

High School Drug Education

Lesson 1: Substance Use Policies and Regulations



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.

Healthy Living Curriculum Outcomes

Drug Education

1. Demonstrate an understanding of what constitutes socially responsible behaviour towards substance use within the school and community.
2. Utilise information technology to access, present, and communicate information on substance use.
3. Recognize the effects of substances and make decisions regarding appropriate and inappropriate use of substances.

Emotional and Social Well-being

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

Communications

5. Collaborate with peers to explore multiple perspectives, practice respectful communication, and justify their ideas in group settings.

Environmental Health and Safety

6. 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 1: Substance Use Policies and Regulations

Norms & Expectations

- Learning Activity 1: Substance Use Policies at School and Work
- Learning Activity 2: The Legalization, Decriminalization, and Regulation of Substances



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

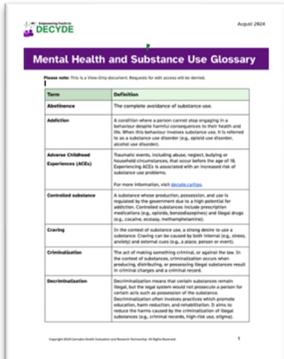
Definition of Drugs

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 chronic, relapsing brain disease characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use that persists despite harmful consequences. It is defined by the presence of drug craving, loss of control over drug use, and continued use despite negative consequences.
Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)	Traumatic events, including abuse, neglect, family or household dysfunction that occur before the age of 18, increasing risk of a wide range of physical and mental health problems.
Controlled substance	A substance whose production, possession, and use is regulated by the government due to a high potential for addiction. Controlled substances include prescription drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and marijuana.
Craving	The desire for substance use, a strong desire to use a substance. Craving can be caused by drug, neural, drug, stress, genetic and learned factors (e.g., a habit, power or emotion).
Criminalization	The act of making something criminal, or applied the law in the context of substance use, criminalization refers to punishing, deterring, or preventing legal substance use.
Decriminalization	Decriminalization means that certain substances remain illegal, but the legal penalties for possession or use are reduced or eliminated. Decriminalization often involves practices which provide education, harm reduction, and rehabilitation services to individuals who use substances. Examples include: reduced penalties, decriminalization of possession, and decriminalization of use.



[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 1: Substance Use Policies and Regulations



Learning Activities and Teacher Background Resources

Learning Activity 1: Substance Use Policies at School and Work

Learning Activity 2: The Legalization, Decriminalization, and Regulation of Substances

Teacher Resources:

- Substance Snapshots: [Cannabinoids \(Cannabis\)](#), [Depressants \(Alcohol, Benzodiazepine, Opioids\)](#), [Hallucinogens](#), [Stimulants \(Cocaine, Nicotine, Caffeine\)](#)
- Infographic: [Substance Use Laws in Canada](#), [Drug Categories](#), [FACE Decision-Making Model](#),



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 Policies at School and Work



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Identify reasons why individuals might use substances in school or workplace settings.
- Explain the rationale behind school and workplace substance use policies in terms of safety, fairness, and accountability.
- Analyze scenarios and apply decision-making skill to consider the consequences of using substances at work.
- Collaborate respectfully with peers.
- Demonstrate positive communication strategies.
- Use critical thinking skills to make decisions and problem-solve.

Materials:

- Introduction:
 - Discussion Prompts: Why Use Substances at Work or School?
- Pre-Activity: School and Workplace Policies
 - Scenarios: Marcus and Jordan - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
- Exploration Activity (Part 1): School Policy
 - Discussion Prompts
- Exploration Activity (Part 2): Making Decisions at Work: FACE Scenarios
 - [Sample Workplace Policy \(PDF\)](#)
 - Scenarios:
 - Scenario 1: Alex: The Fish Plant Incident – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Scenario 2: Sam: Cash Register Mishap – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Scenario 3: Avery: The Delivery Driver’s Dilemma – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Scenario 4: Caelan: The Referee – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Scenario 5: Kit: Restaurant Kitchen Chaos – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Scenario 6: Deven: Struggling to Keep Up – [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographics: [Substance Use & Laws, FACE Decision-Making Model](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Following Substance Use Policies
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
- Substance Snapshots: [Alcohol, Cannabis, Opioids, Cocaine](#)

Introduction: Why Use Substances at School or Work?



