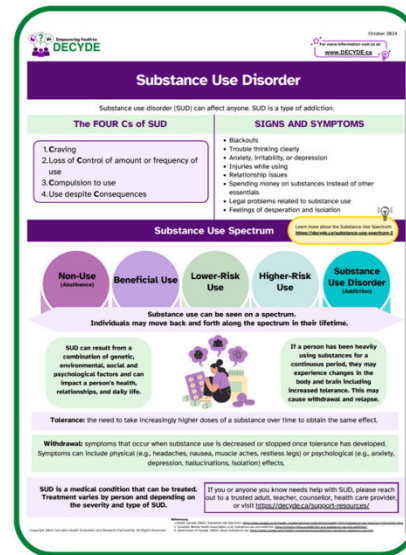
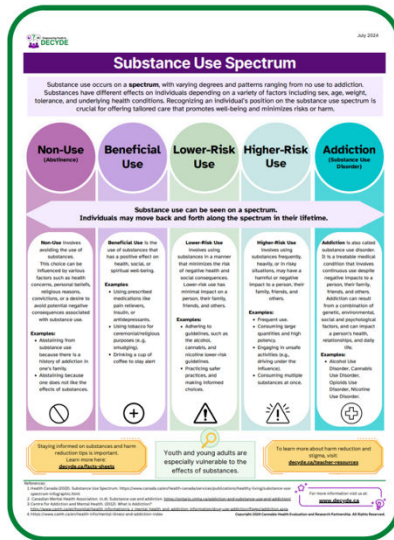
SUBSTANCE SNAPSHOT

Teachers may refer to the [Cannabis](#), [Alcohol](#), [Cocaine](#), and [Caffeine](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

In Learning Activity 1, students will learn about the Substance Use Spectrum and explore how substance use can range from non-use to substance use disorder. They will examine examples to understand how frequency, intent, and impact determine where a person’s behaviour falls on the spectrum. This activity will help students build awareness, reduce stigma, and promote safer, more informed decision-making.

Begin by engaging in a discussion to explore what students already know about the substance use spectrum.

Teachers may use the [Substance Use Spectrum](#) and [Substance Use Disorder](#) infographics to guide the discussion.



Teachers may use the following discussion prompts to guide the discussion:



Discussion Prompts:

- What do you think “substance use” means? Can you give some examples?
- People use substances for different reasons. What are some reasons why someone might use substances?
- Do you think there’s a difference between using a substance occasionally and developing a substance use disorder? Why or why not?
- Is having a substance use disorder a choice? Is having a mental health condition a choice? Is having cancer a choice?
- How do you think substance use disorder is similar to other health conditions like diabetes, cancer, or depression?

After the discussion, begin this activity with a review of the [Substance Use Spectrum](#) infographic. Students can have a copy or the teacher can display it for the class.

Using the infographic, students will complete the following activity by reading through different situations of different people engaging in substance use. Students will select where each person is on the substance use spectrum. Teachers can guide students through the first situation as an example. The Student Worksheet is [available as a PDF or Google Doc](#). The teacher answer guide is below:



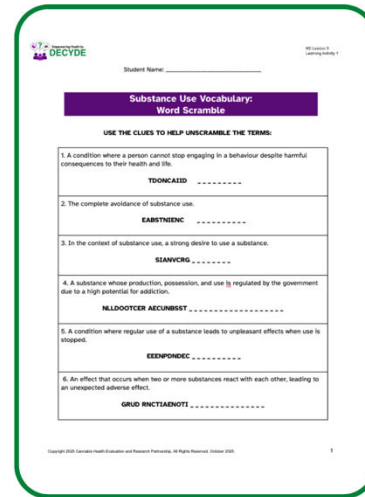
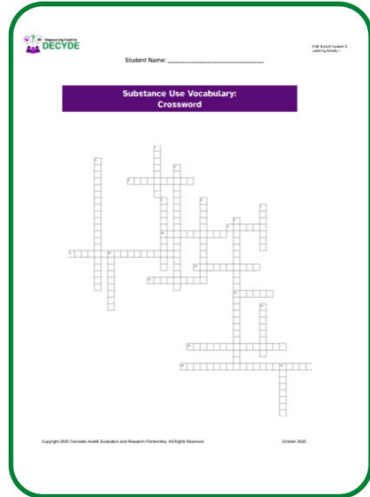
Substance Use Spectrum Activity

1. Jay finds it very difficult to get through full days during exams. They know they should be getting more sleep, but they are staying up late to study. They drink an energy drink at lunchtime to get them through the day. He knows this can't go on, but just needs to get through exam week. **Answer: low risk**
2. Julia was once pulled over and charged with a DUI (driving under the influence) for driving after consuming too much alcohol. She understands that consuming alcohol decreases her ability to make good decisions. She feels lucky that no one was hurt but her bad choice. Since her DUI, she has given up alcohol altogether. **Answer: non-use/abstinence**
3. Peter and Jayden are excited! They've just graduated from high school and have arrived at an all-inclusive resort in Mexico. Neither of them has ever been there before. They plan to try all the fancy drinks and basically stay under the influence of alcohol for the entire week. **Answer: high-risk**
4. Nora is afraid of flying. She wants to attend her best friend's wedding, but the only way to get there is by airplane. She goes to see her doctor and is prescribed lorazepam (a benzodiazepine) for the trip. Nora uses the prescription before the flight and feels much more relaxed during the flight. She arrives safe and sound at the ceremony. **Answer: beneficial use**
5. Stacy started drinking alcohol at age 13, taking liquor from her parent's liquor cabinet on weekends. When she broke up with her first boyfriend in high school, she started drinking every day. She thinks it's okay if she only has a few on weekdays, but drinks alcohol and smokes weed every weekend until she passes out, and her friends have stopped inviting her to parties, so she "parties" alone. **Answer: substance use disorder**

Pre-Activity: Substance Use Vocabulary - Crossword and Word Scramble

For this pre-activity, teachers use one or both of the following activities: Crossword or Word Scramble. Both activities will focus on vocabulary surrounding substance use and the Substance Use Spectrum. These activities are available as a [PDF or Google Doc](#).

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Students

can use the [Substance Use Glossary](#) to help them. The Teacher Answer Guide is below:

Crossword Answers:**Across**

4. Dependence
9. Trauma
10. Abstinence
11. Protective Factors
13. Withdrawal
14. Addiction
15. Stigma
17. Drug Interaction
18. Substance Use Disorder

Down

1. Cravings
2. Substance Use Spectrum
3. Controlled Substance
5. Risk Factors
6. Harm Reduction
7. Relapse
8. Problematic Substance Use
12. Tolerance
16. Sobriety
19. Overdose

Scramble Answers:

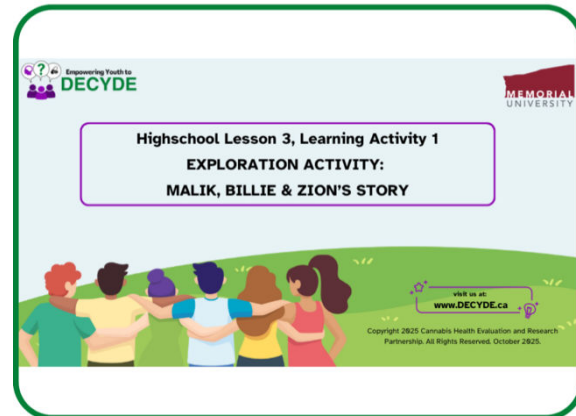
- | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. ADDICTION | 11. RECOVERY |
| 2. ABSTINENCE | 12. RECOVERY POSITION |
| 3. CRAVINGS | 13. RELAPSE |
| 4. CONTROLLED SUBSTANCE | 14. SOBRIETY |
| 5. DEPENDENCE | 15. STIGMA |
| 6. DRUG INTERACTION | 16. SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER |
| 7. HARM REDUCTION | 17. SUBSTANCE USE SPECTRUM |
| 8. OVERDOSE | 18. TOLERANCE |
| 9. RISK FACTORS | 19. TRAUMA |
| 10. PROTECTIVE FACTORS | 20. WITHDRAWAL |

Exploration Activity: Malik, Billie & Zion's Story

In this Exploration Activity, students will expand their understanding of the substance use spectrum and behaviours associated with Substance Use Spectrum by reading through the following case study example: Malik, Billie, and Zion.

