

9th GRADE: SUBSTANCE USE

LESSON 1 OVERVIEW

Reasons To Refuse



Lesson Time:
30 Minutes

Materials Provided:

- Video: “[High School Weekend with Refusal Skills](#)” (2:31)
- Parent Letter (shared electronically or printed one per student) [Download](#)
- Lesson Slides [Download](#)

Materials Needed:

- Projector with Video/Audio Capability
- Index Cards (one per student)

Objectives:

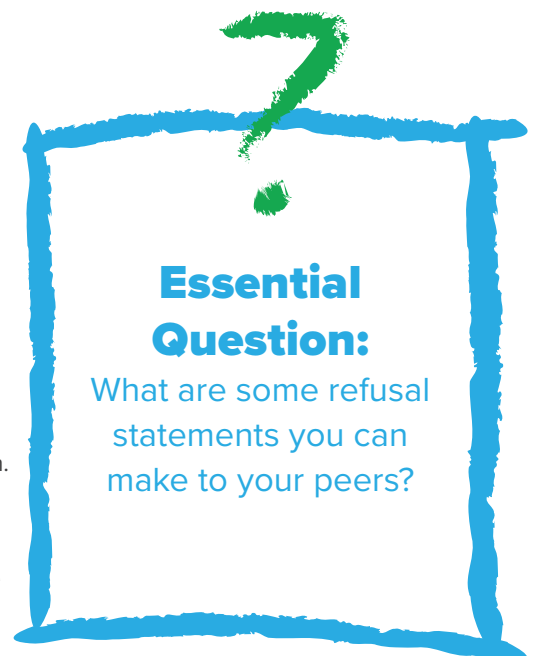
Students will be able to...

1. Explore reasons youth begin to use substances such as alcohol, tobacco products, or other drugs.
2. Identify the risk factors of youth who use.
3. Create refusal phrases and techniques to use when pressured by peers.
4. Discuss benefits of refusing substances such as alcohol, tobacco products, and 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 (SAMHSA, 2023).. 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 CDC (2023) reports that adolescents experience less health risks when their parents know about what is going on with them and their lives. As educators and mentors, we must 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.

Reasons To Refuse



Lesson Introduction: (1 minute)

With maturity comes more freedom of choice. As you get older and take on more responsibilities, you are faced with more and more decisions. It is an exciting time for you because this means you are able to be more independent and possibly able to do more away from home. Some of you may be working your first job, taking care of younger siblings, participating in more school and social events, or even getting ready for your driver's permit. These are exciting opportunities! You have already been faced with one really important decision: the choice to experiment or to be drug-free. You may know people who are bound by the poor choice of substance use. It controls them more than they would like to admit. Our lesson today is going to focus on your choices. Refusing substance use – whether you've experimented or not - is a VERY important choice for you to make early in your life.

Activity 1: Board Activity- Why Do Youth Use Substances? (7 minutes)

When we talk about “drugs,” it's important for you to understand that all of the substances we discuss are drugs. This means alcohol, tobacco products, vapes, pills, marijuana, and more. These are all drugs, so throughout these lessons when we speak of these substances, try to think about some that people your age may try to convince you are ok to use.

I want you to take one minute to think of two reasons that people say are the reasons they start using substances - whether they have tried cigarettes, alcohol, vapes, marijuana, pills, or any other type of drug. (*Allow time for students to think.*) What are some of the reasons you've heard or you assume people might give for starting to use? As you share your answers, I will write them on the board (*or have a volunteer who wants to write*).

Possible answers may include:

- *To fit in and feel a part of a group*
- *Curiosity and wanting to experiment*
- *To feel good*
- *To escape from a hard life situation*
- *Peer pressure*
- *To make friends*
- *Popular media*
- *Lack of confidence*

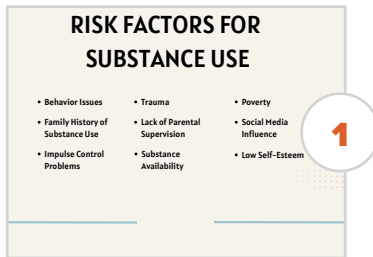
All of these are fitting examples because they truly are reasons youth give for starting to use substances. Sometimes people say they use these substances to escape or deal with their difficult life situations. In this case, their drug use is a negative coping skill.

Some people report that they tried things for the first time due to peer pressure or influence from a peer group. Peer pressure can be very difficult to handle sometimes, especially during the early high school years, as you are trying to figure out who you are and where you “belong.” I don't know where each person “belongs,” but I do know that you don't belong in the hospital, jail, principal's office, or in a group that cares more about image than your safety. This age is a perfect time for you to learn and use positive peer pressure. It is crucial for you to know what to do or say during your first encounter with it. Later in the lesson, we will discuss various ways you can refuse alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.



Reasons to Refuse

Slide/Handout



Lesson Script/Talking Points

Slide 1: Risk Factors For Substance Use (3 minutes)

What does it mean when someone is “at risk” for something? *(Allow for response.)*

Risk means a situation involving exposure to danger. There are certain factors that experts have discovered that put people at more risk of trying substances or becoming addicted.

Some of these include

1. Behavior Issues
2. Family History of Substance Use
3. Impulse Control Problems
4. Trauma
5. Lack of Supervision by a Parent
6. Drug/Alcohol/Tobacco Availability
7. Poverty
8. Social Media Use - One other strong influence now is social media. Columbia University’s National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse reports, “Teenagers who typically spend any length of time on social networking sites every day are more likely to smoke, consume alcohol, and take drugs compared to teens who don’t use social media daily. In fact, 75% of teens ages 12 to 17 claim that seeing pictures on social media depicting their friends and schoolmates using drugs motivated them to mimic the behavior (Hilliard, 2024).”
9. Low self-esteem

Having an awareness of these factors may prevent you from using these substances and having a drug problem. In fact, some people who have loved ones battling addiction don’t even want to touch drugs or alcohol because of what they have seen that person and their families go through.

