

Teacher Discussion Guide: A Balancing Act: Harm Reduction Hustle

Scenario 1: Alex and Finley at the Movies (Cannabis Gummies)

Students will work in small groups to discuss situations where youth have taken too much of a substance. Upon completion, each group will share their learnings to the class and initiate a whole class discussion. Each group will also create a possible conversation to roleplay where the youth will demonstrate a smart decision based on their assigned situations. Students will work through each situation to examine the following “LOOK FORs”: **Effects, Influences, Seeking Help and Harm Reduction Strategies**. Students will record their learnings in their Passport to Learning About Substance Use. Students will require

- **Substance Use Snapshots** for Methylphenidate, Cannabis, Nicotine, Alcohol, Depressants, and Stimulants
- **Infographics:** Overconsumption, Factors Affecting Decision Making. Responding to Substance-Related Emergencies

Note: When discussing the scenarios, be mindful of language or assumptions that may reinforce stigma toward people who use substances. Refer to the [Stigma infographic](#) for guidance on using respectful, non-judgmental language.

Situation 1: Alex and Finley at the Movies (Cannabis)

Alex is a Grade 7 student who just moved to a new junior high school. He attended a movie with a new friend, Finley. At the movie, Finley offered Alex a cannabis gummy that he had taken his older brother's room. Alex had never tried cannabis before but did not want to disappoint her new friend or ruin the fun. Alex decided to eat the gummy, but, as time passed, the effects of the edible became more intense than expected. Alex began to feel dizzy, anxious, and had a fast heartbeat. Finley noticed that Alex was not feeling well, but did not know what to do. Should they seek help at the theatre, contact a trusted adult, or try to manage the situation themselves?

Effects

- ☐ What signs of an overdose or poisoning is Alex displaying?
- Dizziness
 - Anxious
 - Fast heartbeat

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



- Intense feelings

☐ What are the risks associated with taking too much of this substance?

- Severe nausea and vomiting
- Intense anxiety, panic and paranoia
- Dizziness
- Greening out
- Shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat, chest pain

Influences

☐ What are some factors that may have influenced Alex to take this substance?

- Peers
- Fitting in
- To feel cool
- Curiosity

Seeking Help

☐ How might you help Alex if you were in this scenario? Who would you contact? Would you try to manage it yourself?

- Inform Alex of the harms
- Seek help at the theatre and call 911
- Call her family

☐ What factors may influence Alex's decision?

- Experiences
- Knowledge about cannabis gummies
- Family
- Feelings: Fear of getting in trouble
- Feelings: Desire to do the right thing despite the consequences

Harm Reduction

☐ What strategies can be used to prevent taking too much of this substance next time?

- Do not use cannabis.
- Do not take it before school or work; or before operating any type of vehicle, machinery or tools.

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



- Do not use synthetic cannabis which is extremely dangerous and illegal
- Start small and go slow: Don't take too much.
- Be aware the inhaling cannabis can harm the lungs and heart.
- Do not mix with other drugs or medications.
- Adults can choose legal cannabis. They can buy from regulated sites. It is illegal for youth to purchase.

Teachers may refer to the [Synthetic Cannabis](#) Substance Snapshot to help inform the discussion.

Conversation: Making Smart and Safe Decisions

- ☐ Imagine and create a conversation between Alex and Finley that demonstrates a smart decision. You may introduce other people to this situation. Your teacher may ask you to roleplay this conversation for the class.

Scenario 2: Jordan and His Little Sister (Nicotine)

Jordan started vaping nicotine to cope with his parents' frequent arguing at home. His parents have recently started going to weekly counseling together to work things out. When they go to their counselling session, Jordan has to look after their 6-year-old little sister, Lilly. One evening, while Jordan is doing homework in his room, Lilly is playing in the living room. She stumbles upon a colorful bottle of Jordan's vape juice that has a banana scent. She drinks it and soon after she starts feeling stomach sick and dizzy. Jordan hears her crying out from the other room. Jordan immediately notices the empty bottle of vape juice and starts panicking. What should Jordan do?

Effects

- ☐ What signs of an overdose or poisoning is Lilly displaying?
 - Stomach sickness
 - Dizziness
 - Crying out

Teachers may refer to the [Nicotine](#) Substance Snapshot to help inform the discussion.

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



- ☐ What are the risks associated with taking too much of this substance?
 - Highly addictive and dependence
 - Circulation problems
 - Increased infections and pneumonia
 - Increased heart and lung disease
 - Feeling breathless and persistent coughing
 - Headaches, stomach sickness and dizziness

Influences

- ☐ What are some factors that may have influenced Lilly to take this substance?
 - Family
 - Curiosity
 - Lack of information (Knowledge)
 - Attracted to the Banana flavour
 - Colourful bottle (Media)

Seeking Help

- ☐ How might you help Lilly if you were in this scenario? Who would you contact? Would you try to manage it yourself?
 - Call 911 immediately
 - Call parents
 - Contact a trusted adult quickly
- ☐ What factors may influence your decision?
 - Feelings for Lilly
 - Family
 - Feelings: fear of getting in trouble
 - Feelings: panic

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



- Fear of harming Lilly

Harm Reduction

- ☐ What strategies can be used to prevent taking too much of this substance next time?
 - Do not use nicotine which is the safest choice.
 - Do not mix nicotine with medications.
 - Keep nicotine in original containers.
 - Choose products with lower amounts of nicotine.
 - Buy from reliable sources. (It is illegal for youth to purchase nicotine.)
 - Know where to get information about nicotine.

