

# 7th GRADE: SUBSTANCE USE

## LESSON 1 OVERVIEW

# Refusal Skills



### Lesson Time:

30 Minutes

### Materials Provided:

- Parent Letter (shared electronically or printed one per student) [Download](#)
- Lesson Slides [Download](#)

### Materials Needed:

- Projector with Video/Audio Capability
- Chart Paper/Smartboard

### Objectives:

Students will be able to...

1. List risk factors and dangers of using alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.
2. Apply refusal skills for future situations.
3. Explain benefits of refusing alcohol, drugs, and tobacco.
4. Develop strategies to refuse substance use.

### Educators:

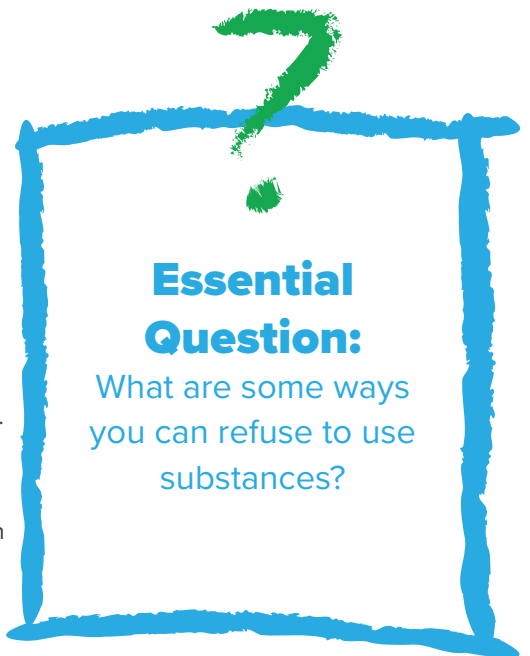
#### Did You Know?

Young people report using assorted drugs for a variety of reasons including fitting in with peers, numbing feelings, avoiding reality, rebelling against parents, or alleviating boredom. Substance use for any reason leads to increased destructive tendencies and added complications. For example, it is not uncommon for someone who struggles with substance use to also experience a mental health disorder such as depression or anxiety (NIDA). Because the human brain is not fully developed until about age 25, any substance use can have an impact far beyond what students typically expect. As adults, we can provide influence that their peers cannot. They need reassurance that despite what pop culture may tell them, not everyone is using alcohol, tobacco, vapes, or other drugs. Our students look to their adult role models for guidance more than some may realize. The research of UpliftFamilies.org reports that there are 3 things parents can do to protect their children from risky behaviors: bonding, boundaries, and monitoring. As educators and mentors, we must use these lessons to bond with our students, explain the boundaries with consequences, and monitor those who may be displaying at-risk behaviors. Some students may be lacking positive peer groups or family influence; therefore, they need our support and reassurance that their healthy choices are critical to their long-term physical and mental health.

### Educator Prevention Tips:

Help your students see the value of making healthy choices at a young age. Reiterate to them that the earlier we start any habit, the more likely it is to become a lifelong habit. This includes good and bad choices from exercise to substance use. Substances can not only be addictive, but many are also now genetically or chemically altered in ways that can cause quicker addiction or fatality.

As you teach this lesson, be helpful and avoid judgment. Pay attention to those who seem reluctant or dismissive of the lesson. This may be a clear sign that they need your support or a referral to the school counselor.



### Essential Question:

What are some ways you can refuse to use substances?

# Refusal Skills



## Lesson Introduction: (2 minutes)

As young teens you are getting to an age at which drugs, alcohol and tobacco become more accessible and peer pressure becomes more relevant to you. At this turning point, making the right decisions can help keep you on the right path toward health and success. Now is the time to set your boundaries and make a firm decision to be free from using any drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products.

The older you get, the more freedom you will have to make more decisions for yourself, rather than an adult always making them for you. This can be an exciting time for you. It is important for you to understand that your brains are still developing and that making impulsive decisions about substance abuse can have immediate and lifelong consequences.

In today's P.A.T.H. lesson we are going to discuss some of the reasons some teens begin using, ways to say "No," dangers of early substance use, and things that can protect you from beginning. Hopefully after gaining this knowledge, you will be able to understand the harmful effects of substance use and have a strong refusal plan.