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

In this lesson, students will learn about substance use policies at school and in the workplace. Begin by engaging students in a brainstorming discussion about why people might use substances at school or in the workplace. Teachers may choose to list students' responses. The following discussion prompts can help to guide the conversation.

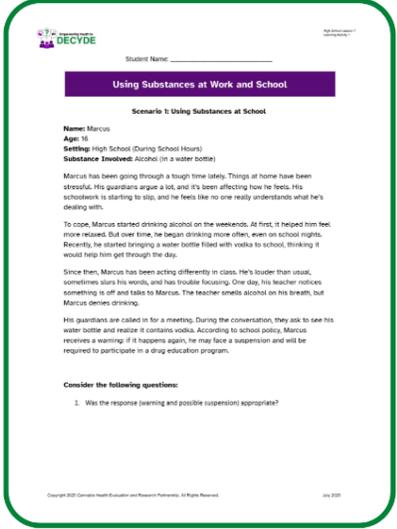


Discussion Prompts:

- Why do you think some people choose to use substances at school or work?
- What kinds of school or work environments might increase stress or pressure to use substances?
- How do peers or coworkers influence someone's decision to use a substance?
- Can someone believe they are using a substance to "perform better"? In what situations might that happen?
- What role does boredom or downtime play in someone's choice to use?
- Do you think using a substance (like vaping or weed) to help with stress at work or school helps or harms in the long run? Why?
- What's the difference between using a substance during school or work versus after school or work?
- When do you think people feel the strongest urge to use something at school or work (e.g., vape, caffeine, weed)? What triggers it?
- What are some safer ways someone could manage stress or frustration without using substances?

Pre-Activity: School and Workplace Policies

This activity will introduce two scenarios of youth who use substances at school (Marcus) and work (Jordan). Divide the class into small groups and provide each group with one or both scenarios. Groups will read through the scenarios and go through the discussion questions together ([available as a Google Doc or PDF](#)).



Student Name: _____

Using Substances at Work and School

Scenario 1: Using Substances at School

Name: Marcus
Age: 18
Setting: High School (During School Hours)
Substance Involved: Alcohol (in a water bottle)

Marcus has been going through a tough time lately. Things at home have been stressful. His guardians argue a lot, and it's been affecting how he feels. His schoolwork is starting to slip, and he feels like no one really understands what he's dealing with.

To cope, Marcus started drinking alcohol on the weekends. At first, it helped him feel more relaxed. But over time, he began drinking more often, even on school nights. Recently, he started bringing a water bottle filled with vodka to school, thinking it would help him get through the day.

Since then, Marcus has been acting differently in class. He's louder than usual, sometimes slurs his words, and has trouble focusing. One day, his teacher notices something is off and talks to Marcus. The teacher smells alcohol on his breath, but Marcus denies drinking.

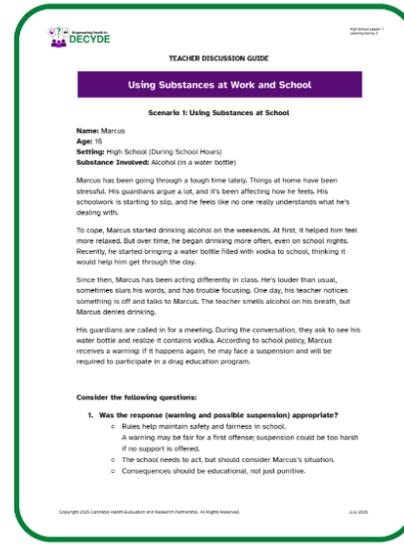
His guardians are called in for a meeting. During the conversation, they ask to see his water bottle and realize it contains vodka. According to school policy, Marcus receives a warning; if it happens again, he may face a suspension and will be required to participate in a drug education program.

Consider the following questions:

1. Was the response (warning and possible suspension) appropriate?

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Teachers can choose to have students fill out the worksheets individually or discuss the questions as a group. The teacher discussion guide is available [as a PDF](#).



Exploration Activity: Part 1 – School Policy

For the next activity, acquire a copy of your school's code of conduct and put it on display for the class, specifically referencing the areas relating to substance use (for variation, you could also do the same with the school district's overarching policy). Once the students have reviewed the policies, lead a discussion asking students to collaboratively identify reasons why they think such policies exist.