Begin the activity by displaying the [Substance Use Spectrum](#) infographic on the board, or handing out individual copies to each student.

Using the [Canva Presentation](#), begin reading the story of Malik, Billie, and Zion as a class. There will be question prompts inserted into throughout the story to discuss with the class where the people in the story are on the Substance Use Spectrum. The Teacher Discussion Guide for these questions is below:



Questions: Teacher Discussion Guide

Part 1:

1. Is it possible for Malik to be in two separate categories on the Substance Use Spectrum? Why?

Yes, Malik is in the non-use and beneficial use categories because they are refusing to use any substances that would interfere with the medication they are on for beneficial use-antidepressants.

2. Where are Billie and Zion on the Substance Use Spectrum? Why?

Both Billie and Zion appear to be in the low-risk category because this appears to be the first time using and they are not experiencing any problems.

Part 2:

3. What category on the Substance Use Spectrum do you think Billie and Zion are in now? Why?

They may still be in low risk but may be heading towards the high-risk category if this pattern of behaviour doesn't change. Using on the weekends may not lead to anything based on the information we have, but if this pattern of use continues it may not be long until they may enter the high-risk category.

Part 3:

4. Where would you place Zion on the Substance Use Spectrum now? Why?

Low risk because they used harm reduction strategy to reduce use and amount used to keep themselves safe and acting the way they want to act.

5. Where on the Substance Use Spectrum would you place Billie now? Why?

Billie is now at high risk because they are now using substances to the point where they are negatively impacting themselves and friends. They are taking part in risky behaviors like



jumping over the fire when intoxicated. Billie also mixes drugs, and they are only 15 years old, which means alcohol and cannabis is illegal.

Part 4:

6. Where do you think Billie is now on the Substance Use Spectrum and why?

Substance Use Disorder because they continue to use substances regardless of the negative impact it is having in their life. They need to keep increasing the amount used to get the same high. It is affecting their health, relationships and daily life such as losing friends, becoming physically violent with friends, getting into an argument with their mom and missing school because of using. They now use it on Sundays suggesting possible cravings. Frequency has increased meaning loss of control over the substance. Billie shows a compulsion to use so he dropped his friends to hang out with older people who use cocaine, and they do not seem to care about the consequences.

7. What advice would you give to Malik and Zio to try to help their friend?

- Encourage Malik and Zion to seek support from a trusted adult or professional.
 - They should not try to handle this situation on their own, as Billie’s behavior shows signs of substance use disorder and possible mental health concerns.
 - Trusted adults could include: a parent, teacher, school counselor, coach, or nurse.
 - Professional supports could include: mental health helplines, youth substance use programs, or community health clinics.
- Avoid confrontation when Billie is intoxicated.
 - Trying to reason with Billie when they are under the influence can increase aggression and risk of harm.
 - Wait until Billie is sober and calm to express concern.
 - Express concern using an empathetic, non-judgmental approach. Use “I” statements (e.g., “I’m worried about you because I care about you,” rather than “You have a problem”). Avoid blaming, criticizing, or lecturing.
- Set healthy boundaries. Malik and Zion should protect their own well-being by not joining in Billie’s substance use or staying in unsafe situations.
 - It’s okay for them to take a step back if Billie’s behaviour becomes harmful or unpredictable.
 - Stay connected and supportive.
 - Even if Billie pushes them away, Malik and Zion can keep in touch with supportive messages (e.g., texts or notes showing they care).
 - Let Billie know they’re there when they’re ready to talk or seek help.
- Encourage professional help and provide information. They can share information about local youth supports (such as Kids Help Phone, local youth addiction services, or a family doctor).
- Recognize limits of what they can do. Malik and Zion are not responsible for fixing Billie’s situation, their role is to offer care, express concern, and seek adult help.


Sharing and Reflection: Understanding the Substance Use Spectrum

This activity encourages students to reflect on real-life situations where they have observed or experienced different points on the Substance Use Spectrum.

Students are asked to consider a range of substances (such as alcohol, nicotine, caffeine, cannabis, prescription medications, or other drugs) and reflect on both positive and negative examples.



Students will record their reflections in the Sharing and Reflection: Understanding the Substance Use Spectrum student worksheet (available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#)).



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Student Name: _____

**Sharing and Reflection:
Understanding the Substance Use Spectrum**

Instructions: In this sharing and reflection activity, you will think about different situations in your life where you have observed or experienced different points on the Substance Use Spectrum. This could include **non-use, beneficial use, lower-risk use, risky use, or substance use disorder.**

Examples of substances you might reflect on include alcohol, nicotine (smoking or vaping), caffeine, cannabis, prescription medications, or other drugs.

- **Think about times when you've seen or perceived "beneficial" use of a substance.**
What substance was involved? What were the circumstances?
- **Think about times when you've noticed lower-risk use.**
How was the substance being used in a way that lowers the risk of causing harm?
- **Think about times when you've noticed risky use or substance use disorder.**
What were the consequences or impacts?

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Learning Activity 2: Why Do Teens Start Using Substances?



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Identify various factors that influence youth decisions about substance use, including media, peers, family, school, community, and self-concept.
- Differentiate between risk factors and protective factors and explain how they can increase or decrease the likelihood of substance use.
- Apply understanding of these factors to real-life scenarios to recognize strategies that can promote healthier decisions.
- Engage in respectful and nonjudgmental discussions about substance use.

Materials:

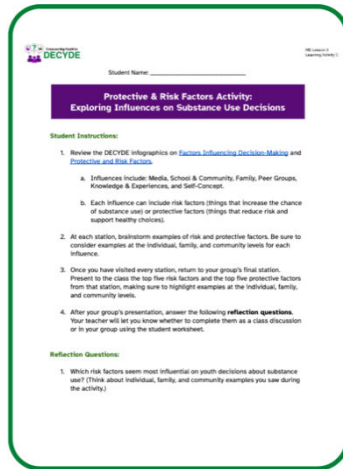
- Introduction: Exploring Influences on Substance Use Decisions [Note: this activity requires preparation in advance]
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographics: [Factors Influencing Decision-Making](#), [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#)
- Exploration: Lived Experiences Spotlight
 - Part 1: Darcy's Story– A Parent's Perspective on Raine's Substance Use Journey
 - Part 2: Lowen's Journey: Understanding the Realities of Substance Use
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographics: [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: What Influences My Decisions?
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
- Substance Snapshots: [Alcohol](#), [Cannabis](#), [Cocaine](#), [Nicotine \(Inhaled\)](#)

Introduction: Exploring Influences on Substance Use Decisions

Note: This activity requires station preparation in advance

This Learning Activity will encourage students to think about the different factors that might influence teens to start using substances. Students will also learn about the different risk and protective factors that influence substance use.