## Core Lesson: (26 minutes)

Let's begin our lesson by first discussing the reason some youth give for their substance use. (*Facilitators, label chart paper "WHY? Youth Substance Use"*)

### WHY do you think people your age might start using drugs, alcohol or tobacco/vape products?

(*After asking the question, allow students time to think and respond. Record their answers on the chart paper. Possible answers may include: fitting in, curiosity, to feel good, to feel better, to experiment, or to gain friends.*)

All of these are great examples because they truly are reasons youth give for starting substance use. Sometimes people use these substances to escape or deal with their difficult life situations. In this case, their drug use is a negative coping skill that will only create more stress, difficulty, and consequences.

Today we are going to concentrate on the one reason that is most common—peer pressure and the desire to “fit in.” Peer pressure can be very difficult to handle sometimes, as you are trying to figure out who you are and where you “belong.” Sometimes certain situations catch us unprepared, and we don't know how to react or know what to say. For example, it may catch you off guard if someone offers you alcohol, marijuana, a cigarette or vape. It is crucial for you to be prepared to know what to say or do during your first encounter with it. Later in the lesson, we will be discussing various ways you can refuse all of these.

You may also find yourself being curious about these substances. It does not make sense to take such a risk due to curiosity when you don't know all of the consequences. What you DO know is that all of these substances can quickly cause addiction and some of them can kill instantly, and all of them will kill eventually.

## Slide/Handout



## Lesson Script/Talking Points

### Slide 1: RISK FACTORS

(Add the words “Risk Factors” underneath the “Why” list on the chart paper.)

Peer pressure is what we call a “risk factor” for youth in using drugs. A risk factor means it increases the chance or risk of someone doing something, which in this case is using and abusing substances. Here are some other risk factors for youth substance use:

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

### Some of the risk factors include

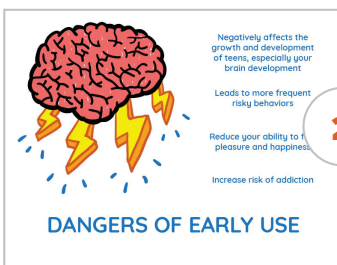
1. Family History - when people in a person's family have also struggled with addiction
2. Impulse control problem – when people have difficulty controlling quick responses and not thinking through their decisions
3. Trauma – when people experience something emotionally disturbing or distressing
4. Lack of supervision by a parent – young people who have too much time without adult supervision
5. Availability of Drug/Alcohol/Tobacco/E-Cigarettes – substances present and easily accessed by the teen
6. Poverty – people who have grown up in generational poverty or extremely harsh situations
7. Mental Health/Behavior Issues – problems/issues that affect mood, thinking or behavior

It's very important to understand that just because something is a risk factor does not mean it will make someone begin using. It simply means that people who have more of these present must recognize risk and plan their refusal of these substances.

### DANGERS OF EARLY SUBSTANCE USE

Let's talk about the dangers of these substances. Having knowledge and understanding of the dangers in early substance use will help you make the decision to stay drug free and give you the confidence in refusing the offer. Let's talk about some of the effects that early use can have on you. Using any kind of substance, whether alcohol, other drugs, or tobacco products can cause severe long-term effects and lead to other health issues.

Engaging in any kind of substance use can do the following things to a developing teen:



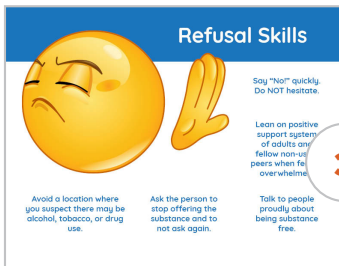
### Slide 2: Dangers of Early Use

Your brain is in a developmental stage just like your body, but the difference is that your brain does not reach full maturity until you are 25 years old! When a young person uses drugs, it alters the pathways that develop and control all of these areas of your life. (Facilitator, read each of the areas on the slide.)