Use the following discussion prompts to guide the discussion:



Discussion Prompts:

- Who do you think put these policies together?
- What do you think these policies are intending to achieve?
- Do you think students should be involved in such policy development?
- Who do you think these policies aim to support? (e.g., staff, students, parents/guardians)
- How could the policy be modified to better meet the needs of these people?
- What is the approach to non-adherence to the policy? What other approaches would you suggest for dealing with non-adherence?

Exploration Activity: Part 2 – Making Decisions at Work: FACE Scenarios

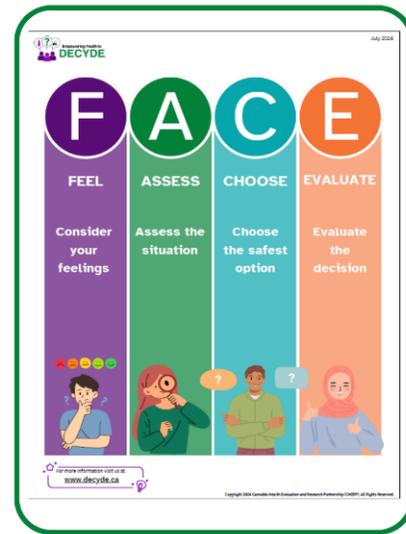


Teachers may refer to the [Alcohol](#), [Cannabis](#), [Opioids](#) and [Cocaine](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

For this activity, students will use the [FACE Decision-Making Model](#) to analyze the following scenarios related to the consequences of using substances at work.

Present and discuss the [FACE Decision-Making Model](#) with students. They will use the model to explore how youth may:

- **FEEL** about the situation
- **ASSESS** the situation
- **CHOOSE** the safest option
- **EVALUATE** the decision



The following six scenarios can be used to discuss decision-making related to substance use at the workplace.

In groups, students will work through one or more scenarios assigned to them. Each scenario and the accompanying student worksheets are available [as Google Docs or PDFs](#):

- Scenario 1: Alex: The Fish Plant Incident
- Scenario 2: Sam: Cash Register Mishap
- Scenario 3: Avery: The Delivery Driver’s Dilemma
- Scenario 4: Caelan: The Referee
- Scenario 5: Kit: Restaurant Kitchen Chaos
- Scenario 6: Deven: Struggling to Keep Up

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Substance Use Laws in Canada

Legal Substance Use
Substance use that is permitted under the law.

Medical substances

- Over-the-counter medications
- Prescription medications (to be used as directed by the prescription holder)
- Non-medical substances
- Coffee and energy drinks
- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Moisture (tobacco and vapor) products

Illegal Substance Use
Substance use that is not permitted by law.

Medical substances

- Prescription medication (used for non-medical reasons or by someone other than the prescription holder)
- Non-medical substances
- Illegal substances
- Unregulated substances

Identifying Regulated and Unregulated Cannabis and Nicotine Products

Regulated Products
Substances whose production, possession, and use are regulated by the government.

- Packaging for regulated cannabis and nicotine products
- Is a safe color and child-resistant
- Identifies product ingredients/energy
- Includes mandatory health warnings

Unregulated Products
Substances whose production, possession, and use are not regulated by the government.

- Some signs of unregulated products
- Packaging has no health warnings or product potency
- Single transactions required during purchase
- Vendor accepts cash or a transfer only

Legal Age by Province

Alcohol

- 18 in all provinces/territories except Alberta (18+) and Quebec (21+)

Cannabis

- 18 in all provinces/territories except Alberta (18+) and Quebec (21+)

Tobacco & nicotine products

- 18 in all provinces/territories except Alberta (18+) and Quebec (21+)

Cannabis Act

- This act applies to underage substance use during an emergency situation.
- This act does not provide protection for **assaulting, harassing, or trafficking** substances.

Workplace Policy

Use the sample policy below as a resource for the case studies in this activity.

