



Resource Guide

Alcohol and Marijuana Abuse

Discussion Questions

1. List at least three risks of drinking alcohol as a teenager. Are teens aware of these risks? How does learning about and having knowledge about these risks of teen drinking the decisions teens make to drink or not? How do you know?
2. Does knowing that alcohol and marijuana abuse can seriously affect your brain power deter or affect your decisions to try either one? Why or why not?
3. Describe K.T. Taylor's story of alcohol abuse. When did it start? Why did it start? What are the consequences she faces today? If K.T. were a friend of yours, what might you have said to her at the time she was abusing alcohol? What would you say to her now?
4. Explain what Susan Tapert, Ph.D., the brain researcher and clinical psychologist featured in the documentary, means when she says, "Certain parts of your brain can compensate for subtle amounts of damage elsewhere by working extra hard, but that compensation can only occur a certain amount, and then it begins to fade away." What does this say for K.T. Taylor's future?
5. What reason do genetic researchers give to help explain why some people who experiment with drugs become addicts and some do not? Do you accept this explanation? Why or why not? If true, what implications does it have for each person's life, including your own?
6. What is the one way to ensure that you will never become addicted to alcohol or drugs? Do you think this is a realistic goal to set for yourself? Why or why not?

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Mini Fact Sheet

Does the early use of marijuana and/or alcohol lead to the future abuse of harsher drugs? National Surveys on Drug Use and Health, from 2002 to 2007, conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration, reported the following:

- Marijuana was the most commonly used illicit drug (14.8 million past month users).
- Past month marijuana use among adolescents ages 12 to 17 generally decreased from 2002 (8.2%) to 2005 (6.8%), and then remained constant between 2005 and 2007.
- About half (50.1 percent) of youths aged 12 to 17 reported in 2006 that it would be "fairly easy" or "very easy" for them to obtain marijuana if they wanted some.
- The percentage of adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month *increased* between 2002 (32.4%) and 2003 (34.9%), and then remained relatively stable between 2003 and 2007.
- Adolescents who perceived great risk from smoking marijuana once a month were much *less likely* to have used marijuana in the past month than those who perceived moderate to no risk (1.4% vs. 9.5%).
- Adolescent past month use of cigarettes, alcohol, and illicit drugs declined between 2002 and 2007 but little change occurred between 2006 and 2007. Between 2002 and 2007, past month use by youth of cigarettes declined from 13.0% to 9.8%; alcohol from 17.6% to 15.9% and illicit drugs from 11.6% to 9.5%.
- Girls (12.5 percent) were as likely as boys (11.9 percent) to smoke.
- Among young adults ages 18 to 25, the level of current nonmedical use of prescription pain relievers has risen 12 percent (to 4.6 percent in 2007).
- Based on combined data from 2006 to 2007 National Surveys on Drug Use & Health, an annual average of 28.1% of underage drinkers (10.8 million persons aged 12 to 20) drank alcohol in the past month. By age group within the underage drinkers the rates were: 51.1% of those aged 18 to 20; 25.9% of those aged 15 to 17; and 6.1% of those aged 12 to 14.
- Underage drinkers who drank in the past month (i.e., current drinkers) obtained their last alcohol drink as follows: 30.6% paid for the last alcoholic drink, 26.4% got it for free from a non-relative of legal drinking age, 14.6% got it for free from another underage person, 5.9% got it from a parent or guardian, and 8.5% got it from another relative who was of legal drinking age.
- An estimated 17.7 percent interviewed used alcohol in the month prior to the survey. Of all youths, 10.6 percent were binge drinkers (five or more drinks on the same occasion at least once in the past 30 days).
- Each day an average of 7,000 Americans tried marijuana for the first time, and about 69 percent of these new marijuana users were under the age of 18.
- Youths who perceived that their parents would "strongly disapprove" of their use of substances were much less likely to use those substances than youths who perceived that their parents would only "somewhat disapprove" or "neither approve nor disapprove."

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Mini Tip Sheet for Parents

What Parents Should Know

If you think your child or teen might be abusing drugs or alcohol, the Nemours Foundation suggests asking yourself the following questions. Answering "yes" to any of these questions may signal that your child is using drugs – or other health issues such as depression or an eating disorder. The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry suggests consulting a physician to rule out physical causes of the warning signs.

- Does my child seem withdrawn, depressed or tired? Have sleeping or eating patterns changed?
- Has my child become hostile or uncooperative?
- Have my child's relationships with other family members or friends changed?
- Has my child drastically changed his or her appearance, interests or favorite activities?
- Does my child experience headaches, nosebleeds or other physical problems?
- Have I noticed the odor of chemicals or drugs around my child?
- Do aerosol products at home seem to be used much too quickly?

