

Peer Influence

SUMMARY

Objective: To provide students with information about positive and negative peer influence and to have students consider strategies to manage negative peer influence.

Process: Students will participate in group scenario projects where they will practise and discuss refusal strategies.

This lesson is one in a series of Grade 8 lessons. If you aren't able to teach all the lessons, try pairing this lesson with the "Substance and Gambling Information," "Media Influences" or "Healthy Relationships" lessons.

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- increase awareness of peers as influences on personal decision making
- understand peer influence, both positive and negative
- build a broad base of positive and supportive relationships
- recognize and participate in personal strategies for managing peer influence to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or to gamble
- practise and build refusal skills

CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 3.1 What Influences You? (5 minutes)
- 3.2 Peers and Peer Influence (15 minutes)
- 3.3 Resisting Negative Peer Influence (20 minutes)
- 3.4 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

REQUIRED MATERIALS

Flip chart paper
Felt pens
Peer influence scenario cards
Handout: Know How to No

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

LINKS TO SUBJECTS

- **Language Arts:** Write a short essay, poem or stories in response to the peer influence scenarios.
- **Art:** Use different art media to illustrate the scenarios and refusal strategies.
- **Drama:** Act out the scenarios in skits or role plays.

3.1 What Influences You?

(5 minutes)

Provide students with a definition of influence. Influence is the effect that a person or thing has on another. Influences can be positive or negative. Ask your students who or what influences them and the decisions they make. Their answers may include

- media (television, movies, the Internet and social media, celebrities, advertisements)
- parents
- siblings
- other family members
- adults (teachers, neighbours, coaches, etc.)
- peers

Write their answers or suggestions on the board. Let the class know that the focus of today's lesson will be on the influence peers have in our life.

3.2 Peers and Peer Influence

(15 minutes)

Ask students for a definition of peers and write it on the board. Peers are a group of people of the same age, status or interests. Peers could include friends, classmates, team members or co-workers.

Lead the class in a discussion of what peer influence is, and how peers influence us. Peer influence is a peer or group of peers trying to persuade you to think or act in a certain way, or to make a particular decision.

Peer influence comes in a variety of forms.

- It can be positive (e.g., peers may influence others to become involved in a school sports team or club).
- It can be negative (e.g., peers may influence others to try alcohol, tobacco, other drugs or gambling).

- It can be direct (e.g., peers may put deliberate pressure on a friend to play poker for money at lunch).
- It can be indirect (e.g., someone might want to belong to a peer group that is playing poker at lunch, and might copy their behaviour to fit in with the group).

Divide students into groups of three to four. Provide each group with flip chart paper and a felt pen. Ask students to brainstorm the different ways our peers influence us. Allow the groups about 10 minutes to record their ideas and then have a representative from each group quickly share one response with the class. Post the flip charts around the room.

Responses may include the following:

- encouraging you and helping you believe in yourself
- helping you stand up for what you believe in
- listening when you want to talk things over
- including you in the group
- inviting you to join an activity (e.g., play soccer)
- being someone you look up to and want to be more like
- calling you names or putting you down if you don't do something (e.g., "you're chicken," "you're dumb")
- threatening you (e.g., spreading gossip about them to others)
- shutting you out (e.g., not supporting you to be part of the group)
- convincing you that it is OK to do something you don't want to (e.g., "Smoking can't hurt you; it will be all right, nothing bad will happen")
- telling you that something is normal or popular (e.g., "Everyone is doing it")
- trying to make you feel better when you're feeling bad
- believing that it is important to fit in with the group and to do what they are doing (e.g., "If I don't do what they're doing, they won't like me")
- feeling afraid of what will happen if you refuse to do something (e.g., "If I choose not to drink alcohol, I may not be invited to another party")

3.3 Resisting Negative Peer Influence

(20 minutes)

Explain to your students that the key to resisting negative peer influence is feeling support from your peers, knowing what you want to do, and having a safe way of avoiding what you don't want to do. It is also important to know where you stand on the issue (e.g., to know that you do not wish to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or that you do not wish to gamble). If you have this clear in your mind, then you will be in more control when the negative influence is there. It is also important to prepare ahead of time, so you will feel more confident in your approach. Having a plan and practising that plan can make it easier to resist negative peer influence.

Depending on your time available, you may want to have students brainstorm some ways to resist negative peer influence, or simply provide the following as a handout to students. (The handout is at the end of this lesson plan.)

Here are some ways that you can resist pressure to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or to gamble:

Be in control.