Workplace Policy

The following activities are strictly prohibited at all company work sites:

- Being under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs while on duty or present at the workplace. This includes reporting to work while impaired.
- Using, possessing, using, smoking, selling, or manufacturing illegal drugs at any time while on company property or during work hours, including breaks and lunch periods.
- Misusing prescription or over-the-counter medications in a way that could lead to impairment at the workplace.
- Possessing open containers of alcohol or cannabis at the work site.
- Consuming alcohol, cannabis, or other illicit drugs during work hours, including breaks and lunch periods.
- Operating any motorized vehicle or equipment while impaired (whether due to alcohol, drugs, prescription medications with impairing side effects, or any other substance strictly prohibited in the workplace. This policy applies to all vehicles and equipment, regardless of ownership (company-owned or personal).

The responsibilities of the employees, as per the above policy, include:

- Reporting to work fit for duty and remaining so throughout their work hours.
- Being responsible for ensuring that their ability to work safely and effectively is not compromised by alcohol, cannabis, or other drugs, including medications.
- Immediately reporting any concerns about their own or a co-worker's potential impairment to their supervisor or another member of management.
- Complying with all aspects of this policy.
- Cooperating with any inquiries or procedures related to this policy.
- Seeking assistance if they believe they may have a substance use problem that could affect their work performance or safety.
- Being aware of the potential impact of prescribed and over-the-counter medications on their fitness for duty and communicating any concerns to their supervisor or HR if accommodation may be required.

Failure to comply with this policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment, in accordance with the company's disciplinary policy, collective agreements of applicable, and relevant employment legislation. In cases involving potential criminal activity or legal violations, the matter may also be referred to law enforcement or other appropriate authorities.

A sample workplace policy is available at the bottom of each worksheet to inform the discussion about the scenarios. Teachers may also provide students with [Substance Use & Laws Infographic](#).

The Teacher Discussion Guide is [available as a PDF](#) on the DECYDE website.

Teachers may choose to model the first scenario with the class (see below).

TEACHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

Exploration: FACE Scenarios

FACE
F: Feel, A: Assess, C: Consider, E: Engage

Table of Contents

SCENARIOS	PAGE NUMBERS
Scenario 1: Alex: The Fish Plant Incident	Pages 2-4
Scenario 2: Sam: Cash Register Mishap	Pages 5-7
Scenario 3: Avery: The Delivery Driver's Dilemma	Pages 8-9
Scenario 4: 曹林: The Referee	Pages 11-13
Scenario 5: Kit: Restaurant Kitchen Chaos	Pages 14-16
Scenario 6: Devin: Struggling to Keep up	Pages 17-19

Sample Scenario 1: Alex: The Fish Plant Incident (Teacher Example)

Alex, who is 17, has a summer job at the fish plant where their cousin works. They frequently socialize with their cousin and their coworkers during lunch break. One day, some of Alex's coworkers were smoking weed (cannabis) during the break and offered it to Alex. Alex took a few puffs, and even though they didn't feel super high, it was enough to impair their coordination when they returned after lunch. Alex accidentally cut their hand while cleaning the filet machine, resulting in a minor injury.

How should Alex FACE this situation?

FEEL:**1. How do you think Alex might feel in this situation?**

- Alex might feel embarrassed and ashamed that they made a poor decision which led to an injury.
- Alex might also feel nervous or anxious about the consequences from their employer
- Alex might also feel pressure or disappointment that they gave in to peer pressure from coworkers or family.

ASSESS:**2. What part of the policy did they violate?**

- Alex violated the part of the policy that prohibits:
 - Consuming cannabis during work hours, including breaks and lunch periods.
 - Being under the influence of cannabis while on duty or present at the workplace.
 - Failing to ensure they were fit for duty and not impaired.

3. According to the policy, what consequences might Alex face because of their actions?

- Alex could face disciplinary action, ranging from a warning to termination depending on severity.
- The employer may require retraining, safety education, or involvement in an incident investigation.
- If substance use is a concern, Alex may be referred to support services (e.g., counselling, EAP).
- Coworkers also share responsibility for safety, and the situation highlights why impairment rules apply even during breaks.

4. How might the employer screen for cannabis use?

- Post-incident Drug testing - Alex might be asked to take a urine, saliva, or blood test shortly after the injury.
- Note: **THC stays in the body** for days or even weeks after use, depending on how often someone uses cannabis. So a positive test doesn't always prove someone was impaired *at the time* of the incident. However, **saliva tests** can detect more recent use (within a few hours), so they might be preferred in post-incident cases.