What Parents Can Do

It's important to talk openly about the dangers of drug use – again and again. Children Now, a research and action organization, offers the following tips for discussing drug abuse with your child:

- Listen carefully. Student surveys reveal that when parents listen to their children's feelings and concerns, their kids feel comfortable talking with them and are more likely to stay drug-free.
- Role play about ways to say "no" without becoming a social outcast. Consider statements like, "My mom would kill me if I used drugs."
- Encourage choice. Allow your child plenty of opportunity to become a confident decision-maker.
- Provide age-appropriate information that fits your child's stage of development.
- Establish a clear family position on drugs. It is OK to say, "We don't allow any drug or alcohol use."
- Be a good example. Children will do what you do much more readily than what you say.

Substance abuse can seem to be an overwhelming issue to deal with, but it doesn't have to be. The Partnership for a Drug-Free America offers the following strategies to help child can reap the rewards of a healthy, drug-free life:

- Be your child's greatest fan. Compliment his or her efforts, strength of character and individuality.
- Involve your child in adult-supervised after-school activities. Ask your child what types of activities he or she is interested in and contact the school principal or guidance counselor to find out what's available.
- Get to know your child's friends and their parents. Call other parents and check-in to make sure they share your views on alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. Steer your child away from any friends who use drugs.
- Call teens' parents if their home is to be used for a party. Make sure that the party will be alcohol-free and supervised by adults.
- Set curfews and enforce them. Let your child know the consequences of breaking curfew.
- Set a no-use rule for alcohol, tobacco and other drugs.
- Sit down for dinner with your child at least once a week. Use the time to talk – and turn off the television.
- Get – and stay – involved in your child's life.

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Lesson Plan: The Risk Spectrum Game

Project

Students will assign risk levels to specific consequences of alcohol and/or marijuana abuse and discuss how knowing the consequences can act as a deterrent to abuse — or not.

Objectives

Students will:

- Participate in risk spectrum game as a contestant and/or discussion participant
- Understand the consequences of abuse of alcohol and/or marijuana

Materials

- 10 pieces of 8 X 11 paper, each with a number from 1 to 10
- Masking tape or another way to mount numbers 1 to 10 in order on the front wall of the classroom
- "Consequence Cards" -- Before class begins, prepare a set of "Consequence Cards" on index cards, each with a possible consequence caused by drinking alcohol or by smoking marijuana. Examples might include:
 - Stopped by a policeman after drinking; lose your driver's license for a year
 - Caught by parents after coming home drunk/stoned; get grounded for a month
 - Threw up in room after getting home drunk; had to clean it up
 - Smoked pot in room on coldest day of year; had to open the window for an hour to get rid of the smell and freeze
 - Drove car after drinking/smoking; crashed it
 - Lost best friend in drunk driving accident
 - Didn't drink/smoke at a party while friends did; had to drive everyone home
 - Didn't drink/smoke at party; had a good time anyway
 - Lost a good friend who fell asleep at wheel due to zoning out after smoking pot
- Paper and pencils for audience members to create additional "Consequence Cards"

Procedure

1. Ask for six to 10 volunteers from the group to play the game. Each volunteer is given an index card with a possible consequence caused by drinking alcohol or smoking pot. The student will read this card aloud and stand under the number that he/she feels the consequence represents, No. 1 being a small consequence and No. 10 being a severe consequence. There may be more than one person under each number.
2. Ask the audience to wait to make comments until all the cards have been read and all the volunteers have placed themselves under a number.
3. When they have all selected a number, ask the group the following questions:
 - Do you generally agree that the consequences are in the right order, from a small consequence to more severe? Which ones would you move and why?
 - What can you tell about the person by how he/she rates the risk value of this consequence? What can you tell about yourself by how you would rate it?

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Lesson Plan: The Risk Spectrum Game

Procedure (continued)

4. Have the students in the audience think of other severe consequences of drinking alcohol/smoking pot and have them write them on individual pieces of paper or index cards. Ask for another group of volunteers and play another round.
5. After the second round, ask the same questions from step three. Then ask: *In general, what conclusions can you draw from this activity?*
6. Have them write a response to the last question as a journal entry or a homework assignment.

Evaluation

- Did students participate in the exercise?
- Did students understand the analogy between the game and the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse?
- Did each student write a response?

Alcohol and Marijuana Abuse Information Resources

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychology www.AACAP.org

Children Now www.childrennow.org

Connect with Kids www.connectwithkids.com

Family Education Network www.teachervision.fen.com (free lesson plans and pamphlets)

Kids Health www.kidshealth.org

Parents. The Anti-Drug www.theantidrug.com

Partnership for a Drug-Free America www.drugfree.org

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

<http://oas.samhsa.gov/nhsda.htm#NHSDAinfo>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/>