



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UNODC Youth Initiative

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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UNODC Youth Initiative

Discussion guide



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I. Perceptions of drug abuse

The prevalence of material related to drug abuse on television, in the news media and in messages in communities has made drug abuse seem like a widespread epidemic, commonly associated with negative stereotypes. As a result, people who use drugs are frequently perceived as bad and dangerous or as outlaws. Sometimes the media portray drug abuse as “cool” and adventurous. Whether the portrayal is positive or negative, substance abuse is often seen as a free choice, and those who abuse drugs face harsh attitudes and prejudice from others who see them as weak and selfish enough to choose to abuse drugs.

But what are the real reasons why some people end up abusing drugs and others do not? There are various risk factors that can affect young people, such as living in a neighbourhood where drug dealing and drug abuse are taking place and where out-of-school activities are not available. Economic strain on families where parents struggle to meet living costs can influence family relationships negatively, while spending time with peers who are involved in drugs or delinquency while seeking adventure puts young people at higher risk of falling prey to drug abuse. As a consequence of these kinds of risk factors, young people may suffer from mental health problems, making them even more vulnerable to substance abuse. It is not so much the case that all young people freely choose to use drugs, as that these kinds of risk factors may influence young people to initiate substance abuse. In the case of tobacco and alcohol, the industries spend a lot of money on subliminal advertising to get young people, especially in developing countries, to use their products.

Youth is also a time for self-discovery and trying new things. Peers who experiment with drugs and talk about substance abuse may give the impression that everybody is doing it. Fortunately, the actual number of young people experimenting with drugs is smaller than young people tend to think, but it is still alarming.

Many of the negative stereotypes that surround people who abuse drugs come from the way they are most often seen in public. Television and other media may portray people who abuse drugs as irrational, their unpredictable behaviour frightening. Heavy or dependent drugs users have often lost their job and/or home and lack many of the physical conditions needed for a healthy and productive lifestyle. The negative stereotypes, stigma and prejudice assigned to people who abuse drugs usually complicate the problem and make it difficult for those in need of treatment and social support to get help. People who abuse drugs are often cut off from their communities and relationships and often homeless and living on the streets.

A substance abuser may become unable to go to school or work as the drugs affect their brain—thinking, concentration and memory—as well as their body. As a result of substance abuse and the way it affects the brain, thinking and memory and relationships with family, friends and community, people who abuse drugs are not able to be responsible persons in their communities or become successful mentors to young people.

Exploring perceptions of drug abuse as a whole and people who abuse drugs in particular is an important first step towards the goal of achieving better insight into the reasons for drug abuse, which contributes to the prevention of drug abuse and its consequences among youth. The activities below provide an opportunity to explore some other perceptions about people who abuse drugs and to start to understand why drug abuse can be a manifestation of a deep-seated problem in a person's life. Getting past the incorrect and harmful stereotypes that society often assigns to people who abuse drugs, it becomes apparent that drug abuse is often not a free choice or a moral question. The reasons why avoiding drugs can contribute to a young person's achieving a desirable lifestyle in the future will also be explored.

Discussion points

- How do you perceive people who abuse drugs? Are there qualities you associate or do not associate with drug abuse (for example happiness, leadership)? Why or why not?
- How common is drug abuse among youth in your community?
- Why do you think some young people abuse drugs?
- What could cause young people to experiment with alcohol, tobacco, the non-medical use of prescription drugs or illegal drugs in the first place?
- Is drug abuse considered normal behaviour?
- Can drug abuse and subsequent dependence be considered a free choice?
- What are the living conditions of people who abuse drugs regularly?
- How does a lifestyle involving drug abuse differ from how you want to live your life?

Activities

Research about youth, by youth (part 1)

Log on to the Internet or visit your local library for information about the number of young people who use tobacco, alcohol, prescription drugs for non-medical purposes or illicit drugs in your community or country. Bring your results to class in the most creative way you can, perhaps by drawing a picture that represents the number of youth who abuse drugs compared to the number of youth who do not.

If there are no (reliable) statistics available, think of different ways of collecting data on the prevalence of substance or illicit drug use in your school and community. Select the most feasible method and assess the number of youth using tobacco, alcohol and other substances in your school. You can also broaden the scope of your research and collect information on, for example, the number of adults using substances in your school and community, or on the attitudes, values and beliefs related to substances and substance use among youth in your community. Share the most interesting findings on the Youth Initiative Facebook Forum!

Challenging perceptions of people who abuse drugs: teacher-led discussion

- Close your eyes and think of a young person you know or have heard of who has tried drugs, or is currently using drugs. What do they look like? Are they generally happy and relaxed? Are they popular with other young people? Are their families closely involved in their lives? Do they wear the best clothes? Are they involved in sports or other group activities?
- Discuss your answers and write the most common ones on a piece of paper. These can be kept as a reminder of the perceptions youth hold about people who abuse drugs, as well as a reminder of what it is like to be a young person who abuses drugs. (Note: The teacher or moderator needs to be well informed in order to avoid unintentionally perpetuating negative perceptions and stigma.)

Word matching game

Working in small groups, write down words you associate with people who abuse drugs and people who do not abuse drugs (such as “healthy”, “responsible”, “dangerous” or “cool”) onto slips of paper and put them into a bag. Then draw the pieces of paper out of the bag and tape them to a sheet divided into two columns headed, “Drug abuser” and “Non-drug abuser” according to how you view each group. Once the small groups have assigned the words to the columns, the whole class sums up their assessments by making one big chart at the front of the classroom. (Tip: two big “charts” can be made by having two volunteers lie down on a large piece of paper where the outline of their bodies can be traced.) Then discuss your perceptions of those who abuse drugs and those who do not.

