

# Dose of Knowledge

Middle and High School

# Responding to Peer Pressure



Educator Guide

### Background

While illicit drugs remain the leading cause of overdose deaths, it is important that students understand that prescription drugs can be dangerous when not taken properly. Prescription opioids are used to treat moderate to severe pain and are generally prescribed for a short period of time. Adolescents may be prescribed an opioid for 1–2 weeks after surgery, wisdom tooth extraction or sports injury. It is always important to take your medication as prescribed by a doctor.

Misusing any drug can be harmful to the brain. Substance use disorder, or addiction, is a chronic, relapsing brain disease with symptoms that include compulsive seeking and use of a drug and/or substance, despite harmful consequences. Addiction or substance use disorder is considered a brain disease because drugs change the brain; they change its structure and how it works. This is especially true for teenagers whose brains are still developing. Substance misuse can permanently change the brain, resulting in lower intelligence, reduced motivation and attention span, and increased impulsivity.

One result of how the teen brain develops is the natural tendency to test boundaries set by adults and engage in impulsive and/or risky behaviors. Peer pressure can increase these impulsive and/or risky behaviors in teens. Students may be pressured to try using drugs at some point. It is important for teens to think about and practice how to respond to situations where peers pressure them to try drugs.<sup>1</sup>

A direct refusal is best because it does not leave room for interpretation or change. A direct refusal includes “No” or “No, thank you” and reflects that the person is adamant and unlikely to be convinced otherwise.

An exit strategy is a plan to be able to escape from a potentially dangerous situation. Exit strategies can include statements such as “I have to go home to take care of my brother” or “I am getting hungry, and I know my mom has dinner ready.” Teens can also use their parents as an exit strategy.<sup>2</sup>

Students could also plan ahead to have a friend or family member help them in situations like these. For example, they could create a plan with a friend to text a “code word” when they need to leave a situation. When the friend sees that text, they will know to call the person to tell them that they need to leave to be somewhere else.<sup>3</sup>

### Overview

Building off of the previous lesson about opioids and their effect on the brain, students will work together to develop and practice refusal skills and exit strategies to use when offered opioids or other drugs.

### Use of Presentation

The accompanying presentation was created with PowerPoint so that it can be used in a variety of classrooms. If you are using a laptop with an LCD projector, simply progress through the PowerPoint by clicking to advance. All of the interactive aspects of the presentation are set to occur on click. This includes images, text boxes, and links which will appear in a web browser upon clicking. If you are using an interactive whiteboard, tap on each slide with your finger or stylus to activate the interactive aspects of the presentation. In the notes for each slide, there will be information on how to proceed.

This guide provides slide-by-slide instructions to ensure educators are prepared to explain, discuss, and facilitate the hands-on content in the accompanying presentation. Note that timing guidance is provided as a recommendation, but each situation will be unique.

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1 National Institutes on Drug Abuse in Teens: *6 Tactful Tips for Resisting Peer Pressure to Use Drugs*. <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/6-tactful-tips-resisting-peer-pressure-to-use-drugs-and-alcohol>

2 National Institutes on Drug Abuse in Teens: *Resisting Peer Pressure*. <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/resisting-peer-pressure>

3 National Institutes on Drug Abuse in Teens: *Are You True to Yourself?* <https://teens.drugabuse.gov/blog/post/are-you-true-yourself>

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## Session Structure

The Health Information: Our Community, Our Responsibility session provides the following information to guide the educator through its implementation and teach the necessary skills and content.

- **Learning Objectives:** Each session includes its overall goals as well as specific learning objectives for students.
- **Materials:** Any materials necessary for the session are clearly outlined and included when possible to facilitate easy implementation of the session.
- **Key Terms:** Any words that can be used as vocabulary words will be defined for the teachers.
- **Key Talking Points:** To help the teacher guide discussion and reinforce key concepts, key points are listed next to the corresponding slides.
- **Anticipated Student Responses:** Where relevant, anticipated student responses for activities and questions are provided next to corresponding slides.
- **Reflections:** A learning summary is provided at the end of each session for the educator to provide reinforcement of the key concepts and objectives of each session.

## Content Areas

Health, Physical Education

## Activity Duration

45–60 minutes



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## Grade Band

6–12

## Objectives

Students will

- Examine the effects of opioids on the body and brain.
- Understand that drug addiction and substance use disorders are illnesses.
- Identify situations that may require them to use refusal skills or exit strategies.
- Practice strategies to avoid peer pressure to engage in drug misuse.

