Junior High School Lesson
Tobacco Talk

This lesson plan can be used for both grades 8 and 9.

HEALTH AND LIFE SKILLS OUTCOMES

W-8.1 Examine the relationship between choices and resulting consequences; e.g., how choosing to smoke affects how one looks, feels and performs.

W-8.4 Develop personal strategies to deal with pressures to have a certain look/lifestyle; e.g., accept individual look.

W-8.6 Analyze possible negative consequences of substance use and abuse; e.g., fetal alcohol syndrome, drinking and driving.

W-8.11 Identify and develop personal resiliency skills; e.g., planning skills, social competence.

R-8.8 Describe and explain the positive and negative aspects of conformity and dissent as they relate to individuals in a group or on a team.

W-9.8 Develop strategies to promote harm reduction/risk management.

W-9.10 Assess the quality and reliability of health information provided by different sources.

R-9.8 Analyze skills required to maintain individuality within a group.

OTHER OBJECTIVES

- make connections between the decision to belong to a group and the possible negative consequences of such a decision
- increase awareness of influences for youth to use tobacco
- increase awareness of health consequences of tobacco use
CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

1. Influences to use tobacco (30 minutes)
2. Introduction to identity and belonging (10 minutes)
3. Closure: Key messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Big Red gum (enough for one stick per student)
Big Red gum activity instructions
magazine advertisements for tobacco products (found in U.S. magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan* or *People*)
scissors
masking tape
1. Influences to use tobacco

Begin this lesson with the Big Red gum activity.

The purpose of this activity is to help the students become aware of internal and external pressures to use tobacco.

Hand out a piece of gum, still in the wrapper, to each student. Instruct the students to remove the gum, lick the white side of the wrapper and stick the wrapper to their forehead. Demonstrate this by doing it yourself. Indicate that this is a really fun activity and many people have done it before. Provide no other explanation at this time, but observe student behaviour and responses. For example, students may be hesitant or refuse to participate. They may pressure others to do it or they may continually ask for a reason for this activity.

Students will begin to experience some mild burning on their foreheads; this discomfort is from the cinnamon on the wrapper. A red rectangular mark will be left on most foreheads for a brief period of time, but it will disappear in a short while. (Caution: Some students may have skin sensitivities or allergies to cinnamon from the wrapper.)

Open up a discussion of what is happening. Ask the following questions:

• How many people put the wrapper on their foreheads?
• Why did you do that?
• If you didn’t do the activity, why not?
• Was there pressure from others in the room to get all students participating?
• How were you feeling during this activity?
Inform the students that the gum wrapper represents tobacco and that there is pressure out there to use tobacco. Ask the following questions:

- What type of risks do people expose themselves to by using tobacco?
- Have the students suggest some risks of tobacco use, and record their suggestions on the board. Here are some risks of smoking:
  - smelling like smoke
  - fingers turning yellow from cigarettes
  - teeth and skin turning brown
  - stomach problems
  - sleeping problems
  - smoker’s cough
  - asthma—making it worse or bringing it on
  - spending money on cigarettes
  - having trouble with family and friends who don’t want you to smoke
  - long-term health consequences (cancer, emphysema, heart disease)
  - wrinkles around the mouth and eyes (early signs of aging)

- Even though we have information about the negative consequences of using tobacco, people still use it. Why?

State that one of the main reasons people start using tobacco is because of pressure. Ask the students, “What pressure is there for you to use tobacco?” Students will likely identify various pressures, including the following:

**Pressure from friends/peers**

- This pressure comes from seeing your friends
smoke or use spit tobacco and wanting to fit in with the group of friends.

- Pressure also comes from the perception that more teens smoke or use spit tobacco than actually do, so you think it is the “normal” thing to do.

**Pressure from family (parents or siblings who smoke or use spit tobacco)**

- Parents or siblings do not necessary exert pressure directly, but seeing them smoke or use spit tobacco makes it seem that these activities are normal or “adult.”