Collage of ideal life

Get photos from the Internet and magazines or draw by hand a poster that represents yourself as an adult. In a brief presentation to the class, describe what you like, where you live, where you study, what you do for fun and who your friends are. Then think about why abusing drugs would stop you from being able to reach those goals and become this person you want to be. Bonus points if you take a picture and post it on the Youth Initiative Facebook Forum!

Resources in English

European Commission Justice

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_en.htm

European School Survey Project on Alcohol and Other Drugs

www.espad.org

Frank: friendly, confidential drugs advice and personal stories

www.talktofrank.com

“Monitoring the future”, a continuing study of American youth

<http://monitoringthefuture.org>

Natural High non-profit organization, whose mission is to encourage youth to choose a natural high and reject drugs and alcohol

www.naturalhigh.org

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the influence” campaign

www.abovetheinfluence.com

Students Against Destructive Decisions seeks “To provide students with the best prevention tools possible to deal with the issues of underage drinking, other drug use, risky and impaired driving, and other destructive decisions.”

<http://sadd.org/mission.htm>

UNODC participatory handbook for youth drug abuse prevention programmes (pages 39-56 give ideas on researching the drug abuse situation in your community)

www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/handbook.pdf

Resources in French

Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies (CCSA)

www.ccsa.ca/Fra/Pages/Home.aspx

Council of Europe Pompidou group on combating drug abuse and trafficking

www.coe.int/t/dg3/pompidou/default_FR.asp?

European Commission Justice

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_fr.htm

Health Canada

www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/index-fra.php

Mission interministérielle de lutte contre la drogue et la toxicomanie (MILTD)

www.drogues.gouv.fr/

Resources in Spanish

Comisión Interamericana para el Control del Abuso de Drogas (CICAD)

www.cicad.oas.org/main/template.asp?file=/oid/default_spa.asp and

www.cicad.oas.org/Main/Template.asp?File=/reduccion_demanda/default_spa.asp

European Commission Justice

http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_es.htm

Information for parents

www.laantidroga.com/

Plan Nacional sobre Drogas (Spain)

www.pnsd.msc.es/Categoria2/centro/home.htm

II. What is vulnerability?

Many reasons are given to explain drug abuse among young people. Some say it is because teenagers want to seem “cool” or are pressured by their peers to fit into a social circle where drugs are abused. While this may be true, there are many other important factors that will influence a young person to start abusing drugs. A proper understanding of those factors is another important step towards reducing the stigma attached to drug abuse and preventing addiction among youth around the world.

Young people are influenced by a number of factors at any given time. A person’s temperament or personality traits, factors such as the stability of their upbringing, family life and bonds with family members and factors related to school, such as positive involvement in school activities, as well as community factors, such as the degree of availability of illicit drugs, all influence young people’s development, day-to-day lives, relationships with family, friends and peers and self-image.

Some individual, family and community factors can put young people more at risk and make them vulnerable to experimentation with drugs and eventual drug abuse and dependence. Examples of risk factors are having a specific temperament or particular personality traits, a family history of addiction, a family member who abuses drugs, negative relationships with parents that lack bonding and warmth, neglect and abuse, lack of a family or home, friends who experiment with or use drugs, living in a community where drug abuse is common and a lack of schooling or employment. Insufficient rest and nutrition may also put an individual at greater risk, so it is important to maintain a balanced diet and get enough sleep. The more risk factors are present in a person’s life, the more likely it is that he or she will start experimenting with or continue to abuse drugs in a regular pattern and eventually become dependent.

However, a young person might be exposed to all of these negative risk factors and still never try drugs, thanks to a number of protective factors that also exist at the individual, family and community levels. These might include, at the individual level, a good sense of discipline, healthy self-esteem, good problem-solving skills, good self-expression abilities, a good ability to recognize and communicate emotions, an ability to maintain mental well-being and to cope with stress or anxiety and an ability to establish personal goals. At the family level, strong, healthy parental bonding and consistent family rules may help to protect family members from risky behaviour. At the community level, the protective factors include attending a school that has explicit policies on substance abuse and living in a safe and caring community that supports the well-being of its members. Sadly, once a person starts abusing drugs, the risk factors tend to outweigh the protective factors. Risk factors such as poverty, the availability of drugs and alienation grow even stronger as a person becomes more dependent on drugs.

The good news is that the protective factors can be strengthened if young people learn new and improve existing skills before they experiment with or start abusing drugs. For example,

there are programmes that teach young people to develop various life and social skills (such as resisting peer pressure or communicating assertively when asked to experiment with drugs), and to mobilize communities to work together and help people living in the same neighbourhoods to get to know each other to make communities safer and healthier environments for everybody. These kinds of programmes that help young people make healthier decisions and to stand up for what they believe is right are becoming more common in schools, and others are often offered at community centres. For young people who are already abusing drugs and need more help and support, many treatment services offer help to those affected and their families in successfully rebuilding a drug-free lifestyle.

The activities below will contribute to a better understanding of the conditions that make a person more vulnerable to and less able to resist drug abuse. By starting from the beginning of a person's path to substance abuse, it is easier to understand why some people can refuse drugs, while for others, saying "No" is not so easy.

Discussion points

- What do you think vulnerability means in terms of drug abuse?
- What are the factors that place some people more at risk of becoming dependent on drugs than others?
- How do these differ between individuals, among families and within communities?
- What are some protective factors that reduce the risk of drug dependence?
- How could you enhance your personal protective factors against risky behaviour? Discuss in pairs what works best for you personally. As homework, check the "Resilience for teens" web page produced by the American Psychological Association (below) to find more tips on how to protect your well-being.
- What could you do in class in order to strengthen each other's protective factors?
- How do societies protect their citizens from problems related to drug abuse?