Growing up you have probably watched videos and heard stories about people being sick, injured, or even dying from drug use. You may be fooled, thinking it can never happen to you or that some substances “aren’t that bad.” The truth is that substances such as marijuana, alcohol, tobacco, and vaping are all dangerous and can cause major issues with your health and decision-making.

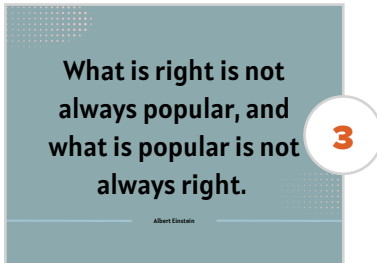


Slide 2: Protective Factors

Protective Factors are elements in someone’s life that can keep them on the right path. These may be supportive relationships with people around them or activities that require their time and focus. There are many things people can stay focused on or busy with to protect them from risk. Filling your free time with positive activities that help you grow mentally, physically, or spiritually can and will help to protect you from falling into the trap of using substances. *(Take a few moments to review the information on the slide with the students.)* Can you think of other protective factors that are not listed on the slide? *(Allow for responses. Answers may include: extra-curricular activities, sports, band, dance, book clubs, faith-based activities, strong parental influence and involvement, caring school, etc.)*

Reasons to Refuse

Slide/Handout



Lesson Script/Talking Points

Slide 3: “What’s Popular Is Not Always Right.” (1 minute)

This is a quote that students see many times as they’re growing up, and it’s completely true. Let’s watch a student-made video that demonstrates this quotation and applies it to using refusal skills.

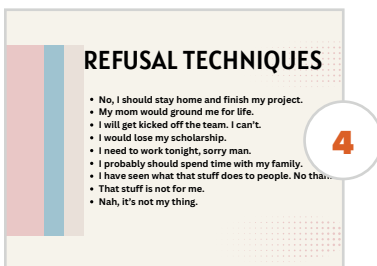
Activity 2: Video “High School Weekend with Refusal Skills” (4 minutes)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BG1eHgJbQXs> (2:31 minutes)

YouTube. Created by Deschutes County

What were your thoughts about this video? (*Allow for response.*)

- How realistic or doable do you think that would be for people? (*Lead discussion in a positive direction toward options for doable refusal.*)
- What were some of the things he did in his refusal? (*Answers may include saying no, repeating it, changing the subject, or offering an alternative.*)



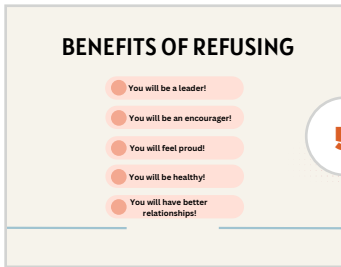
Slide 4: Refusal Techniques Notes (3 minutes)

So, what do you do if you find yourself in a situation where you need to refuse alcohol or other drugs and you want to avoid putting yourself in that environment altogether? It is important for you to understand that your friend is going to understand if you say no and will not react the way you think. If students give you a hard time about it, then they are not really people who have YOUR best interest at heart. They are more concerned with their wants. You probably noticed that some of the examples are refusing to go to a certain place. The smartest decision you can make is to refuse to put yourself in a bad environment or situation where you know there is going to be substance use. Here are some examples of statements you can make to other students if you find yourself in this situation.

- No, I should stay home and finish my project.
- My mom would ground me for life.
- I will get kicked off the team. I can't.
- I can't. I would lose my scholarship.
- I need to work tonight, sorry man.
- I probably should spend time with my family.
- I have seen what that stuff does to people. No thanks.
- That stuff is not for me.
- Nah, it's not my thing

Reasons to Refuse

Slide/Handout



Lesson Script/Talking Points

Slide 5: Benefits of Refusing (2 minutes)

There are many benefits of refusing tobacco, alcohol, vapes, pills, and other drugs.

- **Students may view you as a LEADER.** A leader refuses to follow a crowd and makes positive decisions for themselves.
- **You will encourage other students to refuse.** When you refuse to use, other students who look up to you may follow you as well by refusing these substances.
- **You will be proud of yourself.** Some of the most challenging decisions we make for ourselves are the healthiest and most positive ones.
- **You will set yourself apart from your peers.** Because many students struggle with refusing to use, doing that will set you apart from the students who struggle with making that decision.
- **You will stay healthy!** There is no doubt that alcohol, drugs, and tobacco affect your mental and physical health. Your brain and body functions best when you put healthy substances in your body.
- **You will have stronger relationships!** Strong relationships are characterized by trust, honesty, respect, loyalty, and safety. All of these will be sacrificed when people are using substances. They will betray one another and make poor decisions that threaten their safety. This is true for younger users as well as adults.

Closing: Essential Question (9 minutes)

What are some refusal statements you can make to your peers? (*Allow for responses.*)

To end our lesson today, let's practice what we have learned. (*Provide each student with a blank index card.*)

On the index card, write at least 4 phrases you could use as refusal skills if you are in a situation where you are being asked to engage in high-risk behaviors. Be as original as you can and think about what would work for YOU. (*Allow 3-5 minutes for students to write these refusal skills options on their index cards. Ask a few students to share what they have written.*)

References:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, April 27). *Parental monitoring*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/factsheets/parental_monitoring_factsheet.htm

Hilliard, J. (2024, April 30). *The influence of social media on Teen Drug use*. Addiction Center.

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YouTube. (2016, January 28). *High school weekend with refusal skills*. YouTube.

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