## Materials Needed

- Pencils, one per student
- Scrap paper for planning purposes
- **Peer Pressure Scenario**  
Handout—1 scenario per person

## Educator Prep

1. Read through the instructions to familiarize yourself with the content. Note that timing guidance is provided as a recommendation, but each situation will be unique. Use the Lesson At-a-Glance below to determine how long you plan to spend on each section.
2. Prepare all materials before your session.
3. Cut out and separate each scenario from the **Peer Pressure Scenario** Handouts.

## Key Terms

- **Dependence:** When after repeated use, the brain can only function properly with the presence of the substance
- **Direct refusal:** A refusal that includes a direct “No” or “No, thank you”
- **Exit strategy:** A plan to remove oneself from a potentially risky situation
- **Persuasive Technique/Peer Pressure:** When someone tries to get you to do something or agree to something that you don’t normally do
- **Substance Misuse:** Starting to use a substance, like drugs or alcohol, for non-medical purposes in a manner that’s harmful to themselves or others
- **Tolerance:** When someone has taken enough of a substance that he/she now needs a higher dose to feel the same effects

## Lesson At-a-Glance

Section	Activity	Approximate Time in a 45-Minute Session	Approximate Time in a 60-Minute Session
Engage	Discussion	6–8 minutes	6–8 minutes
Learn	Review of the effects of opioids, substance misuse, tolerance and dependence, symptoms of misuse, and substance use disorder	6–8 minutes	8–10 minutes
	Responding to peer pressure	8–10 minutes	10–12 minutes
Apply	Peer pressure role playing scenarios	10–15 minutes	21–26 minutes
Reflect	Summary of key points in lesson	4–5 minutes	4–5 minutes

## Procedure

### Engage

- Lead a discussion with students using the following questions:
  - Has anyone ever tried to convince you to do something you didn't want to do?
  - Other than by saying “no,” what are some other ways you can refuse to do something?
  - How would you explain “peer pressure?”

### Learn

#### Slide 1

- Ask 2–3 students to share what they remember about what opioids are and how they work. As students share, confirm their responses or address any misconceptions.
- Click to remind students that an opioid is any substance that acts on receptors in your brain for pain relief. There are illegal forms like heroin and those that are legal with a prescription, like

Oxycodone and Hydrocodone. There is also synthetic opioid fentanyl, which is approved by the Federal Drug Administration (FDA) as a prescription pain medicine but is more often used to dangerously lace other illegal/illicit drugs, like heroin or fake pills.

- Teacher note:** Lacing is the act of adding one or more substances to another. Some street drugs are laced with other substances, like fentanyl, to add more mass to the original product. Fentanyl is easier and cheaper to obtain but is much more potent than heroin and can be deadly in very small doses.

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## KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Opioids can be both legal (e.g. prescription opioids) and illegal (e.g. heroin).**
- **Opioids bind to receptors in the brain.**
- **Opioids can decrease pain, increase pleasure, and slow automatic processes, like breathing.**
- **Review that opioids block pain messages to the brain by binding to opioid receptors. Opioids can have three main effects: Decreased feelings of pain, increased feelings of pleasure, and slowed automatic processes, like breathing.**

### Slide 2

4. Click to review the information in the table. Tolerance is when the body requires higher or more frequent dosages to gain the same effect—like needing more gold stars to feel as happy as you did before. Dependence is when the parts of the brain responsible for releasing dopamine only function normally when the drug is taken.

## KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Tolerance is when one requires higher and more frequent dosages to experience the same effect of the drug.**
- **Opioid dependence is when the brain can only release dopamine if the drug is present.**

### Slide 3

5. Now that students have explored opioids' effects on the body and substance misuse, they will learn other common symptoms of an individual

misusing substances, like opioids. Click to reveal some of the physical signs/symptoms of substance misuse.

6. Click again and explain the behavioral signs/symptoms of misusing opioids.
7. Lastly, click to reveal other common signs and symptoms of misusing opioids.

## KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Common signs and symptoms of substance misuse can be physical, behavioral, or be displayed in new habits or preoccupations.**

### Slide 4

Now let's explore how misusing a drug, building tolerance, and becoming dependent can lead to substance use disorder or addiction.