Activities

Research about youth, by youth (part 2)

Expand any research already done on the number of young people using drugs by conducting another survey to find out when, where and with whom young persons in your school or community experiment with or use tobacco, alcohol or illegal drugs. Divide the class into three teams and assign each team one harmful substance to research. Select the research methods (observations in and around school, interviews with young people, interviews with professionals who might have knowledge of the matter, gathering information from the library or the Internet). You can also reflect on the reasons why young people abuse drugs in these cases. Groups can present their findings, 'for example', through a traditional

presentation, a self-made map showing the places and times youth engage in harmful substance use or a “news report” broadcast via YouTube.

List of protective factors

Make a list of things that are good in your life and that function as protective factors against risky behaviour, at the individual, family, school and community levels. Also list the social contacts or networks you have that support you when facing difficulties.

The learning tree

This is a popular educational brainstorming tool that looks at the symptoms of a problem, its causes, institutions that support the cause, solutions to the problem and the ideal situation.

1. Divide the class into teams of four to five.
2. Each team researches and discusses the causes and effects of illicit drug use in their community or country. Each team should focus specifically on the common risk and protective factors at the individual, family or community level.
3. Students should create a learning tree that shows the root causes and ultimate effects of drug abuse and addiction.
4. Students give five-minute presentations to the class based on their learning tree. They should present all the elements (problem, cause, solution or ideal situation) in relation to drug abuse and include something learned about a different country from another school participating in the programme on the Youth Initiative Facebook Forum or Twitter page.

Media portrayals of drug abuse

Keep a diary for one week noting content related to harmful substance use in the print and electronic media, in the news, an entertainment context or advertisements. Pay special attention to images of young people smoking, using alcohol or other drugs, or under the influence of drugs. You can also divide your class into teams, each focusing on a specific type of substance (alcohol, tobacco, prescription drugs used non-medically or illegal drugs).

Then compare notes in class. Did you encounter images of youth using drugs? Were they positive or negative? In what kind of context did they appear? Did they suggest or show any consequences of substance abuse? Were these accurate? You might categorize your findings by the type and form of media (advertisements, different types of news, entertainment) and also consider the target audience of the messages, and whether the portrayals suggested any reasons for the substance abuse. To make the task easier, you could omit social media the first time, making it the subject of another project later. If the class was divided into teams focusing on specific substances, the teams should consider their findings among themselves first before presenting the most interesting ones to the class.

Alternatively, you could test your knowledge on portrayals of smoking in films by taking the fun test available from www.smokefreemovies-europe.eu/en/joi/overview.html.

Resources

American Psychological Association, “Resilience for teens—Got bounce?”
www.apa.org/helpcenter/bounce.aspx

Home Box Office (HBO) addiction series, produced by HBO in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
www.hbo.com/addiction/

Information on smoking in movies www.smokefreemovies-europe.eu/en/joi/overview.html

NIDA, “Preventing drug abuse amongst children and adolescents”
www.nida.nih.gov/prevention/principles.html

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the Influence” campaign—“Recognize influence”
www.abovetheinfluence.com/influence/whydrugs

UNODC prevention website, where a guide on school-based education for drug abuse prevention can be downloaded
www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/index.html

III. The direct effects of abusing drugs

To better appreciate why vulnerability factors are so important, it is essential to understand exactly how drugs affect both the brain and the body. Because different drugs are made of different chemicals, different kinds of reactions take place when drugs interact with natural body chemicals. The end results can be both dangerous and long-lasting. Therefore, appreciating the full range of potential effects of drug use will contribute to an overall understanding of addiction and the long-term consequences that drug abuse can have in a person's life.

Instead of consisting of a long science lecture, however, this chapter encourages independent learning. For example, the National Institute for Drug Abuse (NIDA) website provides fun games and hands-on activities (see link below). One of the activities below is to design and send a postcard about the effects of a certain drug on the brain. The goal of this chapter is to ensure that young people are informed about what drugs really do so that they can help themselves and their friends make smart life decisions.

Discussion points

- What are the short- and long-term physical effects of drug abuse? What are some myths about drug abuse?
- Why are certain drugs (including prescription drugs used for non-medical purposes) illegal? Are you aware of your country's legislation concerning drugs and harmful substance use?
- What are the impacts of drug abuse on the brain? Why is this so dangerous?
- What are drugs? Is it safe to take drugs even if they are not considered illegal? What are the risks?

Activities

NIDA for teens: brain games

Dive into brain science by playing "What neuro-transmitter are you?", "PyraMind climb" and "Dr. NIDA's challenge".

<http://teens.drugabuse.gov/havefun/index.php>

Postcard project

After doing your research and acing all of the brain games on the NIDA website, now it is your turn to get creative! Your teacher will assign you a drug and your job is to design

a postcard depicting its effects on the brain. Make it as scientific or as artistic as you wish. Then, get ready to send your postcard to a student in another country participating in the Youth Initiative to prevent substance abuse. We're all in this together!

Group brainstorming on problems related to drugs

Each student writes down as many negative short- and long-term consequences of using drugs (tobacco, alcohol, illegal drugs and prescription drugs used non-medically) as possible in eight minutes. Then everyone reads out their list in turn. If someone reads out consequences that are the same as those on your list, cross them out, so that each new person sharing their list reads out only consequences that have not been mentioned before. Congratulate the student with the largest number of consequences that no one else thought of, and the one with the second largest number. Sum up all these negative effects of drug use on a large poster with separate columns for short- and long-term effects, with the consequences grouped by substance type. Then display the poster prominently in your school.