CHOOSE:**5. What are the next steps for Alex?**

- Alex should report the injury and the incident honestly to their supervisor.
- They may be asked to meet with HR or management to discuss the policy violation.
- Depending on company policy and whether this is a first-time issue, Alex may be referred to counseling, warned, or disciplined.
- Alex might be encouraged or required to seek help if substance use is affecting their ability to work safely.
- In the future, Alex should avoid consuming any substances during work hours and be more mindful of peer pressure, even from close coworkers or relatives.

EVALUATE:

6. What do you think Alex learned from this experience?

- Even small amounts of cannabis can impair coordination and lead to accidents.
- Workplace substance-use policies apply during breaks and must be followed at all times.
- Impairment can have real safety consequences, not just rule-related ones.
- Peer pressure can lead to unsafe choices, and it's important to set boundaries.
- Reporting concerns or avoiding risky situations is part of staying safe at work.

7. How do you think Alex's actions affected their employer, coworkers, customers, and themselves?

- Alex put themselves at risk and experienced a preventable injury.
- Coworkers' safety was impacted because impaired behaviour increases the chance of accidents for everyone nearby.
- The employer had to manage incident reporting, possible production delays, and safety investigations.
- Customer service or product quality may have been affected if the injury disrupted workflow.
- The incident may damage trust in Alex's reliability and require corrective action.

Sharing and Reflection: Following Substance Use Policies

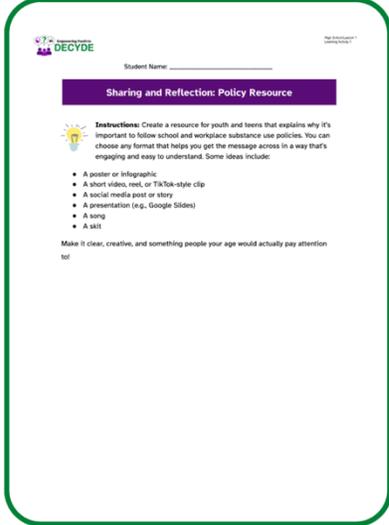


For this sharing and reflection activity, students will create a resource for youth and teens that explains why it's important to follow school and workplace substance use policies.

Students may present their ideas in any format they choose, as long as it clearly communicates their message in an engaging and easy-to-understand way. Some ideas include:

- A poster or infographic
- A short video, reel, or clip
- A social media post or story
- A presentation (e.g., Google Slides)
- A song
- A skit
- A poem

Encourage students to their work clear, imaginative, and appealing—something that would catch the attention of their peers! The student instructions are available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#).



Student Name: _____

Sharing and Reflection: Policy Resource

Instructions: Create a resource for youth and teens that explains why it's important to follow school and workplace substance use policies. You can choose any format that helps you get the message across in a way that's engaging and easy to understand. Some ideas include:

- A poster or infographic
- A short video, reel, or TikTok-style clip
- A social media post or story
- A presentation (e.g., Google Slides)
- A song
- A skit

Make it clear, creative, and something people your age would actually pay attention to!

Learning Activity 2: The Legalization, Decriminalization, and Regulation of Substances



Learning Activity Objectives:

- Analyze the concepts of legalization, decriminalization, regulation, and unregulated approaches related to substance use.
- Consider the effects of various substances, including cannabinoids, depressants, hallucinogens, and stimulants.
- Classify drugs into the categories of legal, illegal, regulated, and unregulated.
- Critically evaluate through a debate the concepts of legalization, decriminalization, and drug classification.
- Collaborate respectfully with peers.
- Demonstrate positive communication strategies.
- Use critical thinking skills to make decisions and problem-solve.

Materials:

- Introduction: Drug Categories, Decriminalization, and Legalization
 - Drug Categories Activity: [Student Worksheet](#)
 - Infographic: [Drug Categories](#)
 - Video: [Difference Between Legalization vs. Decriminalization](#)
 - Discussion Prompts
- Pre-Activity: Substance Snapshot Jigsaw Activity
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
 - [Teacher Discussion Guide](#)
 - Infographic: [Substance Use Laws in Canada](#)
- Exploration Activity: Debate – Should Our City Decriminalize All Drugs?
 - Debate Instructions & Resources: [Canva Presentation](#)
- Sharing and Reflection: Student Fact Sheet
 - [Student Worksheet](#)
- Substance Snapshots: [Cannabinoids](#) ([Cannabis](#)), [Depressants](#) ([Alcohol](#), [Benzodiazepine](#), [Opioids](#)), [Hallucinogens](#), [Stimulants](#) ([Cocaine](#), [Nicotine](#), [Caffeine](#))

