

# The Process of Addiction

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

---

- students will be able to identify a personal comfort level in risk-taking situations
- students will be able to explore the difference between healthy and unhealthy risk-taking
- students will be able to understand that addiction is a process that happens over time
- students will be able to consider the effects of alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and gambling on the major areas of their lives

## CONTENT AND TIME (80-MINUTE LESSON)

---

- 1.1 Introduction (15 minutes)
- 1.2 Activity: Process of Addiction (25 minutes)
- 1.3 Activity: Major Life Areas (25 minutes)
- 1.4 Closure: Key Messages (15 minutes)

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

---

HANDOUT 1.1: Risk

HANDOUT 1.2: The Process of Addiction (OPTIONAL)

HANDOUT 1.3: Characteristics of Levels of Use (OPTIONAL)

HANDOUT 1.4: Major Life Areas

Teacher-made signs that read "Beneficial Use," "Casual/Non-Problematic Use," "Problematic Use" and "Chronic Dependence"

Chart paper and felt markers

Journal books or loose-leaf paper

Students take risks. They challenge themselves physically, emotionally and socially every day. Risk is part of life. Youth need to learn the difference between calculated risks and careless risks. Calculated risks involve important pay-offs: learning to drive is a risk, for example, but being able to drive is a very useful skill. But teenagers especially are inclined to be impulsive and risk something very important (their health, for example) for a trivial gain (such as the momentary esteem of their friends). This lesson gives students an opportunity to investigate risk-taking in general, and to consider the progressive impact of risk-taking behaviours associated with substance use.

## 1.1 Introduction

(15 minutes)

Distribute the handout entitled HANDOUT 1.1: Risk. Students are asked to rate the level of risk in each situation provided, and to generate a list of key words that come to mind about risk. Once lists are complete, have students categorize their key words in a way that fits for them. Some students may sort risks into physical, emotional and social groups, while others might sort by risks associated with family, peers or finances. Ask students what they notice about the situations provided and their own key words. Are there more healthy or unhealthy risks? Are some risks necessary? What risks are not worth taking? Do some risks require courage?

## 1.2 Activity: Process of Addiction

(25 minutes)

The progression of an addiction reflects a spectrum, meaning that people use substances or gamble for different reasons and at varying levels. People may use different substances or gamble at different levels of the spectrum at different points in their life. It is also important to note that some people choose not to use substances or gamble at all (British Columbia Ministry of Health, 2004).

To explore the process of addiction, ask the students to form five groups and distribute one sign to each group. The signs should read: No use, Beneficial use, Casual/Non-problematic use, Problematic Use and Chronic Dependence.

Have the groups describe what each of these levels of use might look like in a person's life. Refer to **HANDOUT 1.2: The Process of Addiction** and **HANDOUT 1.3: Characteristics of Levels of Use** to include important details that may have been missed. As descriptions are given, write on the board the areas of a person's life that are affected (family, friends/recreation, school/job, physical health, emotional/spiritual health, finances and legal status).

In pairs, have students role-play a conversation between two people from different parts of the spectrum. Explain that they will later be asked to complete a written assignment about this role-play. Here are some possible scenarios:

- An adult who is dependent talks to a teenager who uses occasionally to prevent the youth from becoming harmfully involved with substances.
- A person who uses socially tries to influence his or her friend who does not use at all.
- An older sibling defends his or her problematic use to a younger brother or sister who does not use at all.
- A son or daughter who has reached the chronic dependence level of use justifies his or her behaviour to a parent who is moving toward problematic use.

Once role-plays are complete, discuss the interrelation between the process of addiction and the major areas of a person's life. Explain to students that beyond considering whether gambling or using substances are in themselves harmful, they need to consider that being involved in these activities can cause difficulties with family, friends, school, health, finances or the law. (AADAC, n.d. e).

Adapted from: BC Ministry of Health (2004). Every door is the right door: A British Columbia planning framework to address problematic substance use and addiction. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework\\_for\\_substance\\_use\\_and\\_addiction.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework_for_substance_use_and_addiction.pdf).

## 1.3 Activity: Major Life Areas

(25 minutes)

Place seven pieces of flip chart paper and markers around the room. Title each of the charts with a different major life area (family, friends/recreation, school/job, physical health, emotional/spiritual health, finances and legal status). Have students work in groups and record consequences of substance use and gambling to one of the major life areas. Students may record positive consequences to indicate reasons why people initially become involved with substance use and gambling. It is important to acknowledge that there are positive consequences to gambling and the use of alcohol and other drugs; if there weren't, people would not become involved.

After a few minutes, instruct the groups to move on to a different chart, read the information provided by the previous group and identify consequences that have not been included. Repeat this process until the groups have rotated three or four times.

Have students give explanations for some of the consequences recorded on each chart. Check **HANDOUT 1.4: Major Life Areas** and add important points that were overlooked. You may also want to distribute this handout for students to read through and have for future reference, as they will be revisiting the major life areas in Lesson 6.