Resources

Australian Drug Foundation
www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Neuroscience for Kids
<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/introb.html>

NIDA for teens
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

NIDA "National drug facts week"
www.drugfactsweek.drugabuse.gov/

Note: You could also do your own research using information from organizations in your community!

IV. Abuse of prescription drugs

Many people, young and old, think that just because pharmaceutical drugs used to treat medical conditions and diseases are prescribed by a doctor and come from a pharmacy, they are safer to take than illicit street drugs. However, prescription drugs function in similar ways to illegal drugs, and if not taken as prescribed by a doctor, can have equally dangerous effects on the brain and body and can lead to an overdose, just like illicit drugs.

It is important to understand that the Governments of various countries have reached the conclusion together that psychotropic and narcotic substances, including prescription drugs, are so dangerous when not used to treat a medical condition or an illness under the supervision of a trained doctor that they need to be controlled. Countries have agreed on drug control measures, such as the stipulation that only trained medical doctors can prescribe drugs and they should be purchased only from licensed pharmacies where trained pharmacists can dispense and sell them.

Still, people decide to use prescription drugs for non-medical purposes, often for reasons similar to those associated with illicit drug use, or as an alternative to illicit drugs. Prescription drugs are often more easily available, for example, in the family medicine cabinet, together with information on ingredients, expected effects and dosages, making them seem safer than illicit drugs bought on the streets. Sometimes friends may share or sell medication that was prescribed for them. People often do not realize that sharing or selling prescription medication even with somebody who is in pain and seems to need medication is neither safe nor legal.

Some people, including young persons, use prescription drugs to self-medicate when they are feeling down or when they are in acute pain, using medication found in the family medicine cabinet. Self-medication is dangerous and can lead to dependence.

Young people may also try to enhance their abilities or performance by using prescription drugs, for example, to stay awake to study for exams. Again, prescription drugs should not be used for any purpose other than to treat medical conditions or in any way other than as prescribed by a medical doctor.

For all these reasons, it is important to raise awareness about prescription drug abuse, and to help prevent such abuse among young people.

The activities below draw on the knowledge about the brain acquired in previous chapters, with a review of the actual effects of commonly prescribed medications on the brain.

Discussion points

- Why is it dangerous to take prescription drugs not prescribed by a doctor?
- Why do some people think prescription drugs are safe even when used for non-medical purposes? Why is this wrong?

- Why do some people, including young people, use prescription drugs for non-medical purposes?
- Does it happen in your community? How could you find out if you are not sure?
- What kind of groups are particularly vulnerable to this kind of drug abuse?
- Are there any resources for people affected by this problem in your community? What kind of actors or stakeholders relating to the abuse of prescription drugs are there in your community?

Activities

Translation time

Check out the information at the TeensHealth website (see below). This information is in English, but to spread it around your school and community effectively, it needs to be translated into your local language. In teams of three, research the effects of the three commonly used types of prescription drugs (opioids, central nervous system depressants and stimulants) and translate a short description of one from English into the language you speak at home. Type and print your translation, then, in teams, pass copies around your school or community as a positive first step towards raising awareness about prescription drug abuse.

Any activity created by you

If you create an activity that works well, pass it on to other groups as well via the Youth Initiative Facebook page.

Resources

Australian Drug Foundation
www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Health Canada, “Drugs not 4 me” campaign
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogués/youth-jeunes/index-eng.php

Neuroscience for Kids
<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/introb.html>

NIDA for teens <http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the Influence” campaign
www.abovetheinfluence.com/

TeensHealth, “Prescription drug abuse”
http://kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol/drugs/prescription_drug_abuse.html

UNODC information on the non-medical use of prescription drugs
www.unodc.org/unodc/en/drug-prevention-and-treatment/non-medical-use-prescription-drugs.html

V. Consequences and risks associated with drug abuse

As well as understanding the chemical effects that drugs can have on the brain and body, it is important to understand that there are other important consequences of drug abuse that have long-term impacts on a person's health and safety. For example, taking drugs can alter mood and have serious effects on relationships with friends and family, lead to driving while "high", with potentially devastating consequences, or increase the risk of HIV infection, particularly when using contaminated injecting equipment.

The information presented below is not meant to scare but rather to inform. The goal of this section is to develop an appreciation of what drug abuse can mean for relationships, health and safety by providing information about the major risks inherent in abusing drugs and some of the ways in which these issues can be talked about with friends.

Behavioural responses

Taking psychoactive drugs can have serious impacts on mood and general mental health due to the interaction of the drugs with natural brain chemicals, as previously discussed. Taking drugs can affect the ability to focus on schoolwork and even the ability to handle social situations confidently. The personal relationships with family members and friends of people who are addicted to drugs are often affected negatively, as the erratic behaviour of people who are addicted to drugs makes it difficult for others to trust them. Drug abuse can also cause depression and can even lead to suicide if the drug user is not able to find effective treatment and support.

Risk of HIV infection

Another serious danger of taking drugs is the increased risk of contracting HIV. This can happen as a result of having unsafe sex or sharing unclean needles when injecting drugs, and is a deadly consequence of illicit drug use. HIV is transmitted through direct contact with certain body fluids, such as blood. The virus attacks the body's immune system and eventually leads to AIDS, for which there is still no cure.

Even the effect of being high can have serious consequences. Being high increases the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours and impairs decision-making capabilities, which means that actions might be taken that would not normally be taken while sober. For example, someone who is high might be more likely to have unsafe sex and forget to use condoms, which can result in exposure to HIV, other sexually transmitted diseases or hepatitis, or result in a pregnancy.

