

# 8th GRADE: SUBSTANCE USE

## LESSON 1 OVERVIEW

### Peer Pressure



#### Lesson Time:

30 Minutes

#### Materials Needed:

- Video: "[Middle School Weekend with Refusal Skills](#)" (1:30)
- Parent Letter (shared electronically or printed one per student) [Download](#)
- Lesson Slides [Download](#)

#### Materials Needed:

- Projector with Video/Audio Capability
- Sheet of notebook paper/pencil (one per student)

#### Objectives:

Students will be able to...

1. Discuss reasons teens begin using alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
2. Explain when and where peer pressure may occur.
3. Identify various refusal skills to apply in future situations.
4. List pros and cons of refusing to use (ATOD) alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

#### Educators:

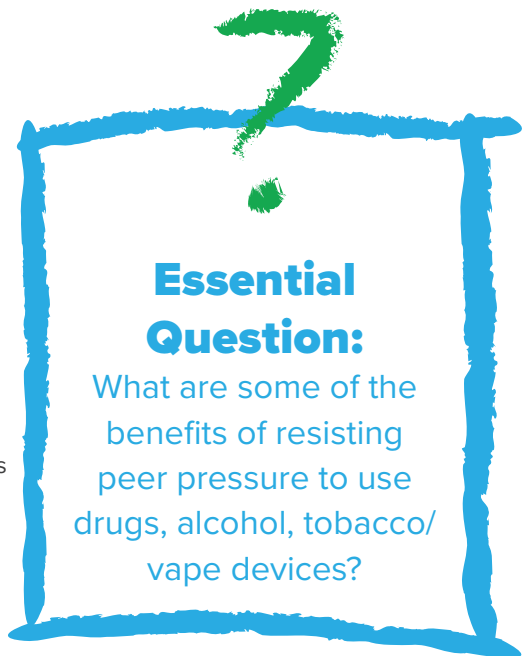
##### Did You Know?

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.



## Lesson Introduction: (1 minute)

Sometimes making healthy choices for ourselves can be easier for you than it may be for others. For some of you, it may be easy to refuse eating fried foods every day for lunch or easy to say no to eating too much candy at the movie theater. Some of you may consider high risk adventures like bungee jumping or skydiving when you get older. For others, taking a risk like that is an easy “no.”

What about refusing to use harmful substances such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco or e-cigarettes? Should this be an easy “NO” for all of you? Just like eating too much junk can make you sick and unhealthy, drugs and alcohol can cause even more damage to a person’s health and even damage their relationships. Today’s lesson is going to focus on different ways you can refuse to use substances such as alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (ATODs). These substances are damaging to your minds and bodies; therefore, refusing to use them is a critical decision towards your future health and wellness. The earlier in life you make that firm decision, the more you will gain.

## Core Lesson Part 1: Early Use (10 minutes)

Let’s begin our lesson by discussing why teens say they use ATODs - Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drugs. *(Read or have a volunteer read the slide points.)*

### Slide/Handout



### Lesson Script/Talking Points

#### Slide 1:

#### Why Do Teens Use ATOD's? (Alcohol, Tobacco & Other Drugs)

1. To feel good.
2. To do better.
3. To explore.
4. To feel better.<sup>1</sup>

All of these are false feelings. Perhaps people begin using thinking that these are a way to feel differently or make changes, but I guarantee that all of these changes will be negative over time – maybe even immediately.

Individuals who use ATODs may use for many different reasons. Some people like the feeling it gives them, but many do not. Some people use them in an attempt to numb the pain they feel from bad life experiences or from mental health struggles. Sometimes teens use in an attempt to enhance academic performance, or to increase their focus in school, work or sports. Many teens begin using because they are curious or because they feel pressured in a situation with friends. Regardless of why they use, they ALL result in more problems.

**Peer pressure** is influence from members of one’s own group.<sup>2</sup> It is when someone feels the pressure to use so that they don’t stand out. They may cave to this pressure so that they can still spend time with the people around them and not feel they are missing out. The “pressure” sometimes comes from the individual putting pressure on themselves to use so that they don’t disappoint anyone.