Conclude this activity by discussing the importance of recognizing addiction as a process that happens over time. When people introduce substance use or gambling into their lives, negative consequences can occur, but they are not overwhelming in the beginning. Progressively, the negative consequences increase. More time is spent on the addiction, and this decreases the attention given to major life areas, which begin to deteriorate. As a result, trying to make changes becomes more difficult. Often, people experiencing addiction feel limited in their ability to make healthy decisions, due to their physical and/or psychological dependence. They feel that they have few supports and lack the positive skills to seek change.

## 1.4 Closure: Key Messages

(15 minutes)

For this lesson, 15 minutes have been allotted for journal writing, and 10 minutes have been set aside as the opening of Lesson 2 for volunteers to read their entries. After this, you can simply add journal writing to the end of each lesson if you have the time. If not, you can assign it as a 10-minute homework activity. Whether students share entries at the beginning of each class is up to you and will depend on time limitations. Each lesson provides suggestions for journal entries.

Ask students to write a journal entry from the perspective of the person they role-played earlier. Explain that you will invite volunteers to read their journal entries during the next class.

# Risk

Rate the level of risk in each of the situations below. Some risks may have positive outcomes, and others negative. Rate the risks according to your personal comfort level.

1. Rate the risk of singing in a choir in front of the entire school.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
2. What if there is a long solo part where you have to sing by yourself?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
3. How would you rate the risk of trying cannabis (marijuana) at a party for the first time?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
4. What if you know people who are dependent on using cannabis on a regular basis?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
5. How would you rate driving 15 km over the speed limit on the highway?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
6. What if the road is dry and there is hardly any traffic?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
7. Rate the risk of standing up for something you strongly believe in, which you know is the right thing to do.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
8. What if your friends are against you and this creates conflict between you and them?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
9. Rate the risk of drinking two beers before going to a party where you will be drinking more.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
10. What if you have “blacked out” at parties before because of your alcohol use (blacking out makes you forget what you did during the party)?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk

11. Rate the risk of buying a \$5.00 raffle ticket.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
12. What if it is your last \$5.00 until the end of the week?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
13. Rate the risk of speaking in a debate.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
14. What if your opponent is the Prime Minister of Canada?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
15. How risky would you find being involved in a sporting event (playing hockey, cycling, skateboarding, gymnastics, etc.)?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
16. What if your skill level is very low in this sport?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
17. Rate the risk of injecting a drug using a needle.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
18. What if someone else has used the needle, which increases your chances of contracting HIV, AIDS or hepatitis B or C?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
19. Rate the risk of smoking a cigarette every so often (once a week).  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
20. What if you knew that this would lead to you becoming addicted to cigarettes?  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk
21. Generate a list of key words that come to mind about risk-taking.  
 No risk    Minimal risk    Some risk    Significant risk    High risk

# The Process of Addiction

The progression of an addiction reflects movement along a spectrum of substance use or gambling behaviors, meaning that people use substances or gamble for different reasons and at varying levels. People may use different substances or gamble at different levels of the spectrum at different points in their life. It is also important to note that some people choose not to use substances or gamble at all.

## **No use**

There is no use of substances or gambling. People have their own reasons for this, including religious beliefs, their age, or health risks in their family.

## **Beneficial use**

Use that has positive health, social or spiritual effects (e.g., medicines, coffee/tea, ceremonial or sacred use of a substance, gambling for entertainment).

## **Casual/Non-problematic use**

Using substances or gambling occasionally with no negative consequences (e.g., drinking a glass of wine with a meal). For young people, this might include experimental use.

## **Problematic use**

Use that begins to have negative consequences such as health problems, conflict with friends and family or impaired driving charges.

## **Chronic dependence**

Compulsive use of substances or gambling despite negative consequences in major life areas.

Adapted from: BC Ministry of Health (2004). Every door is the right door: A British Columbia planning framework to address problematic substance use and addiction. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework\\_for\\_substance\\_use\\_and\\_addiction.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework_for_substance_use_and_addiction.pdf).



# Characteristics of Levels of Use

The motivations, behaviours and consequences below are examples, not diagnostic listings. They are only to give you a broad understanding of what different levels of use look like.

## NO USE

Behaviour ■ Do not use alcohol, tobacco, other drugs and do not gamble

## BENEFICIAL USE

Motivation ■ Use for the health, social or spiritual effects

Behavior ■ Drinking coffee in the morning for alertness, for example  
 ■ Sacred or ceremonial use of substances

Consequences ■ None

## CASUAL/NON-PROBLEMATIC USE

Motivation ■ Curiosity  
 ■ Attraction to risk  
 ■ Desire for “thrills”  
 ■ Desire to defy parents  
 ■ Influence of peers  
 ■ Social needs (feeling of belonging, parties)

Behavior ■ Use alcohol or other drugs at parties, or make small bets on calculated risks with friends.