8. Remind students that substance use disorder (SUD) is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior and leads to an inability to control the use of legal or illegal drugs. This is a disease with repeated actions that will cause the nerve cells to communicate differently—it is a cycle.
9. Click and direct students' attention to the image depicting the cycle of substance use disorder. Review that substance use disorder makes the brain want to recreate the feelings it experiences when the drug is present. Regardless of the consequences, a person with substance use disorder will continue to seek a drug. One has to take more of a substance to obtain the same dopamine "high" because his/her brain has adapted. Reinforce that this is known as tolerance. As a result, they will increase the amount of the substance they take in an effort to achieve the high they are used to.

10. When they are not taking the substance, people will experience withdrawal, causing them to feel severe physical and emotional distress. Eventually, the person's brain can no longer function as it should without the presence of the substance. They will become extremely preoccupied or obsessed with thinking about how they will get their next fix so that they can avoid withdrawal and just be able to function.
11. These changes in the brain remain even after substance misuse stops and explain why it can be so difficult for someone to stop using and for relapse to occur. With the right support, treatment, and care, recovery is possible!
12. Enforce to students that addiction is a brain disease NOT a moral failing. Ask students to share what they have learned previously around stigma and the negative effect it can have. Reinforce to students that the words we use matter. No matter the situation, no one likes to feel judged or devalued. In order to encourage people to reach out for help, it is important to reduce the stigma surrounding their situation. Do not use language that reinforces stereotypes and instead use language that positions addiction as a treatable disease.

### KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Substance use disorder is a disease that affects a person's brain and behavior.**
- **This disease creates a cycle, often referred to as the "cycle of addiction."**
- **Regardless of the consequences, a person with substance use disorder will continue to seek a drug.**
- **The words we use matter. Instead of using a stigmatizing word, like addict or junkie, use person-first language like "a person with a substance use disorder."**

### Slide 5

13. Invite 2 or 3 volunteers to share suggestions of what students can do if they are presented with the opportunity to use an illegal drug or are offered medications that weren't prescribed to them.
14. Click to show "Direct refusal." Reinforce if any of the suggestions provided were direct refusals. Explain that a direct refusal is saying "No" or "No, thank you."
  - **Note:** If necessary, reinforce with students that "I don't think so" and "Not right now" are *indirect* refusals, as they still leave open the possibility of a positive response.
15. Click again to show "Exit strategies." Reinforce any of the suggestions provided that were exit strategies. Explain that an exit strategy is a plan to get out of or away from a potentially dangerous situation. It can also include relying on others for help, like friends or trusted adults.

### KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **Direct refusal is the most efficient way to say no to drugs.**
- **An exit strategy is a plan to remove yourself from a situation.**
- **Rely on others, like friends and trusted adults, to help you exit potentially dangerous situations.**

### Slide 6

16. Inform students that they will be watching a short video about the most effective ways to use refusal skills if they are presented with the opportunity to use an illegal drug or are offered medications that weren't prescribed to them.
17. Click to show the video.

18. Following the video, invite students to comment on their key takeaways. Did they learn anything new? Did what they watched reinforce what they have learned in this lesson?

### KEY TALKING POINTS:

- **A persuasive technique is when someone tries to get you to do something or agree to something that you don't usually do.**
- **A direct refusal is when you say no or no thanks.**
- **If a simple 'No' does not work, you can exit the situation or reach out to a loved one for help.**

### Slide 7

19. Sometimes saying "No", especially to family and friends, can be uncomfortable. Let's brainstorm other ways we can say "No."
20. Ask students to turn to a partner and brainstorm other ways to say "No" when offered drugs. Invite volunteers to share their thoughts, and record responses on the board.
21. If not offered during the brainstorming session, click to reveal the suggestions listed on the slide.

### KEY TALKING POINT:

- **Students may use other ways to say "No" to drugs, including distractions, humor or sarcasm.**