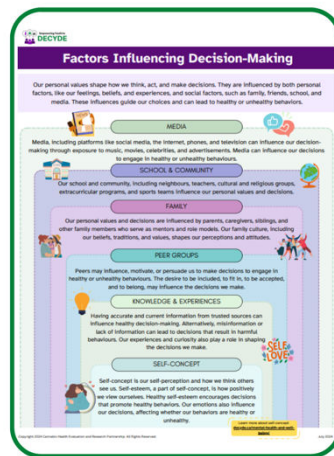
High School Lesson 3



Begin with the following class activity, **Exploring Influences on Substance Use Decisions**. In this activity, students will explore influences on substance use decisions, identify risk and protective factors, and discuss how protective factors can reduce risk. The **Exploring Influences on Substance Use Decisions** student instructions and worksheet are available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).

Instructions

- a) Display or share out the [Factors Influencing Decision-Making](#) and [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#) infographics to the class.



Explain that:

- People are influenced by media, school & community, family, peers, personal experiences, and self-concept.
- Factors can work as protective (reduce risk) or risk (increase likelihood of use).

Then discuss with the class:

- How might having risk factors affect someone's chances of using substances?
 - Teacher guide: The more risk factors someone has, the higher their chances of using substances. Examples include a history of trauma, impulsive behaviour, anxiety or depression, poor parent/guardian supervision, social isolation, friends who use substances, genetic predisposition.
- Why is it important to also consider protective factors?
 - Teacher guide: Protective factors can reduce the impact of risk factors and help people make healthier choices. Even if someone has risks in their life, strong supports, like positive relationships, healthy coping skills, or community involvement, can help prevent substance use.

- b) **Station Activity:** Have students brainstorm examples of potential risk and protective factors at the individual, family, and community levels while considering the various influences on decision-making.

Preparation in advance:

Six large posters, each labeled with one influence:

- *Media*
- *School & Community*
- *Family*
- *Peer Groups*
- *Knowledge & Experiences*
- *Self-Concept*
 - Divide each poster into two columns: Risk Factors / Protective Factors.

Step 1: Place the posters around the classroom.

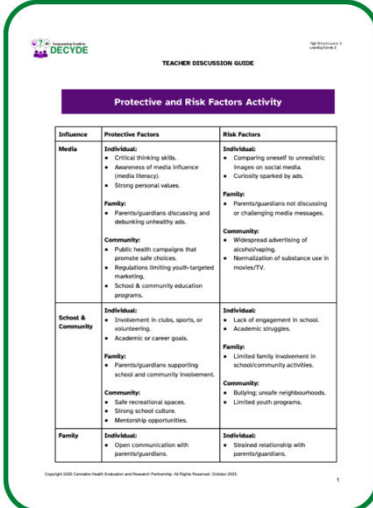
Step 2: Divide the class into six groups.

Step 3: Groups rotate between stations, adding examples to each poster (set a timer).

Step 4: Once all students have visited every station, have each group remain at the station where they finished. Ask them to review the information there and present to the class a summary of the top five risk factors and top five protective factors from that station. Ensure the students highlight factors at the individual, family, and community levels.

Step 5: After the group presentations, have students complete the reflection questions. These can be answered through a whole-class discussion or in small groups using the student worksheet.

The Teacher Discussion Guide is [available as a PDF](#).



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/tobacco. 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"> Isolated, 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.

Exploration Activity: Lived Experience Spotlights

Throughout the lessons, students will engage with authentic stories shared by individuals with lived and living experiences. These spotlights present real perspectives, told in the individual's own words and language, offering students meaningful insight into the realities of substance use.

In this Part 1 of this Exploration Activity, teachers may choose to model **Darcy's Story: A Parent's Perspective** with the class. In Part 2, students will work independently, in pairs, or small groups as they work through **Lowen's Journey**.



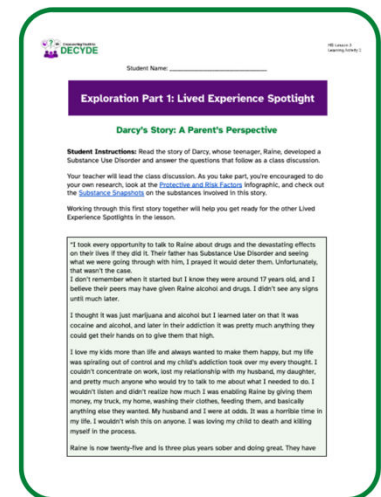
Teachers may refer to the [Alcohol](#), [Cannabis](#), [Cocaine](#), and [Nicotine](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

Part 1: Darcy's Story: A Parent's Perspective on Raine's Substance Use Journey (Teacher Modelling)

Begin this exploration activity by reading through **Darcy's Story: A Parent's Perspective on Raine's Substance Use Journey** and answering the discussion questions as a class. Darcy's Story student worksheet is available as a [Google Doc or PDF](#).

Read the **Darcy's Story** to the class, whose teenager, Raine, developed a substance use disorder. Then, lead a class discussion based on the questions provided. Encourage students to conduct their own research, refer to the [Protective and Risk Factors infographic](#), and explore the [Substance Snapshots](#). Working through this first case together will help prepare them for the remaining Lived Experience Spotlights in this lesson.

The Teacher Discussion Guide for Part 1 is available below:



Darcy's Story – A Parent's Perspective on Raine's Substance Use Journey

I took every opportunity to talk to Raine about drugs and the devastating effects on their lives if they did it. Their father has Substance Use Disorder, and seeing what we were going through with him, I prayed it would deter them. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

I don't remember when it started, but I know they were around 17 years old, and I believe their peers may have given Raine alcohol and drugs. I didn't see any signs until much later. I thought it was just marijuana and alcohol, but I learned later that it was cocaine and alcohol, and later in their addiction, it was pretty much anything they could get their hands on to give them that high.

I love my kids more than life and always wanted to make them happy, but my life was spiralling out of control, and my child's addiction took over my every thought. I couldn't concentrate on work, lost my relationship with my husband, my daughter, and pretty much anyone who would try to talk to me about what I needed to do. I wouldn't listen and didn't realize how much I was enabling Raine by giving them money, my truck, my home, washing their clothes, feeding them, and basically anything else they wanted. My husband and I were at odds with each other. It was a horrible time in my life. I wouldn't wish this on anyone. I was loving my child to death and killing myself in the process.

Raine is now twenty-five and has been sober for over three years and doing great. They have worked very hard to get where they are and are making a great life for themselves. My life has changed dramatically. I no longer worry (well, maybe a little) about where Raine is or what they are doing. Life is getting better.