Let’s consider situations which may result in peer pressure. Try to think of specific situations and locations where these things tend to occur. **When and where does peer pressure happen?** *(Write on the board specific situations where teens may get caught up in being around or even using ATODs. Some*

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

examples may include a friend's house when their parents aren't home, at a party, in the car with older siblings, after school while parents are at work, in unsupervised areas of school, etc.) Now that we have talked about when and where peer pressure might occur, I want you to be thinking about how you might respond. The more prepared you are for these situations, the more likely you are to handle them well.



### Slide 2:

#### Dangers of Early Substance Use

Let's continue our lesson by discussing a few facts on early drug use. Research suggests that early ATOD can cause significant health issues. The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) states that "the earlier a person begins to use drugs, the more likely he or she is to develop serious problems."<sup>1</sup>



### Slide 3: Early Use and Addiction

According to a study by the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, forty-seven percent of people who begin drinking before age 14 become alcohol dependent at some point in their lives, but only nine percent of those who wait until 21 develop a dependency.<sup>3</sup>



### Slide 4: Risk Factors for Drug Use and Misuse

Did you know that there are factors that either increase or decrease the likelihood that a teen will use ATODs? Let's look at the risk factors first. Risk factors are factors that increase the chance that an individual will use substances. You may be wondering why you need to know these risk factors. We believe awareness is key in prevention. The more you are aware of these facts and understand them, the more you will care about breaking the cycle of these factors of what these statistics are saying. Remember as we read these that these are not causes of drug use, just things that could put people at more risk of exposure.

*(Read these aloud.)*



### Slide 5: Protective Factors

On the flip side, there are factors that protect a young person from experimenting or using alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use. Protective factors are what may shield you and your peers from using substances. For example, a student with good self-control and good grades is less likely to use than a student with poor self-control who is struggling in school. Let's look at this list.

*(Read list on slide 5.)*

One good thing about this list is that some of these are within your control. This means that you are not dependent upon others. You can practice self-control, choose positive relationships, work for good grades. You have a school that cares because we're talking about this subject today. We believe educating you

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout

## Lesson Script/Talking Points

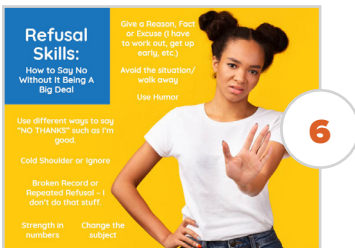
and talking about these things instead of avoiding them is the best way to keep you aware.

Now that you are aware of peer pressure situations, the danger of early drug use, and risk and protective factors, let's now focus on the core of this lesson: Refusal Skills.

## Core Lesson Part 2: Refusal Skills, Slides 6-8 (13 minutes)

**Refusal skills** are a set of skills designed to help children avoid participating in high-risk behaviors.<sup>11</sup> I think most of you, if not all, have heard the slogan “Just Say No.” While it’s a great and effective slogan for drug use prevention, we know that each one of you may be put into some unique and challenging situations in your future that will require a different response or reaction than just saying no.

For some of you, you have never been exposed to any of these substances. For others, you may have already been around it. The truth is that most likely each one of you is going to be put in a situation between now and your senior year of high school where you will have the choice to either use or refuse alcohol, drugs, and tobacco and e-cigarettes. You may already even know people in your grade who have used at least one of these substances. It’s never too late to start refusing to use.



### Slide 6:

#### How Can I Say No without It Being a Big Deal?

There are more ways to say “NO” other than by just saying no. We have included a list for you. *(Ask for a volunteer to read aloud.)*

Which one of these refusal skills seems the easiest to use if you are ever put in a peer pressure situation? *(Allow for response.)* These will be easier for you if they actually sound like you instead of a school slogan. With that in mind, what are some of the things you might say if someone offered you something? *(Allow for responses.)*

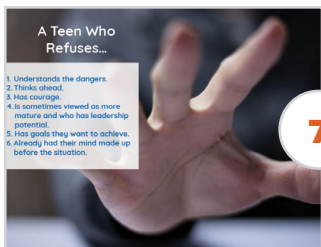
#### Activity 1: Video “Middle School Weekend with Refusal Skills”<sup>13</sup>