## Apply

### Slide 8

22. Divide students into five groups by having them count off as 1 to 5. All of the 1s are in a group, all of the 2s are in a group, and so on.
23. Explain that there is a possibility they will be presented with the opportunity to use an illegal drug or will be offered medications that weren't prescribed to them at some point in their lives. And it is important to be ready to respond. Therefore, they will be practicing direct refusal and exit strategies by acting in short skits based on given scenarios.
24. Distribute a **Peer Pressure Scenario** handout to each group.
25. Assign each group the scenario that matches their group number and give each student in the group a copy of their scenario.
26. Click once and review the requirements of their skits. Take **1-2 minutes** to answer clarifying questions.
27. Allowing **3 minutes per group skit and 2 minutes** for discussion and reflection after each skit, check the clock to determine how much time to allow students to work on their peer pressure skits.
28. Click again to reveal a timer. Enter the time you are giving students to complete their planning sheets and click to start.
  - **Technology Note:** If you are using a printed version of the PowerPoint presentation, use a stopwatch or smartphone clock app to keep time.
29. Remind students that they should leave themselves enough time to practice their routines at least once.
30. As students work, rotate throughout the classroom and provide each group with brief feedback as they practice.

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31. Alert students when there are 10 minutes remaining to work, 5 minutes, and then 2 minutes.

### Slide 9

32. Provide the opportunity for each group to present its skit to the class.
- Note: If time does not allow for the whole class to watch each presentation, match groups together to swap. See “Educator Prep” section for more details.
33. Following each skit, ask the other groups if they have anything to add or any questions to ask.
34. When there are approximately **5–10 minutes** remaining, instruct students to return to their seats.

### Reflect

#### Slide 10: (Skip if session is shorter than 60 minutes)

35. Being a good friend is important and you should be there to listen and support your friends if they come to you with a problem but remember: if you or someone you know is struggling with substance misuse or abuse, it’s important that you ask a trusted adult for help. I know it can be hard to feel like you’re “telling on someone” or betraying their trust, but asking for help can be the difference between life and death.
- Take a moment and turn to the person next you and ask them to identify a person on whom they can rely on as a human resource if they need help or advice.
  - Reinforce that friends who pressure you to misuse drugs aren’t really friends.

### Slide 11

36. Facilitate students’ reflection on their learning by reviewing the following points:
- Opioids bind to receptors in the brain to block pain messages.

- Common symptoms of substance misuse can be physical, behavioral, or displayed in new habits or preoccupations.
- Misusing prescription opioids can lead to addiction or a substance use disorder.
- Substance use disorder is a brain disease and not a moral failing. Remember, the words we use matter! No one likes to feel devalued or judged. It is important to practice different types of refusal skills so if you are in a situation in which you are pressured to use illegal drugs or misuse prescription medications, you are prepared.
- A direct refusal is the best way to say “No”. A direct refusal includes, “No,” or “No, thank you”.
- An exit strategy is a plan to get out of a situation.
- Seek guidance from a trusted adult if you have a question or need help.

## Extension Ideas

- Students can record and share their skits on a secure platform (such as a classroom website, a private Google Drive folder, etc.).
- Students can create public service announcements or infomercials that teach their peers what a direct refusal or exit strategy is.
- Students can come up with their own scenarios and exchange them with other groups to get more practice using refusal skills and exit strategies.

## National School Standards

### UNITED STATES

#### [National Health Standards](#)

- Standard 7: Students will demonstrate the ability to practice health-enhancing behaviors and avoid or reduce health risks.

#### [Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts](#)

- Writing
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4  
Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Speaking and Listening
  - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1  
Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## Scenario 1

It is the last week of school and some of your friends have decided that they want to celebrate by meeting in a local park to use illegal drugs. They have included you in their plan, but you do not want to go.

## Scenario 2

You walk into the school bathroom and see several students you do not know very well. One of them has a bottle of pills and tells you that you should take one because it will make school feel a lot better. You don't want to take the pill, but the other student is very insistent.

## Scenario 3

You are at your best friend's birthday party who privately tells you that a cousin has brought a bottle of pills to the party and is trying to get them to take one. Your friend says that they do not want to take the pill, but they do want the cousin to think that the party is cool. At that moment, the cousin walks over with the bottle of pills and asks both of you if you want to take one pill, or two. Neither of you want to take any pills, but the cousin doesn't seem to think that "no" is an option.

## Scenario 4

You are at your friend's house for a sleepover. It is very late, and all of the adults are asleep. Another guest pulls out some unidentifiable pills and says that, "It's time to have fun!" Your friend seems excited to try a pill, but you do not want to. It is too late to leave, and you seem to be the only person who is uncomfortable.

## Scenario 5

You have a big science exam in a few hours and are very stressed about it. Another student in your class sees that you are stressed. They tell you that they have prescription medication that will take away your stress and make you focus better on the test. They want to give you the pill, but you do not want to take it.