Spotlight Questions:

1. Why do you think cocaine can be so dangerous?

- Speeds up the body and brain, causing rapid heart rate, high blood pressure, and anxiety
- Very addictive, making people want to keep using it even when it harms them
- Long-term use damages the heart, lungs, and brain, and causes sleep and mood problems
- Overdose can cause seizures, stroke, heart attack, or sudden death
- Mixing with alcohol creates *cocaethylene*, a toxic substance that increases the risk of sudden death, liver damage, and heart problems

2. Which protective factors might have helped Raine avoid or reduce substance use?

- Family:
 - Stronger boundaries at home and avoiding enabling behaviours.
 - Supportive family environment without substance use.
- Community:
 - Early access to counselling or mental health support.
 - Positive peer influences who did not use substances.
 - Involvement in safe community activities or programs.

3. Which risk factors seemed influential in Raine's decisions about substance use?

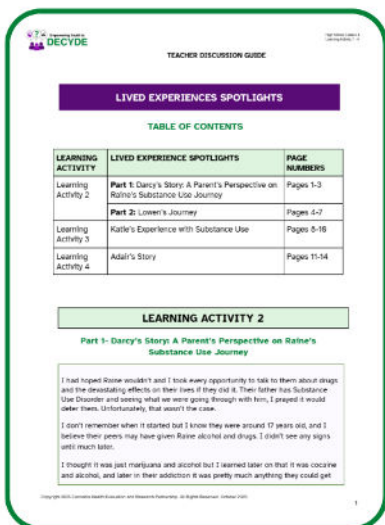
- **Individual:**
 - Family history of Substance Use Disorder (their father's addiction).
 - Exposure to cannabis and alcohol in late adolescence (ages 17-18).
- **Family:**
 - Family history of Substance Use Disorder (their father's addiction).
 - Exposure to cannabis and alcohol in late adolescence (ages 17-18).



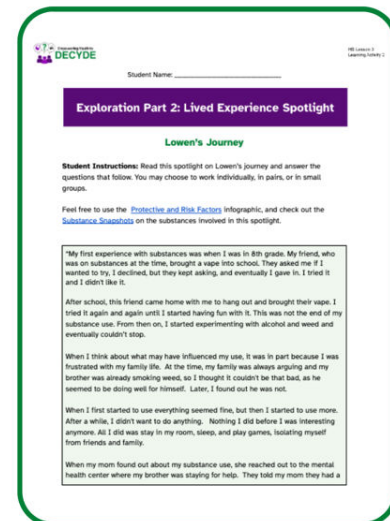
- **Community:**
 - Easy access to other substances, including cocaine and alcohol.
- 4. In what ways did Raine’s substance use impact their mom, Darcy?**
- Darcy’s life spiraled out of control, and she could not focus on work.
 - Her relationships with her husband and daughter broke down.
 - She became isolated and cried often, straining family connections.
 - She enabled Raine by providing money, housing, food, and her truck.
 - Her mental health suffered, requiring high doses of antidepressants.
 - Over time, when Raine entered recovery, Darcy’s health and life improved.

Part 2: Lowen’s Journey: Understanding the Realities of Substance Use

Now that the first scenario has been modelled to the class, students will work through the following Lived Experience Spotlight, **Lowen’s Journey: Understanding the Realities of Substance Use**, individually, in pairs, or small groups. **Lowen’s Journey** student Worksheet is available as a [PDF or Google Doc](#).



The Teacher Discussion Guide is [available as a PDF](#).





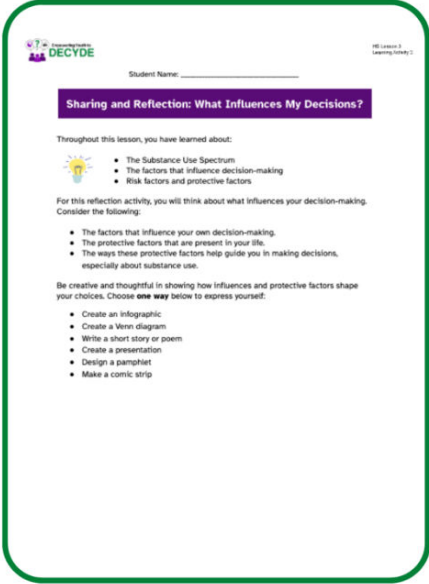
Sharing and Reflection: What Influences My Decisions?

Students have now learned the five categories of the Substance Use Spectrum. They have also learned about factors that influence decision making, risk factors, and protective factors.

Students will explain the factors that influence their decision making, the protective factors they have in their lives, and how they help and guide them when making decisions, especially substance use. They will select one of the following ways to express their findings.

- Create an infographic
- Create a Venn Diagram
- Create a short story or poem
- Create a presentation
- Create a pamphlet
- Create a comic strip

The student instructions for this **Sharing and Reflection: What Influences My Decisions** activity are available as a [Google Doc](#) or [PDF](#).



7th GRADE
 DECYDE
 HS Lesson 3
 Learning Outcome 1

Student Name: _____

Sharing and Reflection: What Influences My Decisions?

Throughout this lesson, you have learned about:

- The Substance Use Spectrum
- The factors that influence decision-making
- Risk factors and protective factors

For this reflection activity, you will think about what influences your decision-making. Consider the following:

- The factors that influence your own decision-making.
- The protective factors that are present in your life.
- The ways these protective factors help guide you in making decisions, especially about substance use.

Be creative and thoughtful in showing how influences and protective factors shape your choices. Choose **one way** below to express yourself.

- Create an infographic
- Create a Venn diagram
- Write a short story or poem
- Create a presentation
- Design a pamphlet
- Make a comic strip

Learning Activity 3: What Is Addiction?



Learning Activity Objectives:

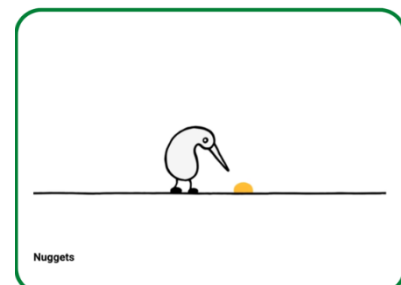
- Explain how addiction develops and progresses along the Substance Use Spectrum, using examples from videos, discussions, and lived experience stories.
- Describe how substance use affects the brain's reward system, emotions, and behaviour, and why addiction is considered a medical condition.
- Identify internal and external factors that influence substance use, recovery, and relapse.
- Engage in respectful and nonjudgmental discussions about substance use.

Materials:

- Introduction:
 - YouTube Video: [Nuggets](#)
 - Discussion Prompts
 - YouTube Video: [Why are Drugs so Hard to Quit?](#)
- Pre-Activity: Teenagers, Brain Development, Substance Use and Mental Health
 - YouTube Video: [Changing Minds – How Substance Use Disorder Changes the Brain](#)
 - Fact-Fiction-Fix Activity
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Infographics: [Substance Use Disorder](#), [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#), and [Promoting Protective Factors for Youth](#)
- Exploration Activity: Lived Experiences Spotlight: Katie's Experience with Substance Use
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographics: [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Early Substance Use
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Substance Snapshots: [Cannabis](#)

Introduction:

Begin this learning activity by displaying this short animation to the class to open the discussion on addiction. [Nuggets](#) (5:06) by Andreas Hykade uses the story of a kiwi bird and a golden "nugget" to explore the stages and impact of addiction.



After watching the video, guide students through the discussion prompts to explore the concept of addiction, encouraging them to link their responses to the earlier conversation about the Substance Use Spectrum.

