

# Substance Use and Major Life Areas

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

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- students will be able to review the effects of substance use on society
- students will be able to recognize the effects of addiction on young adults and their families
- students will be able to evaluate the impact of addiction on the major areas of a person's life
- students will be able to identify community resources and other supports to access treatment or receive constructive support services
- students will be able to identify risk and protective factors as life events or experiences

## CONTENT AND TIME (60-MINUTE LESSON)

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- 8.1 Introduction (10 minutes)
- 8.2 Activity:Community supports: Who are they? (40 minutes)
- 8.3 Closure: Key Messages (10 minutes)

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

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HANDOUT 8.1: Community Planning Worksheet

HANDOUT 8.2: Major Life Areas

HANDOUT 8.3: Resources on the Web

## Background information for teachers

Substance use is of great concern in Canada, and we hear a lot of media reports that lead to the single conclusion that “drugs are bad.” On the other hand, it is apparent that many drugs, antibiotics or blood pressure medications, for example, are helpful. Calling a drug “bad” is not very useful for treating those who are experiencing a problem with substance use. The real question is, what effect is using this drug having on your life?

This is one of the first questions that addiction counsellors ask treatment clients. (Similarly, gambling clients are asked, “What effect is gambling having on your life?”) To answer the question, counsellors guide clients through a systematic examination of major life areas: family, friends/recreation, school/job, physical health, emotional/spiritual health, finances and the law. (This is only one way to divide life areas; other classification systems exist.)

Exploring major life areas is also an effective way to approach prevention. In this lesson, students will examine these life areas in terms of deciding whether to use substances. Students will review the possible consequences of use to major life areas, and the effect of substance use on the community. Students will also be able to identify resources and support systems that can be used to deal with the issue of drug use. A handout entitled Major Life Areas has been attached to this lesson.

The concept of risk and protective factors is helpful in understanding the choices that young people make with regard to involvement with activities like gambling and substances like alcohol, tobacco, cannabis, opioids and other drugs. Research has found that there are certain protective factors that, when present in a young person’s life, decrease the chances of harmful involvement. Protective factors include developing good social skills, participating in positive social activities, feeling connected to school, having friends who positively influence decision-making and having parents who monitor their children’s behaviour (Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission [AADAC], 2003b). Likewise, there are risk factors that increase chances of harmful involvement. Examples of risk factors are becoming involved with substance use at an early age; having friends who use or encourage use; belonging to a family with a history of problematic substance use; experiencing conflict within the family; and having a poor

connection to school (AADAC, 2003b). (Risk and protective factors also increase or decrease the likelihood of other problems, such as dropping out of school or coming into conflict with the law.)

## 8.1 Introduction

(10 minutes)

In the larger group, ask students to brainstorm a list of things most important to them. Have students think about significant areas of their lives that would be affected by substance use. Students may suggest things like friends, money, family and sports. Introduce the concept of major life areas by recording on the board the following areas that are common in everyone's life and that can be affected by substance use. Spend a few minutes defining and giving examples of the ways that substance use can affect the seven major life areas listed below.

- Family
- Friends/recreation
- School/job
- Physical health
- Emotional/spiritual health
- Finances
- The law

## 8.2 Activity: Community supports: Who are they?

(40 minutes)

Divide the class into seven groups. Assign each group one of the major life areas outlined above. Have each student think of a social role that has an effect on his or her group's major life area. If students have difficulty coming up with a role, here are some examples for each life area:

- Family – mother, father, sibling, foster parent, extended family member

- Friends/Recreation – girl/boyfriend, co-worker, teammate, coach, instructor (music, art, dance)
- School/Job – employer, co-worker, teacher, guidance counsellor, principal
- Physical Health – doctor, nurse, nutritionist, recreation leader, trainer
- Emotional/Spiritual Health - priest, pastor, counsellor, elder, confidant
- Financial – banker, financial advisor, parent, career counsellor
- Legal – judge, police officer, lawyer, probation officer

One person can play more than one role in a particular major life area. For example, a friend might be a co-worker and teammate (recreation life area). One role may also be important in more than one life area. For example, the mother or sibling role may be important in both the family and emotional life areas. This helps to illustrate the interconnectedness of major life areas and important people in our lives.

