

Understanding Influences

SUMMARY

Objective: To help students understand how the information we receive from various sources influences the decisions we make.

Process: Lead students in a discussion of social influences, both positive and negative, that affect our decisions. Students will participate in an activity where water colour paint or food colouring, representing various influences, is added to a pitcher of water with different effects. They will also explore ways to filter and cope with the various influences in order to make good decisions.

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 "Decision Making," "Challenge the Influences," or "Protecting Ourselves from Risk" lessons.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- Critically analyze media influence and messages.
- Increase awareness of peers, family and media as influences on personal decision making.
- Recognize and participate in leisure and recreational opportunities.
- Engage in activities that promote health and prevent harmful substance use or gambling.
- Identify personal values and how substance use or gambling fits with personal values.

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 6.1 Understanding Influences (10 minutes)
- 6.2 Filtering through Influences (15 minutes)
- 6.3 Creating Advertisements (15 minutes)
- 6.4 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

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

REQUIRED MATERIALS

One transparent pitcher of water

Liquid water colour (three or four colours) or food colouring

Bleach

Art supplies to create ads (e.g. paper, markers, paint, old magazines to cut up)

LINKS TO OTHER SUBJECTS

- **Career and Technology Studies:** Use a computer application to create multimedia ads
- **Leadership:** Host an awareness week about decision making and influences. Use the ads students create as morning announcements or play at lunch time.
- **Language Arts:** Write a short essay, poem or story about the influences in your life and how self-awareness prepares you to make good choices .

6.1 Understanding Influences

(10 minutes)

Ask your students for a definition of influence. Influence is the effect that a person or thing has on another. Influences affect how we think, feel and behave. We are influenced in all kinds of ways throughout our lives, even throughout a single day. We can experience influence in powerful ways (e.g., laws) or through more subtle ways (e.g., advertisements). Influence can come from our knowledge, experience, culture, attitudes, family and friends. Influence can be direct (someone telling you to do something) or indirect (wanting to be part of a group and so doing something they are doing). Whether influence is positive or negative depends on the outcome or the consequences of the influence (e.g. influence to be involved in the school play or a sports team vs. influence to smoke or do drugs).

Ask your students who or what influences them. Remind them that influence occurs in many different shapes and sizes, and can be positive or negative. Specific answers given by students may include:

- media (e.g., television, music videos, movies, online, celebrities, advertisements)
- parents
- siblings
- other family members
- adults (e.g., teachers, neighbours, coaches, etc.)
- peers

6.2 Activity: **Filtering Through Influences** (15 minutes)

Have a pitcher of water in front of you. Explain that everyone is influenced in one way or another, and repeat that influences can be strong or subtle, direct or indirect, healthy or unhealthy.

Lead a discussion with your students about some of the ways our family influences us even before we know it (e.g., passing on of values and important cultural heritage). As students discuss and call out examples put a few drops of water colour paint (or food colouring) in the water.

Now ask your students to call out a few examples of other significant and strong influences. Again, as students discuss and call out examples add a few more drops of a variety of water colour paint. Ensure you talk about all the different forms (media, friends, adults, culture, etc.) of influence.

Once you have a colour-filled pitcher (which most likely will be a brownish-grey colour) in front of you stop and talk about the different ways we respond to influence, and the way the pitcher represents that.

Lead a discussion about what has happened to the water.
Ask students:

- What is happening that the water turned cloudy?
- How does it feel when we are getting too many messages, and don't know how to filter through all of the different influences to make a good decision?

As students call out answers about their coping skills put a few drops of bleach in the water. As you add bleach the water will clear up and return to its original form. Explore this with your students:

- How do we filter through the influences in our life when things get cloudy?
- What skills do we use to filter?
- How does the information we receive (via influence) affect the decisions we make?

- What would happen if we didn't take the time to filter through and re-focus?
- What influences exist around using substances or gambling?
- How do we filter through those influences specifically?
- Who do you have in your life to help you with filtering through influences?

6.3 Activity: Creating Advertisements (15 minutes)

Influences affect how we think, feel and behave. Think about the television we watch, video games we play, music we listen to, friends we hang out with, messages we see online, etc. What messages are they telling us.

Divide students into pairs or groups to create an advertisement which will promote making healthy choices about substance use or gambling. Encourage students to be creative and use different mediums.

6.4 Closure: Key messages (5 minutes)

Everyone is influenced one way or another. Our influences can be strong or subtle, direct or indirect, healthy or unhealthy. Because influences affect how we think, feel and behave, it is important to know how we will filter through all of the different messages to make good decisions.