Conversation: Making Smart and Safe Decisions

- ☐ Imagine and create a conversation with Jordan in this situation that demonstrate a smart decision. You may introduce new people to the situation. Your teacher may ask you to role play this conversation for the class.

Scenario 3: Robin and the Big Math Test (Methylphenidate)

Situation 3: Robin and the Big Math Test (Methylphenidate)

Robin takes methylphenidate to help them concentrate in school because they have ADHD. It's the weekend, and they have a big Math test on Monday. Usually, they take their medication just like the instructions on the bottle say—only one tablet a day. But this time, feeling stressed about all the material they need to study, they decide to take four tablets, hoping it will help them work better. They did not feel the effects immediately, so they decided to have an energy drink as well. An hour later, Robin realizes something isn't right. Their heart is pounding fast, their chest feels tight, and even though they have just been studying on his bed, they are finding it hard to catch their breath. What should Robin do?

Effects

- ☐ What signs of an overdose or poisoning is Robin displaying?

Teachers may refer to the [Methylphenidate](#) Substance Snapshot to help inform the discussion.

Grade 7 Lesson 1

Learning Activity 3



- Pounding heart
- Tight chest
- Losing their breath

- ☐ What are the risks associated with taking too much of this substance, or mixing it with other drugs?
- Overdose or poisoning
 - Mixing with other drugs can cause harm to heart
 - Risk of infection to mouth or nose if snorted or injected
 - Negatively affect relationships with family and friends

Note: This medication is beneficial for some people and not for others. Methylphenidate is safe and effective when used orally at the appropriate dose that has been prescribed.

Influences

- ☐ What are some factors that may have influenced Robin to take this substance?
- Feelings of stress
 - Lack of information/ knowledge about taking too much medication or mixing it with other drugs (caffeine)

Seeking Help

- ☐ How might you help Robin if you were in this scenario? Who would you contact? Would you try to manage it yourself?
- Get their parent's/caregivers attention if they are at home
 - Call 911
 - Ask Robin for information about the medication or if they took anything else with it such as coffee or other drugs
 - Try to be calming and reassuring; not panic
- ☐ What factors may influence your decision?
- Knowledge: Looking for information

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



- Desire to help
- Fear something serious may happen

Harm Reduction

- ☐ What strategies can be used to prevent taking too much of this substance next time?
 - Read the medication label
 - Understand the drug
 - Know the effects
 - Take only as instructed
 - Do not mix with caffeine or other drugs such as alcohol

Conversation: Making Smart and Safe Decisions

- ☐ You are Robin's friend. You have been texting back and forth and you notice something is not right. You decide to call them. Imagine and create a conversation between you and Robin that demonstrates a smart decision. Your teacher may ask you to role play this conversation for the class.

Scenario 4: Taylor at a Sleepover (Alcohol)

Situation 4: Taylor at a Sleepover (Alcohol)

Taylor is at Casey's place for a sleepover, and Kabir, another friend, is there too. They decide to try some of Casey's parents' alcohol. Casey starts chugging vodka to show off and Kabir and Taylor start cheering him on. About an hour later, Casey is slurring words, stumbling around, and seeming confused about his surroundings. He eventually passes out on the couch. Both Taylor and Kabir only had a couple sips of vodka each but they are worried about Casey. Taylor puts Casey on his side, in the recovery position because they remember hearing that you should do that if someone drinks too much. Taylor and Kabir are also scared of getting in trouble for underage drinking if they decide to tell an adult. What should they do?

TIP: Display the Responding in Substance-Related Emergencies infographic to students, which shows the recovery position. Explain why it is important to seek help and to place a person in the recovery position during a substance-related emergency.

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



Effects

- ☐ What signs of an overdose or poisoning is this Casey displaying?
 - slurring words
 - stumbling around and confusion
 - Passing out
- ☐ What are the risks associated with taking too much of this substance?
 - May affect attention and memory
 - Unpredictable moods
 - Frequent sadness
 - Risk of cancer and heart disease
 - Impair coordination and judgement
 - Poisoning
 - Death

Teachers may refer to the [Alcohol](#) Substance Snapshot to help inform the discussion.

Influences

- ☐ What are some factors that may have influenced Casey to take this substance?
 - Peer influence
 - Self-esteem

Seeking Help

- ☐ How might you help Casey, Taylor or Kabir if you were in this scenario? Who would you contact? Would you try to manage it yourself?
 - Call 911 immediately
 - Contact adults and or parents and caregivers
 - Recovery position
 - Stay with Casey. Do not leave them alone.
 - What factors may influence your decision?

Grade 7 Lesson 1
Learning Activity 3



Harm Reduction

- ☐ What strategies can be used to prevent taking too much of this substance next time?
 - Do not consume alcohol which is the safest choice.
 - Drink slowly. Do not chug.
 - Eat and drink water before and while you are drinking alcohol.
 - Binge drinking can cause alcohol poisoning.
 - Know what you are drinking. Do not accept alcohol from others.
 - Do not mix alcohol with other substances.
 - It is dangerous and illegal for youth to purchase or drink alcohol.

Conversation: Making Smart and Safe Decisions

- ☐ Imagine and create a conversation between Taylor and Kabir in this situation that demonstrates a smart decision. You may introduce new people to the situation. Your teacher may ask you to role play this conversation for the class.