

Acknowledging addiction

SPECIFIC OUTCOMES

Explore the connections among physical activity, emotional wellness and social wellness by

- understanding that addiction involves physical and/or psychological dependence
- acknowledging the value of important life areas, such as family, friends, responsibilities and interests

Demonstrate effective decision-making, focusing on careful information gathering by

- considering how unhealthy choices can have negative consequences

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

7.1 Opening activity: The need to breathe (10 minutes)

7.2 Tobacco tightrope (20 minutes)

7.3 Avoiding addiction (10 minutes)

7.4 Review: What have we learned (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

HANDOUT 6.1a: What is addiction?

HANDOUT 7.2: Tobacco tightrope

Crayons/pencil crayons

7.1 Opening activity: The need to breathe

(10 minutes)

Review the definition of addiction: An addiction is when a person depends strongly on a drug (such as cigarettes) or an activity (such as betting on sports to win money), even though that person may be hurting him or herself or others.

Ask the students to think about what it is like to be under water and unable to breathe. Explain that this next activity challenges them to hold their breath for as long as possible, without overextending themselves to the point of feeling weak or dizzy. Begin by encouraging the class to relax and sit still. When everyone is ready, count down from five. After you call out “One,” the students will take one last breath and hold it for as long as they can. Again, emphasize the importance of breathing when necessary, to avoid becoming light-headed. When the students feel the need to take another breath, ask them to quietly put their heads on their desks and begin breathing normally.

After this activity, engage the students in the following discussion items:

- What words describe how you felt right before taking your second breath?
- What feelings did you experience right after taking your second breath?
- Imagine being in a situation where you couldn’t get a second breath. Would you consider doing something that you might not normally do? What would that be?
- What would it be like to experience this feeling of desperation several times each day?
- Does anyone want to try the challenge again after this discussion? Why or why not?

As a class, discuss how the feelings and sensations experienced during this activity might be similar to those experienced by somebody with an addiction. Although breathing is a necessary part of life, a person with an addiction feels an overwhelming need to continue taking a drug or gambling because his or her body and/or mind relies heavily on it. Emphasize the distinction between an addiction and an adult who buys a lottery ticket occasionally, drinks a glass of wine with a meal or has one cup of coffee each morning.

Once people become addicted to drugs or gambling, it is extremely difficult to stop even though they realize they are making unhealthy choices. They may feel very badly about what they are doing, but their ability to make wise decisions is limited, due to their physical and/or psychological dependence. Discuss how organizations such as Alberta Health Services, Alcoholics Anonymous and Gamblers Anonymous can help people who are suffering from addictions and give support to their family members as well.



Explain that oftentimes the word “addiction” is minimized when people communicate their dependency on a type of food or activity they enjoy. The following expressions are examples of this:

- “I am addicted to candy.”
- “I’d go crazy without my PlayStation.”
- “Life would be awful without T.V.”

Although people may crave a particular food or desire to engage in daily habits, an addiction is different. An addiction can overpower an individual and become the most important part of his or her life. The individual seeks to indulge the addiction, no matter what the cost. There is a feeling of urgency or desperation because the body and/or the mind have come to depend on the substance or the behaviour.

7.2 Tobacco tightrope

(20 minutes)

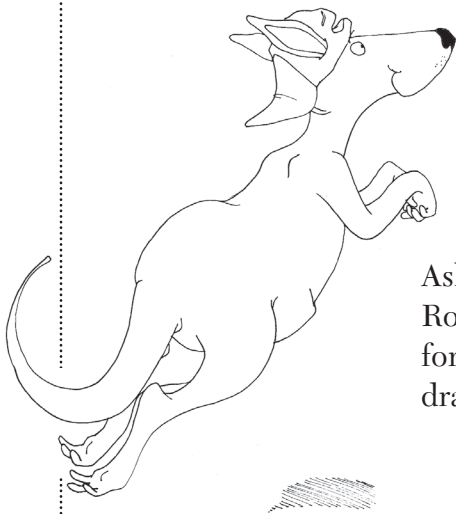
Distribute HANDOUT 7.2. Review the definition of addiction and discuss the scenario provided. Explain to the class that tobacco products contain a drug called nicotine. People can develop a strong addiction to this drug and to the action of smoking cigarettes. Ask the students to look at the cartoon picture, identify the character's problem and evaluate what his life might be like. Have the students think about the following considerations:

