

# Weighing Risks to Make Decisions

## SUMMARY

**Objective:** To show students that choosing to use substances or gamble has risks. To encourage students to make good choices about the risks they encounter daily.

**Process:** Students will participate in a juggling activity that illustrates how risks and the associated consequences affect our life. Using a worksheet, students will then apply what they have learned from this activity to explore scenarios associated with substance use and gambling.

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 "Stress Management," "Substance and Gambling Information" or "Peer Influence" lessons.

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

- examine own risk-taking behaviour and how to avoid risky situations
- increase awareness of peers, family and media as influences on personal decision making

## CONTENT AND TIME (45-MINUTE LESSON)

- 6.1 Activity: Balloon Juggle (20 minutes)
- 6.2 Risk (10 minutes)
- 6.3 Worksheet: Weighing the Risks (10 minutes)
- 6.4 Closure: Key Messages (5 minutes)

## REQUIRED MATERIALS

Felt markers  
Balloons  
Worksheet: Weighing the Risks

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 story in response to one of the situations listed on the handout.
- **Math:** Consider focusing this lesson on the risks associated with gambling. Explore odds and probability, and evaluate risk from that perspective.

## 6.1 Activity: Balloon Juggle

(20 minutes)

**Objective:** Show students that choosing to use substances or gamble has risks, and that those risks and their consequences have to be weighed against things that matter in the students' lives.

**Instructions:** Have students find a partner, and give each pair four coloured balloons and a felt marker. Ask the pairs to brainstorm four things that are important to them. These may fall into the following categories: family, friends, leisure, school/work, health (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual), money, legal.

Have students blow up the balloons, and use the marker to label each balloon with one important thing. Have each student juggle all four balloons on their own.

Comment that it seems difficult to juggle four things. Ask the students how they are finding it to try to keep all of the balloons in the air.

Once both partners have had a turn, tell your students that they will now be given an additional challenge to the juggling (such as only using one hand, adding more balloons, or not being allowed to move their feet). These challenges represent risks associated with substance use or gambling.

Debrief the activity with the following questions:

- How did it feel when the risks were introduced, and what did you notice?
- Was there a strategy that you used to keep your most important balloons in the air?
- Did you notice which balloons dropped? How did that make you feel?
- The challenges (extra balloons, limited use of limbs) represented the risks of substance use and gambling. Is this realistic? If you choose to experiment with substance use or gambling, are you putting the things you value at risk?
- What are some of the risks of substance use or gambling?
- If you were to choose to use substances or gamble despite the risks, what are some of the consequences?

## 6.2 Risk

(10 minutes)

Now that you've introduced the concept of risk and how it affects decision making, discuss further the concept of risk. Teens are becoming independent adults who want to explore and challenge their skills, limits and boundaries. In exploring these limits and boundaries, they will encounter different types of risks. Introduce the concept of actual risks versus perceived risks.

Actual risks refers to the real dangers of the situation. They are the same for everyone. For example, skiing has certain risks. Because of rocks, trees, weather changes and steep runs, anyone could fall and hurt themselves.

Perceived risks refers to our interpretation of the risks and their possible consequences. These interpretations can depend on what has happened to us in our previous experience. For example, a skier may choose to not go down a certain run, because they feel the run is too dangerous for their level of experience, or because they fell on that run the last time they tried it.

Ask the students what are some of the risks that they have faced. On the board, have two columns labelled "actual" and "perceived." Record the students' answers in the appropriate column. (Be aware that labelling risks as actual or perceived is subjective, and that our interpretation of risk is informed by our personal experiences. For example, walking through the cafeteria isn't actually risky, but for a bullied student this may be one of the riskiest moments of their day.)

## 6.3 Worksheet: Weighing the Risks

(10 minutes)

Use the worksheet (attached at the end of this lesson) to enhance students' understanding of the actual and perceived risks of substance use and gambling. Explain that there are different scenarios in which they have to determine the actual and perceived risks, as well as potential positive and negative outcomes involved. Have students work on the worksheet in the remaining time, and complete as homework if necessary.

## 6.4 Closure: Key Messages

(5 minutes)

Remind your students that we come across all kinds of actual and perceived risks every day, and we must make decisions about how we will deal with them. To make good decisions, we need to understand the positive and negative consequences, and how our choices will affect the things that are important to us. By thinking critically and weighing the risks, we will have a clear picture of the situation at hand. And that will help us make a good decision about what to do.

# Worksheet: Weighing the Risks

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:

Situation	What are the risks? (Actual and Perceived)	What could happen? (Positive and Negative)	What do you do?
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.			
On the way to a school dance with friends, somebody pulls out a cigarette and passes it around. Eventually, the cigarette ends up in your hand.			
During lunch, a friend challenges you to a quick game of dice where the wager is \$10 a game. You have exactly \$10 for lunch, but you're feeling lucky and think you can win.			
Your friend's parents are out for the evening, and you are at a party there. Your friend breaks open their liquor cabinet, and tries to pour alcohol in everyone's drinks.			
You owe your parents \$20, but you have no money. All your friends tell you that playing poker online is fun and an easy way to win money.			