

Teacher Discussion Guide

Substance Use Spectrum Situations

Students will read each situation and decide where it falls on the substance use spectrum. If students think that the situation depicts anything other than non-use or beneficial use, they will identify at least two possible ways to lower risk. Students can refer to the [substance use spectrum infographic](#) for examples..

1. Mikael drives his ATV home after having several beers at his friend's shed.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - don't drive any motorized vehicle after drinking - get a friend who isn't drinking to drive the ATV - call someone to pick him up - walk home
2. Willow has chronic pain and was prescribed a CBD product by her doctor. Willow takes the CBD as prescribed and finds that it helps with her pain a lot.
Spectrum: Beneficial use
Ways to lower risk: N/A
3. Annika saw her favourite social media influencer advertising caffeine pills as a way to improve energy and focus. Annika has been using caffeine pills to stay up late and play video games with friends.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - limit caffeine use - choose a lower-strength caffeine product (e.g., coffee, tea) - make sure to get enough sleep
4. Cori started vaping nicotine a few months ago. Recently, Cori has been vaping more and more often, experiencing cravings, and feels anxious and irritable when she cannot vape.
Spectrum: Substance use disorder (addiction)
Ways to lower risk: - talk to a trusted adult (e.g., healthcare professional, guidance counselor, parent)
5. Nico drinks a glass of water in between every alcoholic drink he has at his grad party.

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Spectrum: Lower-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - Drink non-alcoholic drinks
6. Jen became interested in trying MDMA after hearing about it at school. Jen bought MDMA from another student at school and is going to try it alone in her room.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - don't use substances alone - use testing strips to check for fentanyl - have naloxone on hand - drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration
7. Amy's friends are planning to drink on Friday night, but she is taking antibiotics. Amy decides not to drink as she knows that combining substances can be dangerous.
Spectrum: Non-use
Ways to lower risk: N/A
8. Lucy left her drink on the table when she was at a house party when she went to the bathroom. She continues drinking it when she gets back to the table.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - never drink a beverage that has been left unattended - keep a hand over your drink when moving in a crowd - watch out for your friends
9. Nathan has ADHD and is prescribed methylphenidate (Concerta) by his doctor, which really helps him focus in school.
Spectrum: Beneficial use
Ways to lower risk: N/A
10. Penny didn't eat all day and started drinking with her friends on an empty stomach.
Spectrum: higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - eat before drinking alcohol - drink slowly - drink plenty of water
11. Cooper uses cannabis to manage their anxiety. They took a cannabis gummy around 5pm. Two hours later, Cooper drives their little sister to their grandparent's house.

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Spectrum: higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - avoid driving for 12-24 hours after consuming a cannabis edible - arrange a safe ride - delay the visit if necessary
12. Micha is with some friends who regularly drink on the weekends. Micha is an inexperienced drinker. When offered a shot, Micha declines as they want to pace themselves and stick to drinking low-alcohol beer.
Spectrum: Lower-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - drink non-alcoholic drinks
13. Aaron is intoxicated from alcohol, so his friends lay him on his back on a bed so he can sleep it off.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - do not leave them alone - place them in the recovery position - let a trusted adult know - call 911 if you suspect an overdose
14. Lucy has a really bad headache. Her friend has prescription pills for migraines and offers Lucy one. Lucy says no, as she is unsure how the medication will affect her.
Spectrum: Non-use
Ways to lower risk: N/A
15. Jesse's family has a history of substance use problems. As a result, Jesse limits his alcohol use to special occasions and never has more than one alcoholic beverage at any given time.
Spectrum: Lower-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - drink non-alcoholic drinks
16. Mel's grandmother recently passed away, and she is having a hard time coping. Mel has started drinking alcohol daily to numb her feelings. Mel now experiences headaches and irritability when she does not drink alcohol.
Spectrum: Substance use disorder (addiction)
Ways to lower risk: - talk to a trusted adult (e.g., healthcare professional, guidance counsellor, parent)

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17. Maria has anxiety and takes antidepressants that her family doctor prescribed to her. Since taking this medication, Maria's mental health has improved a lot.
Spectrum: Beneficial use
Ways to lower risk: N/A
18. Stefan swallowed a pill that someone gave him at a field party. He is now feeling drowsy, dizzy, and confused. Stefan decides to walk home alone as he only lives a few blocks away.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - do not leave him alone - contact a trusted adult - call 911 if you suspect an overdose
19. Theo has had trouble sleeping lately because they are stressed about their parent's separation. They smoke cannabis every night to get to sleep. Theo can no longer sleep without cannabis and craves it throughout the day.
Spectrum: substance use disorder (addiction)
Ways to lower risk: - talk to a trusted adult (e.g., healthcare professional, guidance counsellor, parent)
20. Hillary and her friends take ecstasy at a house party. No one at the party has a naloxone kit.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - keep naloxone on hand - be aware of the signs of overdose - call 911 if you suspect an overdose
21. Miya has been drinking with friends but is getting tired. Her friend offers her cocaine, saying that it will give her lots of energy to stay out and have fun. Miya declines, as she is worried about the risks of mixing substances.
Spectrum: lower-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - drink non-alcoholic drinks
22. Shea is feeling a lot of pressure from her parents to keep her grades up. She is drinking energy drinks and using nicotine pouches to focus while she studies for a test.
Spectrum: higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk:

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- avoid mixing substances - get enough sleep - take study breaks - try to stop/reduce nicotine pouch use
23. Will bought vape juice from a random website he found on social media.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - only use regulated products from licensed retailers - choose products with lower nicotine - try to stop vaping/limit how much you vape
24. Layla takes several shots of tequila over the course of an hour.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - drink slowly - choose a beverage with a lower alcohol percentage (e.g., low alcohol beer) - have a non-alcoholic beverage (e.g., mocktail, water, pop) for every alcoholic beverage - do not consume more than two alcoholic beverages in one day
25. Emil's older brother took crystal meth (methamphetamine) to stay awake during an overnight shift.
Spectrum: Higher-risk use
Ways to lower risk: - avoid/limit use - don't mix substances - don't use substance alone - test for fentanyl using a testing strip