Impaired driving

Another risky behaviour related to drug abuse is impaired driving. Even though different drugs have different effects on the brain, driving high is always a bad idea. Just as in the case of driving under the influence of alcohol, the altered state of mind when high makes actions and judgements unpredictable. This means that someone might speed, be too distracted to notice an oncoming vehicle or even fall asleep behind the wheel. Whatever the drug, driving high is a serious threat not only to the driver's life, but to the lives of friends, family and community members.

It can be difficult to stand up to friends if they are obviously high and taking risks or are pressuring someone else to do the same. The activities below will help to provide practice in doing just that, as well as some tips on how to best approach a conversation with a friend who is causing concern. The goal is to find the most effective ways of getting the message across: actions when high can have dangerous, long-term consequences for everyone involved. Below are links to resources providing good tips on stopping friends from making decisions they will regret.

Discussion points

- What are some of the effects of drug abuse and how can they impact your daily life?
- How does drug abuse affect your personal relationships?
- What is HIV and why is it so important to prevent it?
- What are the dangers related to the effects of being high on your judgement and personality?
- Why do young people decide to drive drunk or high?
- What are some things you can tell your friends to help them avoid making risky decisions?
- How aware do you consider the youth in your school to be of the risks and consequences of the use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs?
- What kind of impacts do you think illicit drug use has on society?

Activities

Body map

On a large piece of paper, draw an outline of a human body. Then, draw arrows to the parts of the body that can be damaged by taking drugs, indicating which drug causes what effect. Compare your map with that of a partner and then share with your class.

It's skit time!

In groups of two or three, write a short story or drama involving a scenario where a young person successfully intervenes when a friend or family member is too intoxicated to drive.

If you have access to a video camera, videotape your skit and send it in to UNODC or share it on YouTube with another school involved in the UNODC Youth Initiative.

Photo week

Organize a photo competition in your class on the theme “effects of substance use”. Use photography to document all the negative consequences of substance use you find in your community, such as cigarette butts and garbage in places where people smoke, a park that feels unsafe at night because you think that there might be a risk of encountering intoxicated people there, a shop that you think sells alcohol to minors or anything else you can think of. Make a photo exhibition of the best shots in the school hallway.

Another time, you could organize a similar photo competition on all the positive things existing in your community that support you in leading a healthy lifestyle!

What do drugs cost our Earth? Log on to the Internet and start finding out environmental consequences of the production of drugs, including the effects of the tobacco industry. What kind of social consequences does drug production have? Present the findings to different audiences in different ways: a family discussion, a song performed at a school gathering or a poster displayed on a school wall.

Resources

Australian Drug Foundation, “Staying safe on the roads: tips for young people”
www.druginfo.adf.org.au/fact-sheets/staying-safe-on-the-roads-tips-for-young-people-web-fact-sheet

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, “Xperiment.ca”
www.xperiment.ca

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, “British Columbia roadside survey 2010”
www.ccsa.ca/Eng/Priorities/ImpairedDriving/BC_Roadside_Survey_2010/Pages/default.aspx

Health Canada, “Drugs not 4 me” campaign
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/youth-jeunes/index-eng.php

Liquor Control Board of Ontario, “Deflate the elephant”
www.deflatetheelephant.com/deflatetheelephant.html

Nemours non-profit organization, “Kids-Health: HIV and AIDS”
http://kidshealth.org/kid/health_problems/infection/hiv.html#

UNODC, “HIV and AIDS: What is being done”
www.unodc.org/unodc/en/hiv-aids/what-is-being-done.html

VI. Prevention of drug abuse

The previous chapters have covered the factors that make people vulnerable to drug abuse and how drugs affect the brain and body, behaviour and relationships and what kind of consequences drug abuse often has. It is now time to think about whether it is possible to prevent young people from experimenting with drugs and becoming involved in drug abuse and if so, how.

Preventing young people from experimenting with drugs and becoming involved in drug abuse is possible. The earlier children and young people are taught the correct information and skills, the better able they are to make healthier choices when they grow up and the more skills they have to engage in healthy activities such as sports, theatre and music in their free time instead of experimenting with drugs. Also, the more positive and caring relationships between young people and their parents, siblings, friends, teachers and communities are, the less likely they are to have a need to experiment with drugs.

It is also known that some types of prevention programmes work while others do not. So what should be done to prevent drug abuse? In order for young people to make healthy and safe choices in life and refrain from experimenting with drugs, they need to have correct information about drugs, drug use, the effects and consequences of drugs and how to avoid and deal with situations where they may be offered drugs or even pressured to use them. They also need life skills to deal with these situations, and environments that support them in making healthy choices.

Schools are ideal places to reach young persons. Most children and youth go to school and have trained teachers who can use interactive and interesting methods to teach correct information and skills to help young people to make healthy decisions in life. Schools can help to develop these skills and knowledge throughout the years, reinforcing the learning experience. It is important that these programmes are part of a school policy that defines rules and regulations at school, explains the support mechanism (for example, visits to the school psychologist) if a student is found to be abusing drugs, and the consequences of drug abuse. It is important that the policy focus on support instead of punishment.

Families and parents may sometimes need support and help in bringing up children. Prevention programmes that support parents and help families to improve their relationships, spend time together and bond and that provide parents with skills to monitor, supervise and communicate with their children are effective in preventing behaviour problems in children and adolescents and improve overall family life.

At workplaces, employers should ensure employee health and safety and provide services to support the well-being of their staff. This is good for the employees, but also for the company, as staff who are well both physically and psychologically are productive, have fewer accidents and take fewer sick leave days.

What is common to all these programmes is that they offer a series of sessions that help to provide skills and correct information about drugs and drug abuse.