Discussion Prompts:



- What do you think the golden "nugget" represents in the video?
- Where on the substance use spectrum does the kiwi start?
- How does the kiwi's position on the spectrum change over time?
- What changes in the kiwi's behaviour show the progression from experimental use to dependence?
- How do the kiwi's feelings and experiences change from the first nugget to later ones?
- What visual cues in the animation show increasing harm or risk?
- At what point does the kiwi seem to lose control over their use?
- Why might it be hard for the kiwi to stop, even if they know it's harmful?
- What might keep someone from progressing further along the spectrum?
- What internal factors (thoughts, emotions) might drive the kiwi to keep using?
- What external factors (environment, peers, stress) might influence use?
- What does this video suggest about whether addiction is a choice or a disease?
- Why might it be hard for someone to stop, even if they know it's harmful?
- How does the animation show both the short-term rewards and the long-term consequences of use?
- If you were helping the kiwi, what strategies could support moving back toward lower risk use or stopping?

As a class, brainstorm various substances and activities that people may develop addictions to.

Possible Answers:

- Any type of substance (e.g., opioids, nicotine, alcohol, cannabis, caffeine)
- Eating
- Gaming
- Gambling
- Committing Crimes
- Sexual Activity
- Cell Phones
- Social Media

High School Lesson 3



After the students finish brainstorming, display the video [Why are Drugs so Hard to Quit?](#) (3:57), which focuses on how drugs affect the brain's reward system, triggers, withdrawal, relapse, and recovery.

Next, guide the class in a discussion about the video using these prompts:

**Discussion Prompts:**

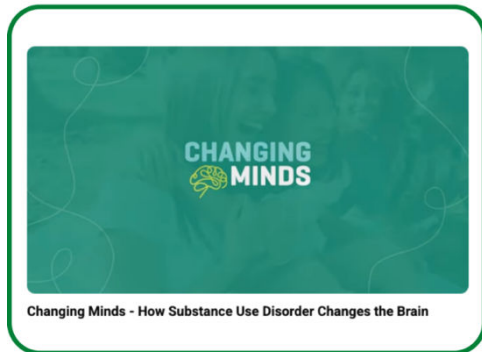
- How does the brain's reward system normally help us, and why might drugs affect it so strongly?
- What are "triggers," and how can they make it harder for someone to quit using drugs?
- Why is addiction considered a medical condition rather than a sign of weakness?
- Why do you think stigma around addiction still exists?
- Why is relapse seen as part of recovery, not failure?
- What supports (friends, family, community, healthcare) can help people in recovery?
- What are some positive "triggers" or habits you could build into your own life for better wellness?
- Why is it important to remember that people can heal from addiction?

Pre-Activity: Teenagers, Brain Development, Substance Use and Mental Health

Teacher Background Information:

- The brain develops until age 25, so substance use in teens can disrupt growth and cause lasting harm. The prefrontal cortex (decision-making area) is still developing, making teens more likely to take risks.
- Risk factors for problematic use: genetics, environment, and early exposure.
- Protective factors: strong family bonds, positive peers, healthy coping skills, and school connectedness.
- Teens are natural risk-takers and often seek dopamine "highs."
- Substances mimic dopamine, creating artificial rewards and reducing natural dopamine production.
- Over time, this can lead to dependence, substance use disorder, and withdrawal symptoms like fatigue, low mood, and lack of motivation.

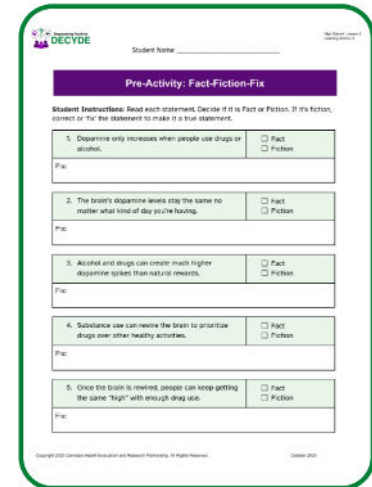
For more information, refer to the infographics: [Substance Use Disorder](#), [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#), and [Promoting Protective Factors for Youth](#)



Display the following video with the class, called [Changing Minds – How Substance Use Disorder Changes the Brain](#) (4:42).

Following the video, ask the students to complete the **Fact-Fiction-Fix** activity where they read each statement and decide if it is Fact or Fiction. If it's fiction, they make the statement correct. This can be completed individually, in pairs, or in small groups.

The **Fact-Fiction-Fix** student worksheet is available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).



Student Name _____

Pre-Activity: Fact-Fiction-Fix

Student Instructions: Read each statement. Decide if it is Fact or Fiction. If its fiction, correct or fix the statement to make it a true statement.

1. Dopamine only increases when people use drugs or alcohol.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Fiction
Fix: _____	
2. The brain's dopamine levels stay the same no matter what kind of day you're having.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Fiction
Fix: _____	
3. Alcohol and drugs can create much higher dopamine spikes than natural rewards.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Fiction
Fix: _____	
4. Substance use can rewire the brain to prioritize drugs over other healthy activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Fiction
Fix: _____	
5. Once the brain is rewired, people can keep getting the same "high" with enough drug use.	<input type="checkbox"/> Fact <input type="checkbox"/> Fiction
Fix: _____	

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Teacher Discussion Guide:

1. Dopamine only increases when people use drugs or alcohol. **Fiction** – Dopamine also increases naturally through activities like eating, friendships, and learning.
2. The brain's dopamine levels stay the same no matter what kind of day you're having. **Fiction** – Dopamine levels rise on good days and drop on bad days.
3. Alcohol and drugs can create much higher dopamine spikes than natural rewards. **Fact**
4. Substance use can rewire the brain to prioritize drugs over other healthy activities. **Fact**
5. Once the brain is rewired, people can keep getting the same "high" with enough drug use. **Fiction** – The brain never reaches those same highs again, no matter how much is used.
6. Over time, the brain may reduce its natural dopamine production, making it harder to enjoy things. **Fact**
7. People with substance use disorder may keep using drugs just to feel normal rather than to feel high. **Fact**
8. Drug cravings are about the same intensity as cravings for food when hungry. **Fiction** – Drug cravings can be far stronger, even compared to going days without food or water.
9. Recovery is not possible once the brain has been changed by substances. **Fiction** – Recovery is possible; the brain can heal with treatment, support, and time.
10. Millions of people are living in recovery today. **Fact**
11. Substance use disorder only impacts certain types of people. **Fiction** – It can affect anyone, in any community.
12. Talking openly about substance use and recovery can help reduce stigma and support healing. **Fact**

Exploration Activity: Lived Experience Spotlight: Katie's Experience with Substance Use

Throughout the lessons, students will engage with authentic stories shared by individuals with lived and living experiences. These spotlights present real perspectives, told in the individual's own words and language, offering students meaningful insight into the realities of substance use.

Teachers may refer to the [Cannabis](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

For this Exploration Activity, Students will read the Lived Experience Spotlight about Katie and answer questions that follow. They can work in groups, pairs, or individually. Encourage students to conduct their own research, refer to the [Protective and Risk Factors](#) infographic, and explore the relevant [Substance Snapshots](#).

Katie's Experience with Substance Use student worksheet is available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).

Student Name: _____

Exploration: Lived Experience Spotlight

Katie's Experience with Substance Use

Instructions: Read the spotlight story below and answer the questions that follow.