Consequences ■ Usually few and minor

## PROBLEMATIC USE

Motivation ■ Use substances and gambling to change mood  
 ■ Use substances and gambling to escape or to stop painful feelings  
 ■ Use substances and gambling to relieve boredom or stress  
 ■ Use substances and gambling to cope with life, to feel “normal”

- Behavior**
- Binge: use substances and gambling to excess or over long periods of time
  - Experiment with various drugs and forms of gambling
  - Change normal activities: lose interest in some, adopt others
  - Use substances and gambling more often
  - Think a lot about getting high or gambling
  - Associate mostly with other people who use substances and gambling
  - Try unsuccessfully to control use of substances and gambling
- Consequences**
- Grades decline
  - Relationship with parents and other close associates (especially non-users) get worse
  - May experience problems in one or more major life areas
  - Get irritable when alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs are not available or there is no money to gamble
  - Feel anxious or depressed
  - Develop physical tolerance (for some drugs)
  - Experience problems in one or more major life areas

### **CHRONIC DEPENDENCE**

- Motivation**
- Getting high or gambling is a motivation in itself; almost everything else they do is motivated by the need to get high or gamble.
- Behavior**
- May become self-focused and demanding of others
  - Defensive of their behaviour, may blame others for their problems
  - May try to control others
  - Make occasional efforts to control use of substances and gambling
- Consequences**
- Feel shameful and hopeless
  - Quality of life is affected by serious problems in major life areas (see Major Life Areas handout)

Adapted from: BC Ministry of Health (2004). Every door is the right door: A British Columbia planning framework to address problematic substance use and addiction. Retrieved from [http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework\\_for\\_substance\\_use\\_and\\_addiction.pdf](http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/library/publications/year/2004/framework_for_substance_use_and_addiction.pdf).

# Major Life Areas

There are a number of areas in a person's life that could be affected by substance use and gambling. Here are some ways in which major areas can be affected:

## Family

- Losing the trust of your family members
- Experiencing arguments between family members because of your use or gambling behaviour
- Failing to keep promises and meet expectations
- Avoiding your family when you use or gamble, or having family members avoid you
- Experiencing incidents of violence in your family

## Friends/Recreation

- Involving substance use or gambling in most of your leisure activities
- Having your friends suggest that you cut down
- Embarrassing your friends by your behaviour
- Arguing with your friends about your use or gambling behaviour
- Failing to keep promises
- Distrusting your friends, or having your friends lose trust in you
- Rarely participating in activities that do not involve substance use or gambling
- Becoming uninterested in activities that you used to like
- Losing friends because of substance use or gambling

## School/Job

- Getting suspended or expelled
- Losing a job
- Lower school grades
- Missing school or work frequently

- Going to school while impaired by substances or preoccupied about gambling debts
- Having your teachers talk to you about your involvement with substance use or gambling

### **Physical Health**

- Experiencing blackouts, hallucinations, shakes, seizures, overdose, vomiting and other physical consequences of using substances
- Poor eating and sleeping habits as a result of extended time spent on gambling
- Being injured when using (for example, in accidents or fights)
- Being warned by a doctor to stop using
- Having poor health due to a weaker immune system from using (for example, a cold or the flu)
- Feeling anxious about winning back gambling losses
- Experiencing “flashbacks” from using
- Having shortness of breath when playing sports (caused by smoking)
- Getting stained fingers and teeth, bad breath and smelly clothing from smoking
- Increasing your risk of heart disease, stroke or cancer due to smoking
- Increasing your risk of contracting blood-borne diseases such as HIV, AIDS and hepatitis B and C from injection drug use

### **Emotional/Spiritual Health**

- Trying to “make it through the day”
- Feeling guilty or embarrassed about using or gambling
- Feeling depressed
- Experiencing moodiness
- Hiding how much you’re using or gambling from family or friends
- Feeling hopeless and that nothing has turned out right for you
- Using or gambling to feel normal
- Trying to hurt yourself (for example: slashing, burning, skin carving, suicide attempts etc.)
- Feeling unsupported and disconnected from others

- Feeling that there is no purpose to your life
- Wanting to stop using substances or gambling, but feeling unable to do so
- Substances or gambling becomes the most important part of your life

### **Financial**

- Spending money on substance use or gambling that you could use for other things
- Paying court fees and fines
- Losing a job and pay because of using or gambling behaviour
- Supplying your friends with money for substance use or gambling
- Taking money or pawning items from home in order to afford substance use or gambling
- Being involved in accidents that cause your insurance rates to go up as a result of alcohol or other drug use

### **Legal**

- Participating in illegal activities while under the influence of alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs or to support a gambling addiction (e.g., theft, drug dealing, assault, impaired driving)
- Being charged with offences related to misuse of alcohol or other drugs
- Experiencing the effects of criminal convictions on your life (e.g., custody, fines, difficulty travelling out of country, limited job opportunities)