What does not work is also known. Campaigns, either on television, radio or billboards by the roads that use scary pictures and slogans alone do not change behaviour, as they do not teach the necessary skills to refuse drugs in the situations where a person may encounter drug use. Alternative activities such as sports, music and theatre alone do not help young persons to cope with these situations. However, when combined with life-skills education and information about drugs they can become effective tools for youth to change their perceptions and attitudes about drug use.

Now the task is to focus on finding out more about prevention programmes that work and how they look, who should implement them and where, and who they should target.

Discussion points

- If you encounter situations where others are experimenting with or using drugs, how can you say no and not be pressured by others to try drugs?
- What kind of skills and information do you think you would need to avoid drug abuse?
- What kinds of prevention programmes are you familiar with?
- Have you participated in drug education programmes based on life skills in your school, in your sports group or elsewhere in your community?

Activities

School policy

Find out if your school already has a policy on drug abuse. If it does, check if the activities outlined in the policy have already been supported, provided and implemented. If your school does not have a policy on drug abuse, find out if you can help and bring this to the attention of teachers, parents and other students. You can also find out what kind of resources are available on the Internet to guide the process of developing a school policy on substance abuse.

School campaign

What would you like to change inside your school to make it a more pleasant place for you and others? Identify a concrete goal, big or small, that you would like to achieve in your school related to substance-free healthy lifestyles. You could focus on either combating the negative effects of drug abuse or the risk factors, or enhancing the positive supportive factors that already exist in your school. Be creative! You can brainstorm in smaller groups, and then vote for the most popular idea.

Then think what kind of steps you would need to take in order to achieve this goal. Develop an action plan by breaking the task down into smaller steps. Think of what resources you have, what talents people in your group have, who else could be involved and which adults

could offer their help, what a realistic schedule would be, how you would publicize your activity or campaign, and how you would finally evaluate it. Present the plan to other people in your school, or if you have sufficient resources, execute it! Share your final plan, or documentation on the activity carried out with others participating in this Initiative via social media.

Community involvement

Find out in small groups what kind of drug abuse prevention programmes are implemented in your community through health-care centres, youth centres, religious communities and even the private sector, such as businesses. Draw a map of your community and indicate who is involved in drug abuse prevention and who has yet to get involved!

Sport

Find out what kinds of sports activities exist in your community, and create a plan on how they could be used as an effective tool for the prevention of drug abuse in your community.

Resources

NIDA, “Prevention can work”

<http://archives.drugabuse.gov/about/welcome/aboutdrugabuse/prevention/>

NIDA, *Preventing drug use among children and adolescents: A research based guide for parents, educators and community leaders*, available from:

<http://drugabuse.gov/pdf/prevention/redbook.pdf>

Smokefree class competition

www.smokefreeclass.info/smoking_and_youth.htm

UNODC drug abuse prevention guide

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/schools.html

UNODC family skills training programmes—publications

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/familyskillstraining.html

UNODC global youth networks resources for taking action

www.unodc.org/youthnet/youthnet_action.html

UNODC prevention website

www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/index.html

VII. Treatment of drug dependence

Beyond knowing about the causes and effects of drug abuse and how to prevent drug abuse, it is important to be aware that drug dependence is treatable and that there is help available for people who abuse drugs, which can help them recover from the disease of drug dependence. Treatment programmes, counselling services and rehabilitation centres provide safe, healthy environments where people who abuse drugs can seek the help they need to get healthy.

Drug abuse leaves a permanent trace in the brain that affects thinking and especially the regulation of emotions and behaviour. There are various treatment options available, ranging from pharmacological to psychosocial treatment and support after recovery. Often a combination of many different treatments is used, individually tailored to the needs of the person. Although drug dependence is treatable, a person who has become dependent will always be vulnerable to drug abuse, even when they have recovered. Relapse is part of this disease, and that means that the person will need to learn psychosocial skills as part of their treatment to stop behaviours that may lead to relapse and help maintain recovery for the rest of their life. Drug dependence requires long-term treatment, and there are no quick fixes.

Anyone thinking about using drugs or who has ever experimented with drugs should talk about it with a trusted adult. This can be a parent, teacher, school counsellor, doctor or another member of the community. Whoever it is, it is important that they help the young person to get the counselling needed to understand why he or she felt like trying drugs and how to avoid wanting to try using them again. Also, if the young person has engaged in risky behaviours such as unsafe sex or sharing unclean needles, it is very important to get tested for sexually transmitted diseases and/or HIV.

If a young person knows a friend or family member who is addicted to drugs, the first step is to tell a trusted adult about the problem. It can be difficult to talk to someone about his or her drug abuse, so having support from other people will be important. But in the end, having support might really help someone who is dependent on drugs to recover and start to lead a new life.

The activities below provide guidance on how to have a conversation with someone close about drug abuse. There are also opportunities to learn more about the treatment facilities available in the community to help someone find the services they need.

Discussion points

- Who should you talk to if you are thinking about or have already tried using drugs?
- What should you do if a family member is using drugs?

- What treatment programmes are available in your community for people who abuse drugs?
- Is there any support available for people who would like to stop smoking or cut down on drinking in your school? What about elsewhere in your community?
- What is the benefit of treatment for drug dependence and how can it help people overcome their drug problem?

Activities

Role play

In groups of two, write a short conversation where one person confronts a friend or family member about their drug abuse. Try to think of all the things you have learned in this programme to predict what the person abusing drugs might say to you: how they would react, why they might defend their drug use and why they might be glad to be receiving help from a young person. Present the play in front of your class twice, with the partners switching roles between the drug abuser and the young person trying to help them recover. Film your play if possible and upload it onto YouTube to help other young people learn how to help others as well.

Treatment check

Go online or into your community to research the facilities available to help treat people with drug addictions. Then draw a map of your community and mark the location of each facility in relation to important landmarks, such as the school, town square or recreation centre.