Introduction: Drug Categories, Decriminalization, and Legalization

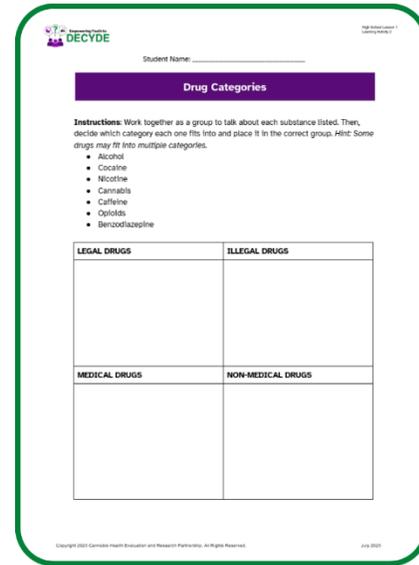
This activity will focus on the difference between legalization and decriminalization of drugs, as well as the different categories of drugs, including illegal and legal and regulated and unregulated.

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Begin with a brief discussion about the different categories of drugs, including medical, non-medical, legal and illegal. Introduce students to the [Drug Categories Infographic](#). Explain that drugs may fall into one or multiple categories. For example, alcohol is both a legal and non-medical drug.

Provide students with the following worksheet ([available as a PDF or Google Doc](#)).

Students will be provided with a list of a variety of substances and will place each substance into the appropriate categories (legal vs. illegal, medical vs non-medical). Students may work in small groups, pairs, or individually).



Teacher Discussion Guide:

LEGAL DRUGS	ILLEGAL DRUGS
Alcohol Nicotine Cannabis Caffeine Benzodiazepine Opioids (prescription)	Alcohol (underage) Cocaine Cannabis (underage) Opioids (non-prescription)
MEDICAL DRUGS	NON-MEDICAL DRUGS
Cannabis (prescription) Opioids (prescription) Benzodiazepine	Alcohol Cocaine Nicotine Cannabis (non-prescription) Caffeine Opioids (non-prescription) Benzodiazepine (non-prescription)



Next, have a class discussion around decriminalization vs legalization and regulated vs unregulated drugs. **Watch the video:** [Difference Between Legalization vs. Decriminalization](#) (2:55) with the class and then review the discussion prompts that follow.

Below is a summary of decriminalization and legalization for the teachers reference.

- **Decriminalization** means removing criminal penalties for certain drug-related activities, such as possessing small amounts for personal use. The drug remains illegal, but people won't face jail time or a criminal record. Instead, they may receive a fine, a warning, or be referred to health services. While the drug may still be unregulated, penalties for personal use are reduced or eliminated.
- **Legalization** means a drug is permitted by law to be bought, sold, and used under specific regulations—such as age restrictions or licensed sellers. It is fully legal and regulated, such as substances like alcohol or cannabis.



Discussion prompts:

- What do you think is the difference between decriminalizing a drug and legalizing it? Can you give an example of each?
- Why might a government choose to decriminalize a drug rather than legalize it?
- Do you think decriminalization reduces harm? Why or why not?
- Should all drug use be decriminalized? What might be the risks or benefits of doing so?
- How might decriminalization affect people who use drugs, police forces, or healthcare systems?
- Is there a difference between saying something is “legal” and saying it’s “not a crime”?
- What does that difference mean in real life?
- How does stigma and punishment impact people who use drugs under criminalized vs. decriminalized systems?

Pre-Activity: Substance Snapshot Jigsaw Activity

Have students form small groups for a **Jigsaw activity** focusing on various substances (both legal and illegal). Assign each small group to a different category of substances: [Cannabinoids](#), [Depressants](#), [Hallucinogens](#) and [Stimulants](#).