1. **Negatively affects the growth and development of teens, especially your brain development:** Stunts physical growth, Loss of self-control, Loss of problem-solving skills, Decreases attention which leads to poor academic performance and attendance
2. **Leads to more frequent risky behaviors** - Substance use negatively affects

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout



## Lesson Script/Talking Points

your brain when it comes to making rational decisions. Because it affects your self-control, it leads people into making more poor decisions and participating in more risky behavior, such as cheating, skipping school, and stealing. These poor decisions can lead to severe consequences.

3. **Reduces your ability to feel pleasure and happiness** - When a person uses alcohol or drugs, their Basal Ganglia, the area in their brain that controls pleasures is overactivated. Over time with repeated drug use, the person begins to feel less pleasure from other things they used to enjoy because their brains have become so dependent on the drug. This lack of pleasure can lead to depression or increase stress and anxiety.
4. **Increases risk of addiction** - Did you know that the earlier you expose your body and your brain to drugs, alcohol, or tobacco products, the more of a risk you are taking of becoming addicted? Yes, it's true. The younger you begin, the more likely you are to lose control and experience lifelong addiction.

## Slide 3: Refusal Skills

The absolute best thing you can do for yourself in establishing who you are, maintaining independence, and being healthy is to make a plan for choosing the right path. Let's discuss some refusal skills or ways to say "No" for when you find yourself in the situation of being faced with substances. First, develop a plan for saying "No." Having a plan and being prepared will help you to make the healthiest and smartest decisions for yourselves.

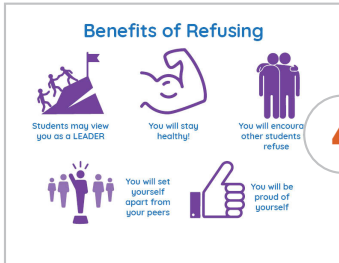
If you find yourself in a situation where someone is offering you alcohol, drugs, vapes, or tobacco, you can use these refusal skills to avoid use.

- Say "No!" quickly. Do NOT hesitate.
  - Your voice should be clear and firm. Remember, you can refuse and still be respectful and kind. \*If you are not firm with your response, they may keep asking.
  - Make direct eye contact.
- Ask the person to stop offering the substance and to not ask again.
- Talk to people proudly about being substance free. This will hold more weight than you realize. When people know where you stand on the issue, they will know you're not interested.
- Lean on positive support system of adults and fellow non-using peers when feeling overwhelmed. More people are drug free than you realize. They just don't always speak up. Find each other and spend quality time together.
- Avoid a location where you suspect there may be alcohol, tobacco, or drug use.

It is important for you to understand that, most likely, when you refuse to use with someone else, you are NOT going to upset or disappoint that person. Many times, young people think if they say "No" to something, it will upset the other person. The truth is...if they do get upset with you, they are not a true friend anyway. But more

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout



## Lesson Script/Talking Points

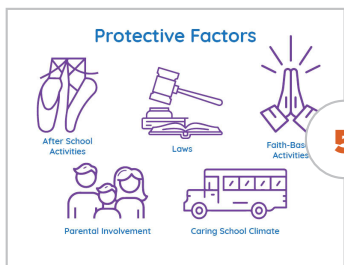
likely, they won't be mad at you. They'll just move on and ask the next person.

### Slide 4: Refusal Skills

Do NOT feel guilty about refusing to use. It is a GREAT thing! In fact, there are benefits to refusing.

**What are some benefits to refusing substances?** *(Allow for a few responses.)*

- 1. Students may view you as a LEADER.** Students who refuse to follow a crowd are exhibiting leadership behavior. Leaders refuse to follow a crowd and make positive decisions for themselves.
- 2. You will encourage other students to refuse.** As human beings, we tend to watch other people. When you refuse to use, other students who look up to you may follow you by refusing these substances as well.
- 3. You will be proud of yourself.** When we make decisions that are out of our comfort zone and go against the grain, we gain self-confidence. Some of the most challenging decisions we make for ourselves are the healthiest ones and the most positive.
- 4. You will set yourself apart from your peers.** Many students value their individuality and want to be noticed for their individual strengths and differences from other students. Refusing to use will set you apart from the students who struggle with making that decision.
- 5. You will stay healthy!** There is no doubt that alcohol, drugs, and tobacco affect your mental and physical health. Your brain and body function best when you put healthy substances in your body.