Now we are going to watch a video clip on how to put these refusal skills in practice. Let’s take a look. Show <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=luQhJAPPfhU> (1:30)

What refusal skills were used in this video segment? *(Refer back to the previous refusal skills slide.)* She said “NO.” She used repeated refusal. Note--She was also confident in her response. She even attempted to walk away when she said she’d just go home. A teen who refuses to use substances in peer pressure

# Core Lesson (cont)

## Slide/Handout



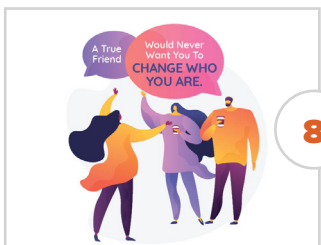
## Lesson Script/Talking Points

situations acts and thinks a little differently. Let's take a look at this next slide to see what sets them apart.

### Slide 7: A Teen Who Refuses...

The benefits of refusing are extensive – probably even too many to list in this short lesson. It says a lot about you when you are able to resist the pressure to use. *(Have the students read slide 7 aloud.)*

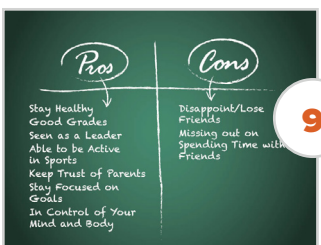
- It is important for you all to understand how drug use impacts your brain, your bodies, your relationships, and just about everything in your life. We will talk in more detail about more of the dangers next lesson.
- Someone who refuses may also be thinking ahead. For instance, their friend may call them and ask them to come over, but they know that some of the other people coming are not the best influence, so they refuse to come.
- Saying no to something that people around you are doing is not easy. It takes courage to go against the grain. It also shows leadership potential when someone does something different than the others and refuses to follow.
- A young person who refuses to use may have academic or athletic goals they are focused on that they don't want to be affected. Their goals may even be to live a healthy life unlike others they have known.
- A teen who refuses usually has already made their mind up that they are not going to use. It is not typically a decision they make last minute.



### Slide 8: What Could Happen If I Say No?

You may say to yourself, "What if refusing to use ATOD upsets my friends?" It is important for you to understand that true friends would never want you to change who you are.

Your friends should respect your choices, *especially* if you are trying to keep yourselves safe and healthy. If they don't respect your healthy choices, then they are not your true friends. Having the right friends makes a huge difference in you having a bright future.



### Activity: Pros and Cons of Refusing to Use (5 minutes)

By making a Pros and Cons list, you have the opportunity to consider the benefits and consequences of refusing to use. *(Students will need a piece of paper and a pencil.)* For this activity, you will make a t-chart by drawing a line across the top and through the middle, labeling the left side "Pros" and the right side "Cons." *(Refer to the slide as an example.)* For the pros side, you will list the benefits of refusing to use ATOD. In other words, what are some good things about choosing not to use substances? In the right column under "Cons" list the consequences of refusing to use. What negative things might you experience from friends or other by saying "No" to using these substances? Obviously, there will be more pros to refusing drugs than cons.

# Core Lesson (cont)



(Allow 2-3 students to share their answers once the class has finished. Some examples for pros: stay healthy, good grades, seen as a leader, able to be active in sports, keep trust of parents, stay focused on goals, in control of your mind and body. Examples for cons may be disappoint/lose friends, missing out on spending time with friends.)

As you can see, there are many benefits to either avoiding or saying no to using. You should have more benefits to refusing than to not refuse. Your health, academics, and relationships are stronger when you choose to not poison your body and mind with these substances.

## Closing: Essential Question (1 minute)

**What are some of the benefits of resisting peer pressure to use drugs, alcohol, tobacco/vape devices?**

(Allow for responses.)

From this lesson, we hope you better understand the importance of refusing alcohol, tobacco, e-cigarettes, and other drugs. In your years ahead even in high school, most of you will encounter situations where you will have to make a choice on whether or not you should use. Remember that there are several ways to refuse to say no without causing a scene. Your true friends will understand and maybe even respect you more when you refuse. Each time you refuse is another opportunity to keep your body and mind healthy!

## References

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