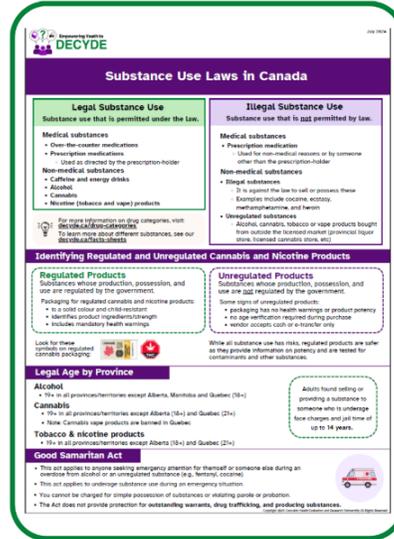
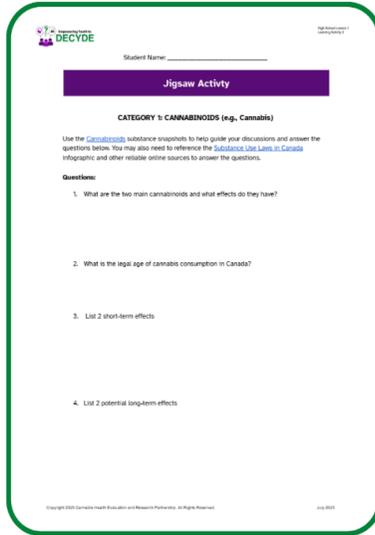


SUBSTANCE SNAPSHOT

Teachers may refer to the [Cannabinoids](#), [Depressants](#), [Hallucinogens](#) and [Stimulants](#) Substance Snapshots to help inform the discussions.

High School Lesson 1

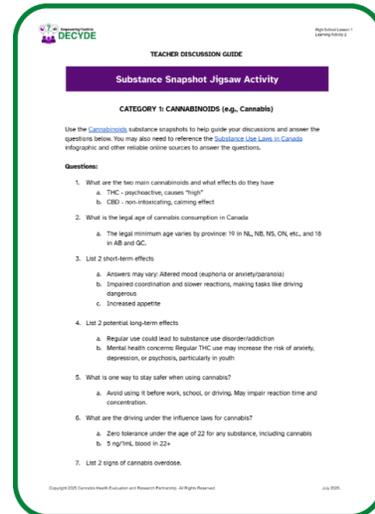
Provide each student with the student worksheet (available as a [PDF](#) or [Google Doc](#)), and a copy of their group’s [DECYDE Substance Snapshot](#) and the [Substance Use Laws in Canada](#) infographic.



Give each group 10-15 minutes to fill out their worksheet. Each group then becomes the expert group on a given group of substances from the snapshot.

Next, students will form new groups, with a person from each of the expert groups moving to a new group and sharing the information they just learned. By the end of the activity, each student should have filled out all categories of the student worksheet.

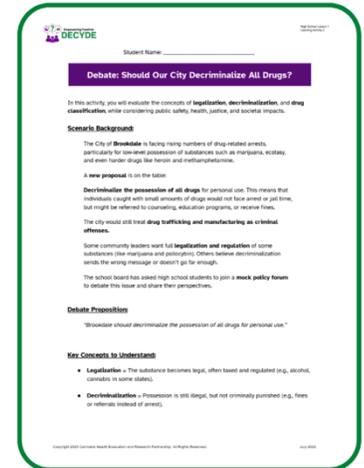
The Teacher Discussion Guide for this activity is available as a [PDF](#) on the DECYDE website.



Exploration Activity: Debate - Should Our City Decriminalize All Drugs?

This debate activity will help students understand and critically evaluate the concepts of **legalization**, **decriminalization**, and **drug classification**, while considering public safety, health, justice, and societal impacts.

The teacher may choose to split this debate over 2 classes, with the first class being used for preparation, and the second class being the debate day. Estimated times for each section of the activity have been provided to help guide the activity.



Teacher Instructions:

1. Introduce Topic (10-15 mins)

Provide a brief overview of the decriminalization debate. Review the **Debate Instructions** (available as a [Canva Presentation or PDF](#)) with the class, answering any questions the students have before beginning.

2. Introduce Debate Scenario and Proposition (5-10mins)

Read the scenario and proposition, pausing to highlight key points and provide additional explanations as needed to ensure understanding.

