

The importance of refusal skills

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- increase awareness of the influence of peer pressure
- evaluate the level of risk in situations involving substance use and act to avoid that risk
- learn healthy alternatives to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs
- use skills that are directly related to alcohol, tobacco and other drug choices (e.g., refusal skills, decision making, stress reduction skills)

TIME

- 45-minute lesson

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Big Red gum or other cinnamon gum with a paper or foil wrapper (1 stick for each student) Note: Big Red Gum can be ordered on Amazon.ca.

Refusal skills handout

Refusal role-plays handout

flip chart paper

Opening activity: Big red

(10 minutes)

Try this activity yourself before the lesson. You may feel that the burning sensation from the gum wrapper will be too uncomfortable for students in your class. Use your discretion about whether to include this activity in the lesson.

The objective of this activity is to increase student awareness about internal and external pressure to use alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Give each student a stick of gum and explain that it is a class treat. Without saying anything to the class, remove the gum from the wrapper, lick the white inside surface of the wrapper, and stick it to your forehead (with the shiny surface facing out). Before the lesson, you can ask five students to do this as well. Ask them not to say anything to their classmates about being approached by you, but to encourage students around them to stick their wrappers to their foreheads. Even though the students have not been directed by you to do this, you can encourage them to try it by making it seem like fun. Then, wait and see how many students follow suit.

Do not provide an explanation for the purpose of the activity. Observe student behaviour and responses (e.g., being hesitant, refusing to participate, pressuring others to try it, asking what the purpose of this activity is, etc.). Because students with allergies or skin sensitivities should not participate for safety reasons, you can ask them to help you observe the class.

Students will begin to feel mild burning on their foreheads, from the cinnamon on the wrapper. Their foreheads will also have a red, rectangular mark for a brief period of time (approximately 15 minutes). After observing student reactions, discuss what happened with the class. You can use the following questions as a guideline:

- How many students put the wrapper on their foreheads?
- Why did you do that?
- How many students did not put the wrapper on their foreheads?
- Why not?
- What did others say when you were not participating?
- What were you feeling during this activity?

- Imagine a group of people pressuring someone to try alcohol, tobacco or another drug. What would be a reason for trying it?
- What kinds of risks would a person take if they chose to try alcohol, tobacco or another drug?
- What could you do if you were in this situation?

Sample role play

(10 minutes)

You can perform the following role-play using two puppets or by acting it out with a student volunteer.

At recess, a student is playing by himself on the playground. Two classmates are talking off to the side.

Student A: *Hey, Lee's over at the monkey bars eating his recess snack.*

Student B: *I don't like him. I dare you to go and take his snack!*

Student A: *No, that's not nice.*

Student B: *Go and take it or I won't be your friend!*

Student A: I want to be your friend, but I won't do mean things to be your friend.

Student B: *GO DO IT!*

Student A: *No! I won't do it (walking away)!*

Ask students to identify other ways Student A could have said no in this scenario and record ideas on flip chart paper. Brainstorm other examples of one person pressuring another and ways of refusing. Continue to add to your list of refusal skills. Refer to the *Refusal skills* handout, which provides several examples of ways to decline pressure. Try to draw some of these responses from the class. You can distribute this handout at the end of the lesson for students to review and add their own ideas.

Explain to students that if somebody is pressuring them, it is important to use refusal skills that they feel comfortable with and to be respectful when expressing their feelings. This will eliminate any unnecessary conflict and may avoid a confrontation.

Refusal role-plays

(20 minutes)

Explain to the class that they will be working in pairs to discuss and act out a role-play. After 10 minutes of group work, volunteers will be asked to present their role-plays to the class.

Make two or three copies of the handout called *Refusal role-plays*. Cut out the scenarios and distribute one to each pair. Ask students to read the scenario and brainstorm ways of dealing with the situation. Encourage them to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy responses and the results of each. Ask them to consider healthy ways they can handle their feelings in these situations and what they can do to help themselves feel better? Have the pairs act out the scenarios by using the refusal skills that have been identified on the class chart or by coming up with their own solutions.

Closure: Review

(5 minutes)

Ask students to highlight their favourite refusal skills. Distribute the *Refusal skills* handout. Have the class read through the refusal skills and record three of their own ideas.

Refusal skills

I can resist pressure like Buzzy the Bee. These are ways I can say no when I am feeling uneasy:

I like you as a friend, but I don't like doing that.

My parents trust me and that's important to me.

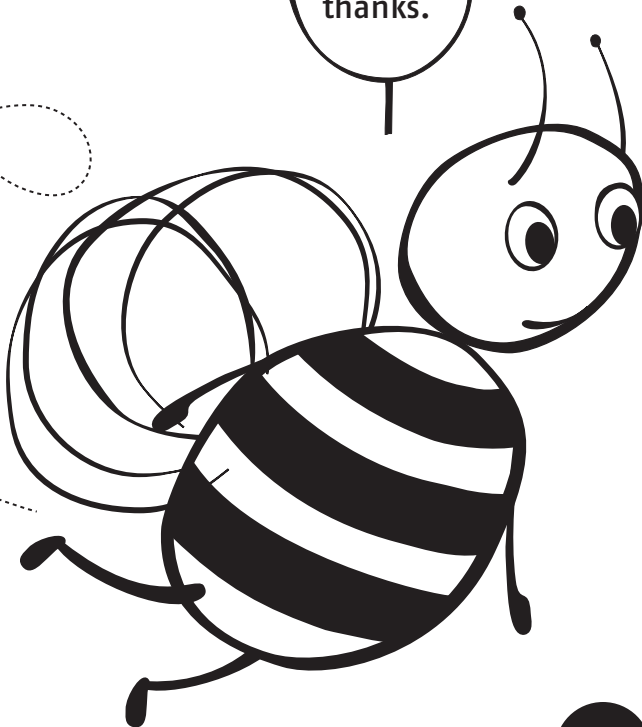
I'm not comfortable doing that.

No, I don't want to.

No thanks.

Don't say anything, just walk away.

If you can see trouble starting, try to avoid it.



Refusal role-plays

SCENARIO 1 • You're playing outside at your friend's house. You notice that his older sister is smoking a cigarette with her friends. She invites you to try smoking and tells you that it's no big deal, it won't hurt you to try it, and you're a baby if you're too scared.



SCENARIO 2 • You're at your friend's house, and you have a headache. Your friend says, "My mom always gives me a pill when I have a headache, I'll ask her to get you one."



SCENARIO 3 • You're playing on the school grounds after school. Your parents are expecting you home soon. Your friend says, "Hey I know a new park that's 10 minutes from here. Let's go! We won't be long, and then you can go home after that."



SCENARIO 4 • Your dad's friend offers you a sip of his beer.



SCENARIO 5 • You did poorly on a spelling test and you got in trouble for talking in math class. You had a terrible day! On your way home from school, your two friends kick a "for sale" sign, jump on it, pick it up and throw it to you.