Treatment works

Present your map to other students in your class and explain what each of the facilities you found does to help people who abuse drugs to overcome their addictions. Can you think of anything else they could do?

Resources

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the influence” campaign, “Get help”
www.abovetheinfluence.com/help

The Office of the Children’s Commissioner, *You are not on your own: A booklet to help children and adults talk about a parent’s drinking*, available from:
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_498

VIII. The role of youth in the global effort to prevent drug abuse

The UNODC Youth Initiative believes that youth represent a strong force for preventing substance abuse in communities and around the world. More than many scientific researchers, they have experience of today's youth and the ability to communicate positive, non-stigmatizing messages that are based on facts about the disease to respond to the huge problem of drug abuse disorder around the world.

This is where your reflections throughout this programme come in. What can be done to prevent another young person from starting to abuse drugs? What can schools do to help young people make better decisions today? How can communities help their members to raise awareness about drugs and overcome the disease of substance abuse?

The truth is, there is a lot that you can do in response to these questions. The first step is to become informed, which after all your research, learning and sharing with the help of this discussion guide, you can proudly consider to have achieved. The next step is not to accept the inaccurate images, stereotypes and prejudices or theories based on ideology rather than facts about people who abuse drugs and drug-dependent persons. Thirdly, it is time to get creative, and find ways to spread the information you have learned to other young people in your community (and even to other adults!).

Awareness-raising activities such as posters and rallies or a fundraiser for a local treatment service are effective means of spreading the message. Social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube also present a good avenue for expressing views about using drugs. Posting the videos created during the activities in this programme has already made valuable resources available for other young people to use in preventing drug abuse in their lives, families and communities.

The resources below can help to provide some ideas for spreading the message about substance abuse and mobilizing a youth effort towards drug abuse prevention. Blogging, tweeting and posting to Facebook some of the alternative activities to drug abuse identified through the activities below are great ways to get started.

Discussion points

- What do you want to do to help young people make better decisions today?
- How can youth help to prevent drug abuse in their schools, families and communities?
- What are some fun and engaging alternative activities to using drugs that you can promote in your community?

- How can your class raise awareness about what you have learned in your school, community and country? How could you influence what services are available in your community related to substance abuse? What would be a good way for youth in your country to influence legislation?
- How could you raise awareness globally?
- How can youth partner with UNODC and other schools and groups participating in this Initiative to reduce the abuse of drugs among young people?

Activities

100 things I'd rather be doing

In a group, try to think of 100 things you like to do that do not involve abusing drugs or other dangerous activities. Post your list on social media sites and compare with other Youth Initiative students from around the world!

Awareness-raising contest

In teams of four or five, brainstorm an idea for an awareness-raising project and think about how to put your plan into action. The team with the best idea as voted by the class wins! Next, make your idea a reality by implementing it in your community.

Connecting globally

Brainstorm now on projects you could conduct together with other schools and on fun ways in which you could interact with other schools participating in this Initiative. Post the best ideas on Facebook!

Resources

Global Poverty Project, “How-to” guide on using social networking sites, available from: www.globalpovertyproject.com/howto/social_networking

Global Poverty Project, “How-to” guide on organizing an advocacy or campaign event, available from: www.globalpovertyproject.com/howto/organise

Natural High non-profit organization, whose mission is to encourage youth to choose a natural high and reject drugs and alcohol
www.naturalhigh.org/

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the influence” campaign, “Live above the influence” www.abovetheinfluence.com/liveati

Office of National Drug Control Policy, “Above the influence” campaign, “Share your voice” www.abovetheinfluence.com/speak

Students against Destructive Decisions
<http://sadd.org/mission.htm>

Annex I

Ice breaker ideas

Human bingo

This game can be played using a bingo card or a list. Each square on the bingo card or item on the list is something about one of the people in the group. The players must find that person and ask him or her to sign the bingo card square or the item on the list. The first person to fill in all the bingo squares or have all the items on the list signed wins.

Interviews

Each person interviews the person next to him or her for five minutes and then introduces the person to the group. A list of interview questions can be provided or people can invent their own questions.

Would you rather...?

Ask questions inviting a difficult choice between two alternatives (for example: "Would you rather be three feet tall or eight feet tall?") and have people create their own questions.

I never did that!

Sit in a circle. Give each person 10 or 15 small objects such as pennies or jellybeans. In turn, each person shares something they have never done, for example, "I have never travelled outside the USA", "I have never eaten sushi", or "I have never played a violin". Anyone who has done the activity referred to by the speaker gives the speaker one jellybean or penny. After going around the circle twice, the person with the most jellybeans or pennies wins.

Two truths and a lie

In turns, each person says two true things and one false thing about themselves. The group tries to guess which one is the lie.

Famous pairs

Tape names of famous pairs and couples on people's backs. Everyone has to find their partner by asking each other questions that can only be answered with "yes" or "no".

Famous authors

Tape names of famous or popular authors on people's backs. Everyone has to find out who they are by asking everyone else questions that can be answered only with "yes" or "no".

Annex II

Guidelines for creating activities

This checklist gives guidelines for you to think about when designing activities. It is not necessary to cover every point in any one activity, but each is worth considering. The most important principle to remember, though, is that each individual activity needs to remain focused on the theme so that its purpose is clear.

The people doing the activity

- Is the activity manageable in the time available?
- Will the activity be authentic and interesting? (This will apply particularly if it is based on the experience of those performing the activity.)

Reasons for the activity

- What is the purpose of the activity?
- What new information will be learned?
- Will learners see some purpose in the activity?
- Is it clear to participants why it is worthwhile to do the activity?
- Does the activity provide an opportunity to assess the task performed or to think about what is being learned?