**Pressure from the media (TV, movies, video games, magazines)**

Show the students the ads you have found from magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan* and *People* that depict smoking or spit tobacco as glamorous, sensual, exciting or associated with sporting events that portray daring behaviour. Explain that these are ways the tobacco industry gets you to try or use tobacco products, but they don’t show you the negative consequences of smoking or chewing tobacco.

Note that smoking is portrayed in many movies, even those directed to children. Thumbs Up! Thumbs Down!, a California-based project that shows the impact of smoking and tobacco references in entertainment, states the following on its website, http://www.scenesmoking.org/frame.htm:

- The more a favourite star smokes in movies, the more likely that a teen viewer will smoke.
- Leading actors light up in 60% of movies.
- When tobacco is shown in a movie, leading actors smoke in 82% of them.
- More than 1,000 teens will start smoking today because of what they saw onscreen.
• 340 of them will die early from a smoking-related disease.

• The website of Smoke Free Movies also contains information about the influence of the media on smoking: http://www.smokefreemovies.ucsf.edu/index.html

**Pressure from the tobacco industry (marketing)**

• The tobacco industry needs new smokers or spit tobacco users to maintain sales. Tobacco companies market to young people through advertisements, sponsorship of events, making tobacco appealing through flavours, etc.

• Power walls are large point-of-purchase displays that have a variety of tobacco products readily available to potential customers. They appeal to the senses through bright colours. They also give the impression that tobacco must be a widely used product because there are so many products for sale.

Discuss these pressures with the students. Ask them why there is so much pressure to use a product that is so dangerous. Brainstorm ways they can either reduce the pressure OR challenge the pressure they experience from others.

Some examples: think critically about where the pressure is coming from, stand up for yourself, think of healthy alternatives, walk away from the pressure, try to avoid situations where there might be pressure, etc.

**2: Introduction to identity and belonging**

In preparation for this activity, arrange the classroom so that there is ample space at the front of the room. Using masking tape, make a square on the floor, small
enough so that not all of the students can fit inside it.

Explain that junior high is a time when belonging to a peer group is very important. Youth are often trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. Sometimes it can be challenging, because youth may be uncertain about where they belong.

Stand in the centre of the square and state enthusiastically that this is the square of belonging and it is a fun and exciting place! Go on to say it’s a cool place where everyone is hanging out. Encourage those who want to be a part of this square to come forward and join you. As students begin coming into the square, continue to build it up, saying that everyone in the square is having so much fun and that everyone is invited to be a part of it. Ask students in the square to go recruit any of their classmates who have not joined. Not all students will choose to participate, nor will everyone be able to fit in the square.

After everyone who is interested comes forward, ask the class to return to their seats. Discuss the following questions:

1. Why did some of you choose to join in the square of belonging?
2. There was limited information given about the activity happening in the square of belonging. How did that influence your decision?
3. How did you feel being a part of the group that fit inside the square of belonging?
4. Talk about the importance of belonging and what a person will do in order to belong to a group (e.g., they might smoke). Record responses on the board.
5. What was it like for those of you who did not fit in the square of belonging?
6. How many of you decided to go into the square of belonging because your friends did?
7. What are some other activities that are healthy
that you can belong to? Record responses on the board. For example: sports (basketball, soccer, etc.), art, music, going for a walk/jog/bike ride, reading a book, etc.

3: Closure: Key messages

Have the class summarize what they have learned by identifying key messages they will take away with them. Responses may include the following:

- Some people feel the need to belong to something and might just jump in without thinking about the potential harm involved with an activity.
- Before you decide to do something, think about the harm that may be attached to that activity.
- Believe in yourself and what is right for you—not what is right for your friends.
- The myth that “everyone is doing it” makes it seem as though tobacco use is normal. (Note: You can tell the class that less than 5% of students in Alberta in grades 7 through 9 report smoking (TAYES, 2005). It is an unhealthy activity that most people do not do.)