

Protecting Ourselves from Risk

SUMMARY

Objective: To help students understand the risk and protective factors that either put us at increased risk for, or help protect us from problems such as harmful alcohol and drug use or gambling.

Process: In a group discussion, students will explore the concept of anticipating and protecting oneself from risk.

This lesson is one in a series of Grade 7 lessons. If you aren't able to teach all the lessons, try pairing this lesson with the "Substance Use and Gambling Information," "Understanding Influences," or "Decision Making" lessons.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Examine own risk-taking behaviour and how to avoid risky situations.
- Understand the effects of substance use on major life areas.
- Increase awareness of peers, family and media as influences on personal decision making.

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 3.1 Risk and Protection Discussion (10 minutes)
- 3.2 Protecting Ourselves From Risk (30 minutes)
- 3.3 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Large rolls of paper

Various art supplies such as markers, paint, magazines, tape, glue, scissors

"Risk and Protective Factors" – teacher reference sheet

Teaching about substance use and gambling can and should cross all subjects. Here are a few suggestions for use in subjects other than health.

LINKS TO OTHER SUBJECTS

- **Physical Education:** Examine risk and protection as it relates to physical activities and anticipating these in order to be prepared

3.1 Risk and Protection

(10 minutes)

Introduce to your class the idea of a player preparing for a sports game. Ask students - what are the risks of playing various sports? Draw a picture of a person ready to play their sport without any equipment. Have students discuss and brainstorm the different lengths a person goes to prepare for a game and add pieces of equipment to the graphic and jot down important notes to represent the protection.

Note: You know your class the best, and what type of metaphor would work best with your class. For this example we have used a general sports figure. Please modify to suit your needs.

Try to discuss as many aspects of preparation as possible, including

- types of equipment a player wears
- specific food a player eats before a game
- pre-game pep talks with the team and coach
- important people they may invite to come watch
- superstitions and rituals for luck

As students discuss the different preparations, lead a discussion about why they are necessary (e.g., equipment protects us from the risks associated with the game). Conclude that it would be foolish to jump into an activity or decision without fully understanding the risks and how to protect ourselves.

Discuss how each of us is vulnerable to risks, some of which are associated with substance use or gambling, and that there are ways to protect ourselves from becoming involved with substances (alcohol, tobacco and other drugs) and gambling.

Ask students what they think may put somebody at risk for using substances or gambling. Their answers may include:

- starting to experiment with substances at an early age
- feeling overwhelmed, stressed, etc.
- believing that using substances will help with problems or make a person more popular
- parent or guardian that uses drugs or gambles

- friends who use
- not feeling a part of a group or school
- feeling like school doesn't matter
- failure in school classes

Explore with students what helps protect a person from using substances or gambling. Things that help protect us include:

- not using substances at an early age
- easy going temperament
- learning ways to manage stress
- believing that using substances has negative consequences
- good family support
- family discusses and models responsible drug use and gambling
- positive adults in our lives
- positive peers/friends
- participation in extra-curricular activities
- feeling a part of school groups and classes
- caring and supportive school environment
- clear school standards and rules for behaviour

The terms “risk factor” and “protective factor” refer to the kinds of things that either help protect us or put us at increased risk for using alcohol and other drugs and possibly developing problems such as substance use or gambling. A lot of research has been done to try to understand how some young people who struggle against the odds – that is, they have many risk factors in their lives – seem to be able to develop into healthy, happy adults. This important research has clearly pointed to the critical role that protective factors play in our lives.

3.2 Protecting Ourselves From Risk (30 minutes)

Working individually, in pairs or groups, provide students with large sheets of newsprint and have students trace each others outlines. Students may then use the art supplies to illustrate the ‘protection’ they have around them – the things that protect them from getting involved in substance use, such as a supportive family or friends.

Ask students to be specific about how they can protect themselves from engaging in substance use or developing a problem. For example, how they think they can increase their protective factors.

3.3 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

Students may share their pictures with the class OR you may post them on bulletin boards within the room as a reminder of the protective factors around us.

Key messages:

- Just like we plan ahead and prepare well for a big game, we need to do the same for decisions about using substances or gambling.
- Protecting ourselves from getting involved in substance use is very important.
- We need to be aware of what may put us at risk for using substances and we need to build protection into our lives that will help keep us from getting involved in harmful substance use. The protection can come from within ourselves and by surrounding ourselves with people who will support us and keep us from using.

Risk and Protective Factors

Risk Factors

Risk factors for the teenager:

- Difficult temperament
- Mental health problems
- Positive expectations of drugs
- Early experimentation

Risk factors within the teen's family:

- Drug use in the family
- Permissive views around drug use
- Stressful or unsupportive home environment
- Unclear rules, poor supervision, inconsistent discipline

Risk factors include the teen's friends who:

- Use drugs and encourage drug use
- Are not engaged in school or positive social activities
- Break the law

Risk factors within the teen's school experience:

- Academic failure
- Negative, disorderly and unsafe school climate
- Low teacher expectations
- Lack of clear school policies on drug use
- Lack of commitment to school
- Withdrawn/aggressive classroom behaviour

Protective Factors

Protective factors for the teenager:

- Easy going temperament
- Strong self esteem
- Connection to school and family
- Negative expectations of drugs
- Delayed experimentation

Protective factors within the teen's family:

- Responsible use is modeled at home
- Open communication
- Close relationship between parents and kids
- Clear parental expectations, monitoring and discipline

Protective factors include the teen's friends who:

- Don't use drugs or encourage it
- Are engaged in school and positive social activities (sports, music, art, etc.)
- Positively influence decision making

Protective factors within the teen's school experience:

- Caring and supportive school environment
- High expectations
- Clear standards and rules for appropriate behaviour
- Youth participation, involvement and responsibility in school tasks and decisions