Activity procedure

- Are the instructions clear, simple and well ordered?
- Does the activity require learners to work together meaningfully? (Collaborating with others is a valuable way of learning, although obviously some activities will be designed for individuals.)

Motivation of participants

- Have you used exciting and interesting material to stimulate learners (for example, pictures, sounds, objects or articles)?
- Does the activity have a logical connection with the next activity or topic?
- Does it provide the right level of challenge?
- Does the activity provide feedback that will help to motivate learners and develop their confidence?
- Have you encouraged learners to express their own ideas and think about their own opinions?

Annex III

List of youth-friendly sites providing information about drug abuse

American Psychological Association, “Resilience for teens—got bounce?”
www.apa.org/helpcenter/bounce.aspx

Australian Drug Foundation
www.druginfo.adf.org.au

Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse, “Xperiment.ca”
www.xperiment.ca

“Check Yourself” (supported by the Partnership at Drugfree.org)
<http://checkyourself.com>

European Commission Justice
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_en.htm

Frank—friendly, confidential drugs advice and personal stories
www.talktofrank.com

Global Poverty Project, “How-to” guides
www.globalpovertyproject.com/howto/social_networking

Home Box Office (HBO) addiction series, produced by HBO in partnership with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)
www.hbo.com/addiction

Health Canada, “Drugs not 4 me” campaign
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogués/youth-jeunes/index-eng.php

“Just think twice”
www.justthinktwice.com

Liquor Control Board of Ontario, “Deflate the elephant”
www.deflatetheelephant.com/deflatetheelephant.html

“Monitoring the future”, a continuing study of American youth
<http://monitoringthefuture.org>

Natural High
www.naturalhigh.org

Neuroscience for Kids
<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/introb.html>

National Institute on Drug Abuse, for teens
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

Office of National Drug Control Policy, Above the Influence campaign
www.abovetheinfluence.com

The Office of the Children's Commissioner, *You are not on your own: A booklet to help children and adults talk about a parent's drinking*, available from:
www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/content/publications/content_498

Students against Destructive Decisions (SADD) seeks to provide “the best prevention tools possible to deal with the issues of underage drinking, other drug use, risky and impaired driving, and other destructive decisions.”
<http://sadd.org/mission.htm>

TeensHealth, “prescription drug abuse”
http://kidshealth.org/teen/drug_alcohol/drugs/prescription_drug_abuse.html

UNODC prevention website containing various materials: the UNODC family skills training programmes, the publications, “School-based education for drug abuse prevention”, “SPORT—using sport for drug abuse prevention”, “Monitoring and evaluating youth substance abuse prevention programmes”, and others
www.unodc.org/unodc/en/prevention/index.html

Resources in French

Centre canadien de lutte contre l'alcoolisme et les toxicomanies (CCSA)
www.ccsa.ca/Fra/Pages/Home.aspx

Council of Europe Pompidou group on combating drug abuse and trafficking
www.coe.int/t/dg3/pompidou/default_FR.asp?

European Commission Justice
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_fr.htm

Health Canada
www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hc-ps/drugs-drogues/index-fra.php

Mission interministérielle de lutte contre la drogue et la toxicomanie (MILTD)
www.drogues.gouv.fr

Resources in Spanish

Comisión Interamericana para el Control del Abuso de Drogas (CICAD)
www.cicad.oas.org/main/template.asp?file=/oid/default_spa.asp and
www.cicad.oas.org/Main/Template.asp?File=/reduccion_demanda/default_spa.asp

European Commission Justice
http://ec.europa.eu/justice/anti-drugs/index_es.htm

Information for parents
www.laantidroga.com

Plan Nacional sobre Drogas (Spain)
www.pnsd.msc.es/Categoria2/centro/home.htm

Annex IV

Youth Initiative Facebook Forum: guidelines

In order to ensure the efficient and optimal use of the Youth Initiative Facebook Forum, there are some basic rules that always apply—please familiarize yourself with them.

Topics

This platform is about UNODC and topics related to the role of youth in drug abuse issues and to ways of supporting healthy lifestyles for youth, by youth. Please refrain from drifting off topic to subjects that are irrelevant to the Forum. Additionally, posted responses should be specific and address the ideas discussed in the original message.

Exchange

The main goal of this Forum is the fruitful exchange of ideas and knowledge. In order to promote that, we ask that you address each other respectfully, commenting on the idea rather than the person. “Flaming” or abuse of others will not be tolerated.

Discrimination

No posts or links promoting discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, religion, nationality, physical or mental disabilities or age will be tolerated.

Images

Please refrain from posting any material that is indecent or contains illicit imagery in this Forum. Additionally, we ask that you be aware that sites often change their content without notification, so be careful when posting links.

Advertisement

This Forum should not be used for the promotion or advertising of products or services. Please refrain from posting any advertisement or recruiting through this Forum for any personal projects.

Personal information

This is a public forum, and any information that you post will become a part of the public domain. Therefore we ask that you avoid posting any personal information.

Copyrights

Please respect the copyrights of other users, sites and media. Any links to information or images that the person posting has no permission to use will be removed.

Spam

There is a zero-tolerance policy on spam.

Notifications

We welcome cooperation in reporting any post that violates these guidelines. Please e-mail our moderator at twolfe@unausa.org.

Moderator

As in every community, the Forum has a moderator who reserves the right to edit any post considered disrespectful or in breach of the above rules.

Concerns

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the UNODC Youth moderator.

Note: Tips on managing your privacy on Facebook are available from:
www.techradar.com/news/internet/web/20-facebook-privacy-settings-tips-924540.



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