I did not become addicted. For me, I always had a curious nature for as far back as I can recall. During my teens some of my peers began to experiment with various substances. I suppose I looked at it as if I didn't want to go through life thinking I was missing out on something.

I initially tried weed and felt like it just wasn't for me. This largely remained the same heading into my early 20s, at which point I found myself experiencing a lot of stress and anxiety as a result of various work and relationship struggles. Slowly I began experimenting with weed more regularly, finding that it could help quiet the ringing noise inside my head. Eventually, this developed into smoking regularly aside from my working hours. This pattern then persisted for well over a year, before I began to recognize that it was impacting other aspects of my life.

Initially, I felt as though it was a net positive for me, particularly mentally. I generally felt happier and less stressed. The issue became when I began looking at smoking as a bonus to any activity/event. Simple things I previously enjoyed while sober like getting out for a walk with the dog, taking part in hobbies like performing music or playing sports, or socializing with friends slowly started to seem 'boring' without me being high. Eventually it began to feel as though I couldn't enjoy any experiences without being stoned. I began to slip into a pretty sedentary lifestyle as well, often resorting to taking around for the evenings outside of my daily work duties. Because my work was not directly impacted, I failed to see how it could have been an issue. However, in due time I noticed some of my relationships began to deteriorate. My girlfriend at the time felt as though we were no longer communicating effectively, peers reported me being 'distant' and my parents informed me that they felt like I was drifting out of their life.

Ultimately I did not aim to completely remove cannabis use from my life, but rather significantly reduce my dependency on it. First and foremost, I had to want that for myself. There were some attempts early on where I didn't take it seriously, only to

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TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

LIVED EXPERIENCES SPOTLIGHTS

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LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

Part 1- Darcy's Story: A Parent's Perspective on Raine's Substance Use Journey

I had hoped Raine wouldn't and I took every opportunity to talk to them about drugs and the devastating effects on their lives if they did it. Their father has Substance Use Disorder and seeing what we were going through with him, I prayed it would be different, unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

I don't remember when it started but I know they were around 13 years old, and I believe their peers may have given Raine alcohol and drugs. I didn't see any signs until much later.

I thought it was just marijuana and alcohol but I learned later on that it was cocaine and alcohol, and later on their addiction it was pretty much anything they could get

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The Teacher Discussion Guide is available as a [PDF](#).

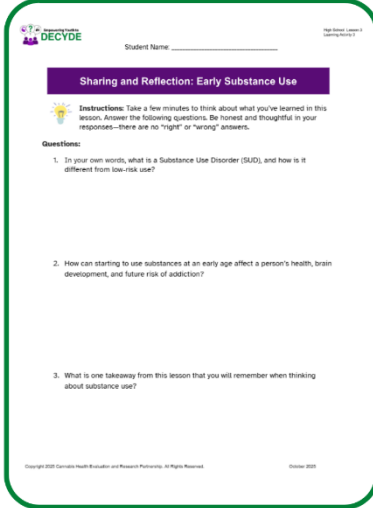
Sharing and Reflection: Early Substance Use




To complete this learning activity, invite students to take a few minutes to reflect on what they've learned. Ask them to respond in writing, encouraging honesty and thoughtfulness by reminding them there are no right or wrong answers. Students will be prompted with the following questions:

1. In your own words, what is a Substance Use Disorder (SUD), and how is it different from low-risk use?
2. How can starting to use substances at an early age affect a person's health, brain development, and future risk of addiction?
3. What is one takeaway from this lesson that you will remember when thinking about substance use?

The **Sharing and Reflection: Early Substance Use** student worksheet is available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).




 Student Name: _____

Sharing and Reflection: Early Substance Use

Instructions: Take a few minutes to think about what you've learned in this lesson. Answer the following questions. Be honest and thoughtful in your responses—there are no "right" or "wrong" answers.

Questions:

1. In your own words, what is a Substance Use Disorder (SUD), and how is it different from low-risk use?
2. How can starting to use substances at an early age affect a person's health, brain development, and future risk of addiction?
3. What is one takeaway from this lesson that you will remember when thinking about substance use?

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Learning Activity 4: Stigma



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Define stigma and explain how it affects individuals who use substances.
- Identify myths and misconceptions about substance use.
- Recognize different types of stigma (structural, social, and self-stigma) and describe how they can influence a person's choices, relationships, and access to help.
- Demonstrate the use of non-stigmatizing, person-first language when discussing substance use and addiction.
- Reflect on ways to reduce stigma and promote empathy, inclusion, and support for people experiencing substance use challenges.
- Engage in respectful and nonjudgmental discussions about substance use.

Materials:

- Introduction to Stigma
 - YouTube Video: [Stigma and Substance Use](#)
 - Myth vs. Fact: Understanding Substance Use – [Canva Presentation](#)
 - Infographic: [Stigma](#)
- Pre-Activity: Change the Language
 - YouTube Video: [Stigma and Substance Use Disorder Video](#)
 - Change the Language Activity
- Exploration: Lived Experience Spotlight: Adair's Story: Understanding the Impact of Stigma
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographics: [Stigma](#), [Caregiver Substance Use](#) and [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Breaking the Stigma Around Substance Use
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
- Substance Snapshots: [Cocaine](#), [Alcohol](#), [Opioids](#), [Benzodiazepines](#)

Introduction

In this learning activity, students will discuss how language affects stigma related to substance use. They will explore how words and labels can shape attitudes, influence behavior, and either create barriers or foster understanding and support. Through discussion and reflection, students will learn how using respectful, person-first language can help reduce stigma in their school and community. Refer to the [Stigma](#) Infographic for help guide this lesson.

Class Discussion and Brainstorm: What is Stigma?

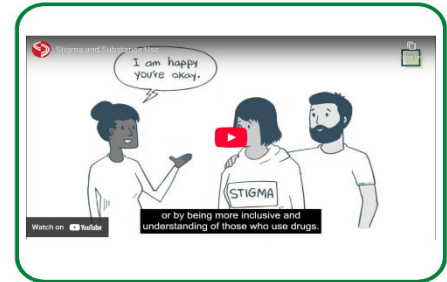
1. Introduction:

Begin by asking students:

- “What do you think the word *stigma* means?”
- “How do you think stigma affects people who use substances?”

2. Show the video [Stigma and Substance Use \(2:06\)](#)

Begin by showing the following video about stigma as an introduction to the topic.



3. Show the [Stigma](#) Infographic.

Explain that stigma happens when people are **judged, labelled, or treated unfairly** because they use substances or are in recovery. Emphasize that stigma can stop people from asking for help, talking about their struggles, or seeking treatment.

4. Class Brainstorm:

As a class, brainstorm **common stereotypes or negative perceptions** people might have about individuals who use substances.

Write responses on the board (e.g., “lazy,” “dangerous,” “weak,” “bad choices”).

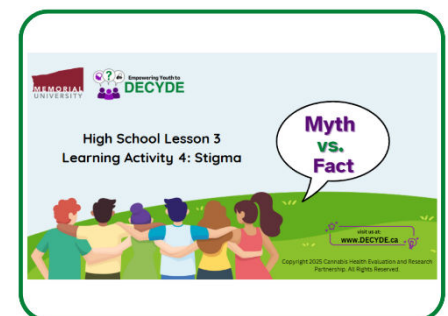
5. Myth vs. Fact: Stigma

Review the 10 myth vs facts statements with the class. Encourage students to read each myth aloud and then guess the fact before revealing it.