- the damage that he is doing to his body
- his family's concern about his health
- the money he is spending on his pack-a-day habit (\$10 per day, \$70 per week, \$280 per month, \$3360 per year)
- his friends' dislike of his behavior

Once you have discussed the scenario presented in the cartoon, explain that the best time to stop an addiction is before it has a chance to start. Have the students brainstorm ways that the character might have said no to smoking, and as a result, avoided becoming dependent on nicotine. For example, Jenny could have said:

- No, I'd rather go play street hockey with my friends.
- I don't want to smoke because I need to stay in good shape for the swim club.
- Smoking costs too much and I want to spend my money on a new video game.
- I don't want to smoke because it causes lung cancer.
- I've heard how hard it is to quit smoking, so I don't want to start.
- No thanks, my family would worry about my health.
- My friends don't smoke and they wouldn't want to hang out with me if I started.

Ask the students to draw a cartoon that illustrates one of the ways Roo could have reacted when the older kids offered him a cigarette for the first time. Upon completion, have the students share their drawings with a partner.



7.3 Avoiding addiction

(10 minutes)

Emphasize the following point about addiction: forming an addiction does not happen over night. At first, people do not experience many problems. If they did, they would probably stop. But as time goes by and their behavior continues, they begin to focus more and more on the drug or activity and less and less on other important areas of their lives. They may begin to neglect or lose interest in their families, friends, responsibilities and interests. But by the time they see problems happening, they strongly depend on the drug or activity to feel happy. Losing interest in these important life areas is a high price to pay, but that is the cost of addiction.

Ask the students to divide a piece of loose-leaf paper into four parts. Have everyone title the sections using the following words:

- Family
- Friends
- Responsibilities
- Interests

Explain that you want the students to list or illustrate people who are significant in their lives in the family and friends boxes, tasks for which they are accountable in the responsibilities box and activities they value in the interests box. As the students are finishing, have them consider whether they appreciate or take for granted the examples they have included.

7.4 Review: What we have learned

(5 minutes)

Encourage the students to tell the class the reasons they value the examples they gave, and discuss how different their lives would be without these important life areas. Conclude this lesson by encouraging them to say no to an addiction with a statement like this:

Figure out how drugs and gambling might affect what is important in your life.

HANDOUT 7.2

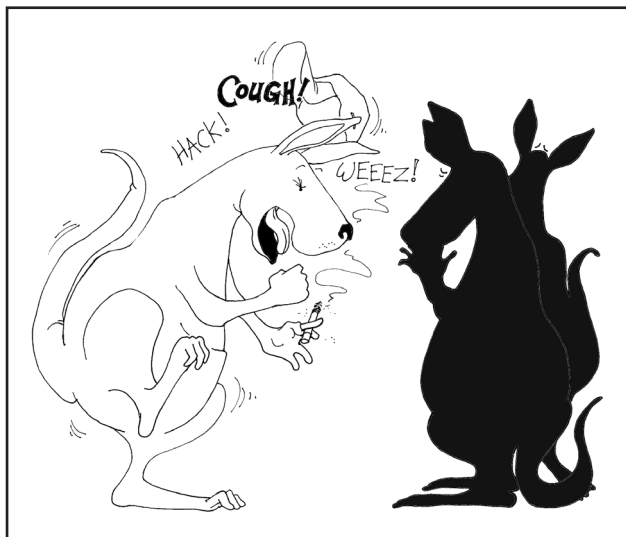
Tobacco tightrope

An addiction is when a person **depends strongly** on a **drug** (such as cigarettes) or **an activity** (such as betting on sports to win money), even though that person may be hurting him/herself or others.

Smoking cigarettes is an addiction and very difficult to quit. Roo's body has become dependent on nicotine, which is the addictive drug in cigarettes. His body feels normal when he smokes because he is getting the drug his body has come to expect. When he stops smoking, he experiences a strong craving for the nicotine. His mood changes and he becomes irritable and anxious.

Read through the following scenario and see if you can help the character to stop his addiction, before it has a chance to start. Help him make a healthier decision in the cartoon box below.

Roo, today:



Roo, when older kids offered him a cigarette for the first time:



The Healthier Choice