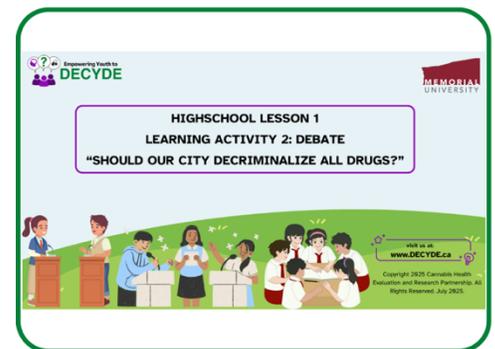
3. Assign Groups (5 mins)

Assign students to one of the following roles (e.g., drawing names or using a random group generator tool such as [Wheel of Names](#)).

The Role Descriptions are as follows:

- Pro Team - Argues in favor of decriminalization
- Con Team - Argues against decriminalization
- Panel - Acts as City Council or Policy Review Board; asks questions and decides outcome (or helps the audience vote)
- Audience - Listens, takes notes, asks questions during Q&A, and votes on the most persuasive team

If the class size is small, you can combine roles (e.g., Audience also serves as Panel).





4. Team Research & Planning (20+ mins)

- Provide or suggest credible research sources for students. Students may use some of the resources in the presentation, but encourage them to search for additional resources.
- Have each team define their main talking points, referring to the debate day format as a guide.
- The Panel and Audience should prepare potential questions and criteria for judging.

5. Debate Day Format (45–60 minutes)

Introduce students to the debate format. Use the following format to guide the debate.

SEGMENT	TIME	NOTES
SCENARIO OVERVIEW & REMIND ROLES	5 mins	Introduce topic and structure. Encourage respectful participation.
OPENING STATEMENTS	2 mins/team	Each team presents a clear position statement.
MAIN ARGUMENTS	3–4 mins/team	Teams elaborate on points with evidence.
REBUTTALS	2 mins/team	Respond directly to opposing points.
AUDIENCE/PANEL Q&A	10 mins	Ask clarifying or challenging questions to both teams.
CLOSING STATEMENTS	2 mins/team	Summarize strongest arguments; appeal to the panel/audience.
PANEL DECISION/VOTE	5 mins	Panel announces decision or audience votes on persuasiveness.

Teacher Discussion Guide:

Tips for Success

- Model respectful disagreement.
- Encourage quieter students in the audience to ask questions.
- Have fun with it — this should be engaging, not overwhelming!

Pro Team Might Argue:

- Decriminalization reduces mass incarceration and racial disparities.
- Personal drug use is a public health issue, not a crime.
- Countries like Portugal have seen success with this model.
- It allows resources to shift toward treatment and education.

Con Team Might Argue:

High School Lesson 1

- Decriminalization may increase usage, especially among youth.
- It sends the message that drugs are "okay" or harmless.
- Public safety could be at risk—impaired driving, accidents.
- We need better prevention and education, not leniency.

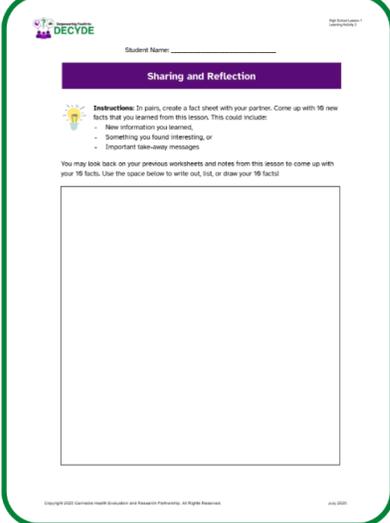
Extension Ideas:

- Students could also do an anonymous vote after the debate is completed, this way you can see what students are thinking. Were perspectives changed?
- Have students create a public awareness campaign for either position.
- Invite a local health expert, lawyer, or counselor to speak with students after the debate.

Sharing and Reflection: Student Fact Sheet

To wrap up this lesson, students will work in pairs to come up with 10 facts from this lesson. This could be new information they learned, something they found interesting, or key takeaway messages. Encourage students to be creative. They may draw, list, or write out their facts.

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



The worksheet is titled "Sharing and Reflection" and includes the following text:

Student Name: _____

Instructions: In pairs, create a fact sheet with your partner. Come up with 10 new facts that you learned from this lesson. This could include:

- New information you learned,
- Something you found interesting, or
- Important takeaway messages.

You may look back on your previous worksheets and notes from this lesson to come up with your 10 facts. Use the space below to write out, list, or draw your 10 facts!

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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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