The myth vs facts statements are available as a [Canva Presentation](#) to be displayed to the class.

6. Debrief:

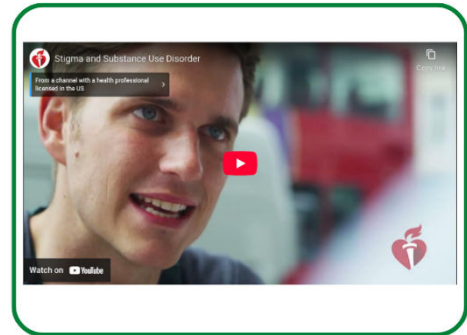
Discuss how negative perceptions can cause harm, such as shame, isolation, or fear of seeking help.



Pre-Activity: Change the Language Activity

- As a class, watch the [Stigma and Substance Use Disorder](#) Video (4:43).

The video discusses how words matter, and it is important to avoid words that can create negative stigma. To become more supportive in society, we can start by changing our language and how we think and speak about people who use substances.




- Brainstorm stigmatizing language or derogatory terms used daily to refer to people with substance use disorders. (Use a flip chart/whiteboard)
Examples: “Skeet”, “Druggie”, “Addict”, “Crackhead”.
- As a class, discuss how you might re-write these terms in a non-stigmatizing way.

Examples:

- He’s nothing but a druggie.
“He is a person who uses drugs.”
- She’s an addict.
“She has a substance use disorder.”
- Buddy is skeet.
“Buddy is different from me.”
- That guy is nothing but a drunk.
“He struggles with alcohol use disorder which is a disease.”

Exploration: Lived Experience Spotlight: Adair’s Story: Understanding the Impact of Stigma

Throughout the lessons, students will engage with authentic stories shared by individuals with lived and living experiences. These spotlights present real perspectives, told in the individual’s own words and language, offering students meaningful insight into the realities of substance use.



SUBSTANCE SNAPSHOT

Teachers may refer to the [Cocaine](#), [Alcohol](#), [Opioids](#), and [Benzodiazepines](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

High School Lesson 3



Students will read the Lived Experience Spotlight about Adair and answer questions that follow. They can work in groups, pairs, or individually. Encourage students to conduct their own research. They may refer to the [Stigma](#), [Caregiver Substance Use](#), and [Protective and Risk Factors](#) infographics as well as explore the relevant [Substance Snapshots](#).

Student Name: _____

Exploration: Lived Experience Spotlight

Adair's Story

Student Instructions: Read the story of Adair who faced challenges with substance use. As you read it, think about how stigma may have shown up at different points in Adair's life, such as during childhood, teenage years, or adulthood. Afterwards, answer the questions that follow. You can choose to either work in groups, pairs, or individually.

As you work, you may refer to the [Stigma](#), [Caregiver Substance Use](#), and [Protective and Risk Factors](#) infographics as well as explore the relevant [Substance Snapshots](#).

"I grew up in a home with two parents who had alcohol use disorder. I swore to myself that I would never live the way they lived and I would never do to my future children what was done to me mentally and emotionally. I hung around with an older group of people than myself. We played a lot of sports and drinking was a big part of that. I remember how much I loved the way alcohol made me feel and I knew from the first drink that I was dependent. The drug use didn't come along for many years later. I knew I couldn't hide alcohol use but I thought if I was using pills I would be able to hide it. For the first time when I was able to use only pills but shortly after my alcohol use disorder came back with a vengeance.

I started out with alcohol in my late teens. When I was 17, I was prescribed a benzodiazepine for severe anxiety and became dependent on them pretty quickly. As an adult I started using Percocet, Ritalin and Cocaine along with my benzos and alcohol. I also used Tylenol 3's, Tylenol 6's and pretty much anything with codeine in it.

When I was using it my life was in complete chaos. I worked to pay for my habits until my substance use had complete control over my life and I was unable to work anymore. I lost my children, my family, my business and any friend I had at the time. I lost my home and ended up walking the streets until I found somewhere to live. I had zero self respect. I lost the ability to make any rational decisions for

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Adair's Story: Understanding the Impact of Stigma student worksheet is available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).

The Teacher Discussion Guide is available as a [PDF](#).

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

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LEARNING ACTIVITY 2

Part 1: Daicy's Story: A Parent's Perspective on Rainie's Substance Use Journey

"I had hoped Rainie wouldn't and I took every opportunity to talk to them about drug and the devastating effects on their lives if they did it. Their father has Substance Use Disorder and seeing what we were going through with him, I prayed it would be different. Unfortunately, that wasn't the case.

I don't remember when it started but I know they were around 17 years old, and I believe their peers may have given them alcohol and drugs. I didn't see any signs until much later.

I thought it was just marijuana and alcohol but I learned later that it was cocaine and alcohol, and later in their addiction it was pretty much anything they could get

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Sharing and Reflection: Breaking the Stigma Around Substance Use



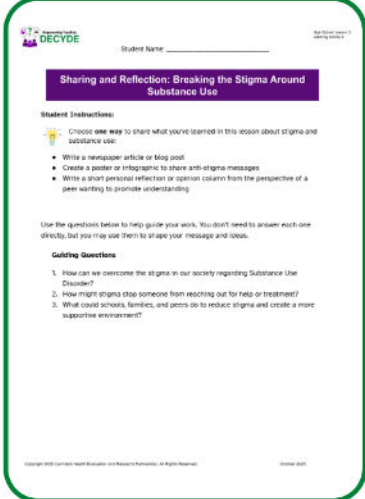
Students will reflect on what they've learned about stigma and substance use through a creative activity. They can choose how to share their ideas through writing, art, or personal reflection.

Encourage empathy, accuracy, and realistic ways to reduce stigma in schools and communities.

Students will consider the following guiding questions for this activity:

- How can we overcome stigma in our society regarding Substance Use Disorder?
- How might stigma stop someone from reaching out for help or treatment?
- What could schools, families, and peers do to reduce stigma and create a more supportive environment?

The student worksheet is available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).



The worksheet is titled "Sharing and Reflection: Breaking the Stigma Around Substance Use" and includes the following content:

Student Instructions:

- Choose **one way** to share what you've learned in this lesson about stigma and substance use:
 - Write a newspaper article or blog post
 - Create a poster or infographic to share anti-stigma messages
 - Write a short personal reflection or opinion column from the perspective of a peer wanting to promote understanding

Use the questions below to help guide your work. You don't need to answer each one directly, but you may use them to shape your message and topic.

Guiding Questions

1. How can we overcome the stigma in our society regarding Substance Use Disorder?
2. How might stigma stop someone from reaching out for help or treatment?
3. What could schools, families, and peers do to reduce stigma and create a more supportive environment?

Learning Activity 5: How to Seek Help for Substance Use



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Recognize signs that someone’s substance use may be becoming harmful.
- Identify barriers that can make it challenging for people to seek help for substance use.
- Identify protective factors and facilitators that support help-seeking, recovery, and resilience in youth.
- Demonstrate safe, compassionate, and nonjudgmental ways to approach someone you’re concerned about and offer support.
- Locate and describe youth-friendly local and national resources that provide support for substance use, mental health, or crisis situations.
- Engage in respectful and nonjudgmental discussions about substance use.

