

**This lesson plan can
be used for both
grades 8 and 9.**

Tobacco Talk

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- make connections between the decision to belong to a group and the possible negative consequences of such a decision
- increase awareness of influences for youth to use tobacco and tobacco-like products
- increase awareness of health consequences of tobacco and tobacco-like product use

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 10.1 Influences to Use Tobacco and Tobacco-like Products (30 minutes)
- 10.2 Introduction to Identity and Belonging (10 minutes)
- 10.3 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Big Red or other cinnamon gum with a paper or foil wrapper (enough for one stick per student)

Big Red gum activity instructions

magazine advertisements for tobacco products (found in U.S. magazines such as *Sports Illustrated*, *Cosmopolitan* or *People*)

scissors

masking tape

10.1 Influences to Use Tobacco and Tobacco-like Products

(30 minutes)

Begin this lesson with the Big Red gum activity.

The purpose of this activity is to help the students become aware of internal and external pressures to use tobacco.

Hand out a piece of gum, still in the wrapper, to each student. Instruct the students to remove the gum, lick the white side of the wrapper and stick the wrapper to their forehead. Demonstrate this by doing it yourself. Indicate that this is a really fun activity and many people have done it before. Provide no other explanation at this time, but observe student behaviour and responses. For example, students may be hesitant or refuse to participate. They may pressure others to do it or they may continually ask for a reason for this activity.

Students will begin to experience some mild burning on their foreheads; this discomfort is from the cinnamon on the wrapper. A red rectangular mark will be left on most foreheads for a brief period of time, but it will disappear in a short while. (Caution: Some students may have skin sensitivities or allergies to cinnamon from the wrapper.)

Open up a discussion of what is happening. Ask the following questions:

- How many people put the wrapper on their foreheads?
- Why did you do that?
- If you didn't do the activity, why not?
- Was there pressure from others in the room to get all students participating?
- How were you feeling during this activity?

Inform the students that the gum wrapper represents tobacco and tobacco-like products and the pressure to use these products.

Ask the following questions:

- What type of risks do people expose themselves to by using tobacco and tobacco-like products?

- Have the students suggest some risks of tobacco use, and record their suggestions on the board. Here are some risks of tobacco or tobacco-like product use:
 - smelling like smoke
 - fingers turning yellow from cigarettes
 - teeth and skin turning brown
 - stomach problems
 - sleeping problems
 - Coughing and breathing problems
 - making asthma symptoms worse
 - spending money
 - having trouble with family and friends who don't want you to use
 - long-term health consequences (cancer, emphysema, heart disease)
 - wrinkles around the mouth and eyes (early signs of aging)
- Even though we have information about the negative consequences of using tobacco and tobacco-like products, people still use them. Why?

State that one of the main reasons people start using tobacco and tobacco-like products is because of pressure. Ask the students, “What pressure is there for you to use tobacco and tobacco-like products?” Students will likely identify various pressures, including the following:

Pressure from friends/peers

- This pressure comes from seeing your friends smoke, vape or use spit tobacco and wanting to fit in with the group of friends.
- Pressure also comes from the perception that more teens use tobacco and tobacco-like products than actually do, so you think it is the “normal” thing to do.

Pressure from family (parents or siblings who smoke, vape or use spit tobacco)

- Parents or siblings do not necessary exert pressure directly, but seeing them smoke, vape or use spit tobacco makes it seem that these activities are normal or “adult.”

Pressure from the media (TV, movies, online, social media, video games, magazines)

Show the students the ads you have found that depict smoking, vaping or spit tobacco as glamorous, sensual, exciting or associated with sporting events that portray daring behaviour. Explain that these are ways the tobacco industry gets you to try or use tobacco and tobacco-like products, but they don't show you the negative consequences associated with these products..

Note that smoking and vaping is portrayed in many movies, television shows and video games, even those directed to children.

Pressure from the tobacco industry (marketing)

The tobacco industry needs new customers to maintain sales. Tobacco companies market to young people through print and online advertisements, sponsorship of events, making tobacco appealing through flavours, etc.

Discuss these pressures with the students. Ask them why there is so much pressure to use products that are so dangerous. Brainstorm ways they can either reduce the pressure OR challenge the pressure they experience from others.

Some examples: think critically about where the pressure is coming from, stand up for yourself, think of healthy alternatives, walk away from the pressure, try to avoid situations where there might be pressure, etc.

10.2 Introduction: Identity and Belonging (10 minutes)

In preparation for this activity, arrange the classroom so that there is ample space at the front of the room. Using masking tape, make a square on the floor, small enough so that not all of the students can fit inside it.

Explain that junior high is a time when belonging to a peer group is very important. Youth are often trying to figure out who they are and where they fit in. Sometimes it can be challenging, because youth may be uncertain about where they belong.

Stand in the centre of the square and state enthusiastically that this is the square of belonging and it is a fun and exciting place! Go on to say it's a cool place where everyone is hanging out. Encourage those who want to be a part of this square to come forward and join you. As students begin coming into the square, continue to build it up, saying that everyone in the square is having so much fun and that everyone is invited to be a part of it. Ask students in the square to go recruit any of their classmates who have not joined. Not all students will choose to participate, nor will everyone be able to fit in the square.

After everyone who is interested comes forward, ask the class to return to their seats. Discuss the following questions:

1. Why did some of you choose to join in the square of belonging?
2. There was limited information given about the activity happening in the square of belonging. How did that influence your decision?
3. How did you feel being a part of the group that fit inside the square of belonging?
4. Talk about the importance of belonging and what a person will do in order to belong to a group (e.g., they might smoke). Record responses on the board.
5. What was it like for those of you who did not fit in the square of belonging?
6. How many of you decided to go into the square of belonging because your friends did?
7. What are some other activities that are healthy that you can belong to? Record responses on the board. For example: sports (basketball, soccer, etc.), art, music, going for a walk/jog/bike ride, reading a book, etc.

10.3 Closure: Key Messages

(5 minutes)

Have the class summarize what they have learned by identifying key messages they will take away with them. Responses may include the following:

- Some people feel the need to belong to something and might just jump in without thinking about the potential harm involved with an activity.
- Before you decide to do something, think about the harm that may be attached to that activity.
- Believe in yourself and what is right for you—not what is right for your friends.
- The myth that “everyone is doing it” makes it seem as though tobacco use is normal.

(Note: You can tell the class that the majority of students in Alberta choose not to use tobacco or tobacco-like products (Canadian Student Tobacco, Alcohol and Drugs Survey, 2016-17). It is an activity that most people do not do.)