### Slide 5: Protective Factors

Now let's talk about some protective factors or things that will help guard against the pressure or urges to use.

- **After School Activities: sports, band, dance, scouts, or clubs**  
Participating in an extracurricular activity has so many benefits. Through these activities you will make memories with new friends, keep yourself busy, and keep your minds / bodies healthy. They will fill your time in a positive way. They can also help us deal with difficult life situations such as loss, divorce, stress, etc. In addition, if you desire to excel in what you are doing, you will have even more motivation to stay away from drugs/alcohol/tobacco/vapes so that you can perform at your best. Can you think of examples of activities that would be positive? *(Allow students to provide examples.)*
- **Faith-Based Activities**  
Participating in faith-based activities can also protect you from making unhealthy/harmful choices. Many faith-based activities are community oriented, which means you will have other young people by your side. In addition, many churches participate in outreach projects that are very fulfilling. Your spirituality can also keep you focused on staying true to your morals and values, including staying drug free.

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

- Laws Limiting Availability**  
 As we know, drugs, alcohol, and tobacco have some serious dangers to them. Because of this, our laws are set to protect you from getting access to them.
- Parental Involvement**  
 Some of you may have had discussions with your parents about drug and alcohol use, but others may not know how to talk about it. Parental involvement is very important when it comes to you staying informed and protected from the dangers of these substances. Even when it may seem awkward, be open to those conversations with parents.
- Caring School Climate**  
 Our teachers and counselors are always here if you or someone you know is struggling with substance use. Come to us if you need to share something or have questions or concerns.

These protective factors protect you from being a substance user or abuser. Filling your free time with positive activities that help you grow mentally, physically, or spiritually will help to protect you from falling into the trap of using substances.

Let's complete our lesson today by creating a refusal plan you would use in this situation.

### Slide 6: Activity 1 Scenarios

(Assign students to groups to discuss and share how they could respond in each situation.)

**Activity 1 Scenarios**

1. Your friend asks you to go to a sleepover to another person's house. This student is popular in the school but has a reputation of drinking alcohol. You have a basketball game the next morning at 8:00am. What do you do say to your friend?

2. You walk in the bathroom and notice two students vaping. One of them asks you to vape with them and tells you that you won't get caught. How could you respond to this situation? What do you say to that student?

3. You are at the back of the ballpark playing with your friends. You notice a group of older students standing near the woods and smoking something. Your friend grabs your arm and says, "let's see what those guys are doing over there." What do you say?

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- Your friend asks you to go to a sleepover to another person's house. This student is popular in the school but has a reputation of drinking alcohol. You have a basketball game the next morning at 8:00am. What do you do say to your friend? *(Allow students to respond. Have students develop a plan with the class.)*
- You walk in the bathroom and notice two students vaping. One of them asks you to vape with them and tells you that you won't get caught. How could you respond to this situation? What do you say to that student? *(Allow students to respond. Have students develop a plan with the class.)*
- You are at the back of the ballpark playing with your friends. You notice a group of older students standing near the woods and smoking something. Your friend grabs your arm and says, "Let's see what those guys are doing over there." What do you say? *(Allow students to respond. Have students develop a plan with the class.)*

**BE SMART**

**DON'T START**

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### SLIDE 7 Closing image

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Closing: Essential Question (2 minutes)

What are some ways you can refuse to use? *(Allow for responses.)*

Remember that as you get older, especially in your high school years, peer pressure and trying to fit in continues and sometimes increases. Know that you can begin putting into practice the refusal skills we discussed today; such as:

- Say “No!” quickly. Do NOT hesitate.
- Ask the person to stop offering the substance and to not ask again.
- Talk to people proudly about being substance free.
- Have a positive support system of adults and fellow non-using peers and lean on them.
- Avoid locations where you suspect there may be alcohol, tobacco, or drug use.

The earlier you set your boundaries and stand your ground, refusing and avoiding substances, the easier those years can be. Have confidence in your decision to say “No,” and know that you are doing what is in the best interest of you and your future!

## References:

- [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#)
- [CDC.gov](#)
- [Alcohol.org](#)

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