- Know the reasons that you don't want to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or to gamble.
- Be prepared with comebacks to their pressure.
- Know that not everyone is doing it, and that it's OK for you not to do it.
- Manage your feelings so that you feel confident and in control.
- Choose to surround yourself with positive friends who respect your choices.

Refuse.

- Say things like, "Nope," "No way" or "No thanks."
- Repeat if necessary; be persistent.
- Give reasons (e.g., "If I get caught, I could lose my place on the team").
- Use humour (e.g., "No way. My parents would ground me for the rest of my life and I value my freedom").

- Be careful not to use statements such as “not right now,” because this might give the impression you would be open to it in the future.

Suggest an alternative.

- Think of something else you can do, either with a friend or as a group.
- Plan to spend time with friends in places where you know alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are not allowed.

Avoid the situation.

- Walk away.
- Think ahead. If you see a situation arising where you might be pressured, avoid the situation.

Activity: Peer Influence Scenarios

Objective: To give students a chance to consider and practise responses to negative peer influence.

Instructions: Divide the class into teams of three or four. Cut out the “Peer Influence Scenario Cards” (attached) and give one scenario to each team. The cards each describe a scenario in which peers are trying to negatively influence other peers. It is the task of each group to decide on a course of action to resist the pressure. Have the students in each group discuss options for resisting the negative peer influence, and record their responses.

Use the following questions to guide the group discussions:

- What type of influence (direct or indirect) is being used in each scenario?
- What is your first reaction to this scenario?
- How might you resist the influence? Brainstorm as many responses you can.

Alternative: Have students act out the scenario cards in role plays. Continue to have students discuss and consider options for resisting the negative peer influence.

It is a common misconception among young people that substance use is excessive within their peer group. When asked how many youth use drugs, they will often overestimate the actual amount. This can sometimes result in the false belief that it is normal to use substances, leading them to think that to fit in or belong, they should use substances. In fact, rates of drug use among Alberta youth are quite low. It is important to clarify this with your students. With a more accurate perception of youth drug use, they will be better prepared to make healthy decisions about substance use.

3.4 Closure: Key Messages

(5 minutes)

Peer influence comes in many shapes and sizes: it can be positive or negative, direct or indirect. Being aware of the different ways our peers influence us can help us to make choices we can feel good about. But no matter how our peers try to influence us in certain directions, it is important to know what we stand for.

Peer Influence Scenario Cards

Your friend is having a birthday party and asks if you would bring some alcohol. She suggests that you take it from your parents. If you don't bring it, you will not be invited to the party.

There is a group at school that you would like to be friends with. They have invited you to hang out with them over lunch, but you know that they normally smoke cigarettes at lunch.

You are at a good friend's house one Friday night and he pulls out a joint of cannabis that his older sister gave him. He wants you to smoke it with him.

You are walking downtown with a group of friends and someone pulls out a vape pen and offers it to the group. Everyone else takes a puff from the vape pen.

You are on a bus trip with your hockey team. A group of your teammates are making a pool and taking bets on who will win the game. The bets are for \$5 each.

The school dance is on Friday night and you are excited to be going with your friends. You are to meet at one friend's house, then all go to the school together. When you get to your friend's place, they are drinking alcohol. They want you to join them.

You have just had a terrible day at school: you were late for class, got sent to the office and failed your math quiz. At your friend's house after school, your friend says they know just the solution to your problems, and they offer you a beer.

You are chatting with some online friends. They tell you about an online poker website, and challenge you to a game. At first, you are having fun playing cards for friendly bets; then, one person suggests wagering money and other items of value.

Handout: Know How to No

Knowing where you stand and planning ahead is the best preparation for you to resist pressure to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or to gamble. Here are some tips that can help you to be ready whenever you're feeling pressured:

Be in control.

- Know the reasons that you don't want to use alcohol, tobacco or other drugs, or to gamble.
- Be prepared with comebacks to their pressure.
- Know that not everyone is doing it, and that it's OK for you not to do it.
- Manage your feelings so that you feel confident and in control.
- Choose to surround yourself with positive friends who respect your choices.

Refuse.

- Say things like, "Nope," "No way" or "No thanks."
- Repeat if necessary; be persistent.
- Give reasons (e.g., "If I get caught, I could lose my place on the team").
- Use humour (e.g., "No way. My parents would ground me for the rest of my life and I value my freedom").
- Be careful not to use statements such as "not right now," because this might give the impression you would be open to it in the future.

Suggest an alternative.

- Think of something else you can do, either with a friend or as a group.
- Plan to spend time with friends in places where you know alcohol, tobacco and other drugs are not allowed

Avoid the situation.

- Walk away.
- Think ahead. If you see a situation arising where you might be pressured, avoid the situation.