Materials:

- Introduction
 - Discussion Prompts
 - Infographics: [Stigma](#), [Substance Use Disorder](#), [Substance Use Spectrum](#), [Harm Reduction](#), [Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use](#)
- Exploration: Create a “Reaching Out” Guide
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - DECYDE: [Support Resources Page](#)
 - Infographics: [Substance Use Disorder](#), [Substance Use Spectrum](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Circles of Support Map
 - [Student Worksheet](#)

Introduction

This learning activity will help students apply what they have learned so far about the Substance Use Spectrum, Substance Use Disorder and Addiction, and Stigma by exploring how to recognize when someone might need help, how to approach them safely, and where to find support. Use the prompts below to guide a short class discussion before beginning the Reaching Out Guide activity.



Discussion Prompt

Teacher Notes / Key Concepts to Emphasize

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does stigma make it harder for someone to ask for help with substance use? | <p>Stigma can cause shame, fear of judgment, or worries about being labelled. Remind students that substance use is a health issue, not a moral failing. Refer to the Stigma infographic.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What life challenges or inequalities might make it harder for someone to get help? | <p>Discuss social determinants of health (e.g. poverty, trauma, housing, discrimination, lack of access to care, substance use in the home). These can increase risk and reduce ability to access support. Refer to the Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use infographic.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some protective factors that might help someone avoid or recover from harmful substance use? | <p>Strong family support, positive peer relationships, healthy coping skills, school/community connectedness, etc. Refer to the Protective and Risk Factors for Substance Use infographic for more details.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of barriers might block someone from reaching out for help? | <p>Fear of judgment, lack of knowledge about resources, doubt they deserve help, concern about confidentiality, cost, stigma.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What facilitators could make it easier for someone to seek help? | <p>Trusting relationships, knowing about youth-friendly resources, supportive community or school culture, nonjudgmental professionals, visible recovery stories.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can harm reduction and compassionate approaches change someone's decision to seek help? | <p>Emphasize that harm reduction lowers risks (e.g., education, safer practices) instead of punishing and helps maintain connections to care. Refer to the Harm Reduction infographic.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What could make it easier for someone to ask for help? | <p>Supportive and trusted adults, safe and youth-friendly spaces, access to accurate information, peers who show understanding, and visible examples of recovery.</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we recognize when someone might need help with substance use? What signs could we notice? | <p>Signs may include mood or behaviour changes, withdrawing from friends, hiding substance use, missing school, or losing interest in things they enjoy. Emphasize recognizing these without</p> |

judgment—show care, not blame. Refer to [Substance Use Spectrum](#) Infographic and the [Substance Use Disorder](#) infographic.

- **How could you approach someone you're worried about safely and compassionately?** Discuss caring approaches such as: “I’ve noticed you don’t seem like yourself lately—do you want to talk?” or “I’m here if you ever need to talk.” Avoid lecturing or accusing. Focus on listening and offering support.
- **Who or what supports might someone reach out to in your community or online?** Suggest school counsellors, trusted adults, helplines (e.g. 811, Kids Help Phone), local addiction or mental health services. Refer to the [Support Resources](#) page of the DECYDE website for more information.

Exploration Activity: Create a “Reaching Out” Guide

For this activity, students will design a one-page guide or poster aimed at helping young people understand how to recognize when someone might need help, how to reach out safely, and where to find support.

Guides should be creative and include the following information:

1. Recognizing the Signs:

- List or illustrate signs that someone’s substance use might be becoming harmful.
- Students may refer to the [Substance Use Spectrum](#) and [Substance Use Disorder](#) infographics, or other online resources.

2. Starting the Conversation:

- Describe safe and compassionate ways to approach someone you’re worried about.
- Include examples of what you could say to show care and support without judgment. (e.g., “I’ve noticed you haven’t seemed like yourself lately—do you want to talk?”)
- Students may refer to the [Stigma](#) infographic or other online resources.

3. Finding Help:

- Identify trusted people youth could turn to (e.g., parents, teachers, school counsellors, coaches, friends).
- Research 2–3 youth-friendly support services (local, online, or national).
For each, include:
 - Who the service is for
 - What kind of help they offer (e.g., counselling, harm reduction, crisis support)
 - How to contact them (phone, text, chat, or in-person)

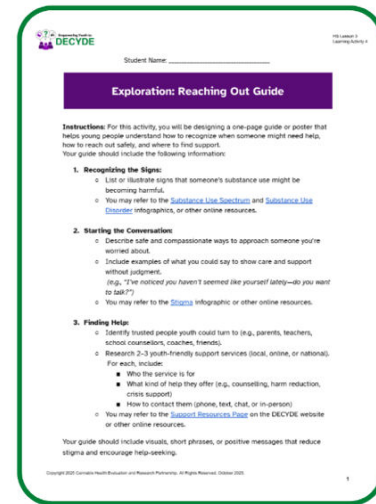
High School Lesson 3



- Students may refer to the [Support Resources Page](#) on the DECYDE website or other online resources.

Encourage students to add visuals, short phrases, or positive messages that reduce stigma and encourage help-seeking.

Student Instructions are available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).



Sharing and Reflection: Circles of Support Map

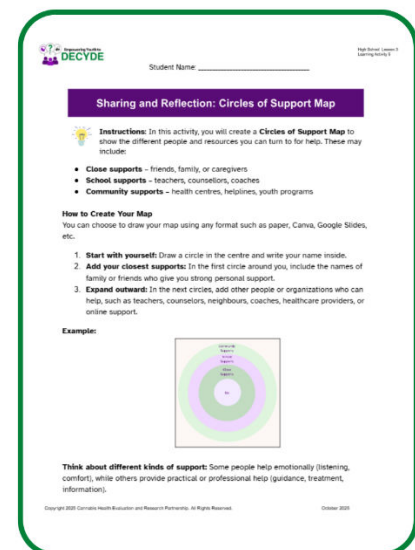


In this Sharing and Reflection, students will create a **Circles of Support Map** to identify the people and resources they can turn to for help.

The map begins with the student in the centre and expands outward to show different layers of support—**close supports** (e.g., friends and family), **school supports** (e.g., teachers, counsellors, coaches), and **community supports** (e.g., health centres, helplines, programs). Students will then reflect on the following questions:

1. Which supports feel easiest to reach out to?
2. Which ones feel hardest to reach out to, and why?
3. How might stigma or fear affect your comfort in asking for help?
4. What could make it easier to reach out to people or services in each circle?

The **Student Instructions: Circles of Support Map** are available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).





Content Created by the Cannabis Health Evaluation and Research Partnership (CHERP) Team at Memorial University

DECYDE stands for Drug Education Centred on Youth Decision Empowerment. Through this project, our Cannabis Health Evaluation and Research Partnership (CHERP) team of pharmacists, educators, researchers, and students at Memorial University who wish to support substance use education for youth. We further collaborate with a diverse panel of youth in Newfoundland and Labrador who collaborate with the team on creating the DECYDE content.

The key goals of our project are to:

- Provide substance use education that emphasizes harm reduction principles.
- Provide youth with information and support the development of decision-making skills about substance use.
- Provide youth with the knowledge and skills to make safe and informed decisions surrounding substance use.
- Provide educators with accessible and easy-to-follow lesson plans that contain valid and reliable information.

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