Once all students have identified a role, describe the following:

The class represents one community (feel free to give the community a name). Each student will role-play the person he or she chose to represent. For instance, students in the physical health group might play a doctor, nurse, physiotherapist and fitness trainer.

This community is concerned about a new, dangerous and highly addictive drug they are seeing in their community: drug Z. They would like to put in place some effective strategies to prevent use of the drug by youth, and to identify community supports for young people (protective factors, which help youth to avoid using, or help them to recover from problematic substance use).

Distribute copies of the handout on page 7. Give each student 10 minutes to complete the worksheet, representing the person he or she is role-playing. At the end of this time, tell the class that the community will be holding a meeting to discuss concerns about drug Z use and resources for dealing with those concerns. Ask the groups to spend the next 15 minutes preparing for the meeting.

In this 15-minute preparation, each student will bring the perspective of the role he or she has assumed while completing the worksheet. For

example, in the legal group, a judge and police officer might see the community's problem in the same way, but have different ideas on how to deal with it. The members of each group should come to agreement on what they want to bring to the meeting in terms of concerns about the issue and resources they have to offer or might require to help the community deal with the problem of drug Z use. Each group should choose one person to represent them at the meeting. The last three questions on the worksheet can guide the discussion. The representative will want to record a group answer to each of these questions.

Next, have the representatives from each group move to the front of the class. Each representative is still in the role he or she chose (mother, judge, etc.), so students may choose to do some dramatic improvisation. The representatives from each group should present on

- the key concerns related to that group's major life area
- the resources or skills that the major life area can offer
- how other life areas could be helpful in dealing with the concerns of this life area

Once the group of representatives has finished presenting, lead the students in debriefing the activity. The following questions are guidelines:

1. Now that the members of the community have heard each major life area group, what more have you learned about the issue?
2. Are there resources in the community that you did not know about before?
3. Did some groups see the problem in the same way as other groups or did they have similar skills to solve the problem?
4. Could one major life area group alone address the issue successfully?
5. Who could you team up with to deal with concerns?
6. Were there certain people that could have or did appear in more than one of the major life areas?
7. What are some of the resources in our real-life community? Try to come up with some for each of the major life areas.

## 8.3 Closure: Key Messages

(10 minutes)

This lesson is designed to help students understand issues related to substance use within the context of their own experience. This closure activity enables students to reflect on their own communities and the material presented. You can have students spend this time journal writing or assign it as a homework activity. Ask students to create their own web of support or circle of community. With the student's name in the centre, have them draw circles surrounding themselves. Seven circles should surround their name, to represent the different major life areas. In each circle have them list a person or resource that fits within that major life area.

# Community planning worksheet

Who are you? (Personality within the community)

What major life area do you represent?

What are the key concerns for your major life area?

What resources or skills do you have to address the concerns listed above?

What other major life areas could also be helpful in addressing the concerns and how?

# Major life areas

There are a number of areas in a person's life that could be affected by substance use. 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 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
- Becoming uninterested in activities that you used to like
- Losing friends because of substance use

## School/Job

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



- Going to school or work drunk, stoned or preoccupied about gambling debts
- Having your teachers talk to you about your involvement with substance use

### **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, but feeling unable to do so
- Using substances becomes the most important part of your life

### **Financial**

- Spending money on drugs 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 drugs
- Taking money or pawning items from home in order to afford drugs
- 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 substance use
- Experiencing the effects of criminal convictions on your life (e.g., custody, fines, difficulty travelling out of country, limited job opportunities)

## Reference List

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. (2003a). Be your own hero: Health education resiliency opportunity. Edmonton, AB: Author.

Alberta Alcohol and Drug Abuse Commission. (2003b). Summary report: The Alberta Youth Experience Survey 2002. Edmonton, AB: Author.