**Lesson 6: Peer Influence and Social Norms**

**Overview:** This lesson will focus on students’ perceptions of social norms, culture, and peer attitudes around substance use. Students will compare their own perceptions of substance use vs. reality-based behavioral health data. Students will explore how peers, media, and social norms can be positive and negative influences on substance use.

National Health Education Standards

**Standard 1.** Students will comprehend concepts related to health promotion and disease prevention to enhance health.

**Standard 2.** Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors.

Healthy Behavior Outcomes (HBOs):

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| --- | --- |
| **Alcohol and other drugs** | HBO 8. Support others to be alcohol- and other drug-free. |
| **Tobacco** | HBO 4: Support others to be tobacco-free. |

Lesson Objectives – Students will be able to:

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| **Objective** | **Assessments** |
| 1. Describe the role of social norms and peer influence on substance use or substance use prevention. | Attachment 6.3 – Exit Slip |
| 1. Explain how perceptions of norms influence healthy and unhealthy alcohol-, tobacco-, and other drug-use practices and behaviors. | Attachment 6.3 – Exit Slip |
| 1. Explain how to be a positive influence to promote healthy behaviors and substance use prevention. | Attachment 6.3 – Exit Slip |
| 1. Identify alternatives to negative influences to prevent substance use or enhance healthy behaviors. | Attachment 6.3 – Sticky Note |

Introduction:

* Hand a note card to each student.

Teaching Steps:

Activity 1: Higher or Lower

* Ask students, “Higher or lower?” on the statements in slides (and below).
* The questions ask what percentage of Ohio middle school students they believe participated in a particular ATOD behavior (e.g., vaping). The students will need to estimate the percentage they believe to be correct. ([Ohio YRBS Data LINK](https://youthsurveys.ohio.gov/reports-and-insights/yrbs-yts-reports))
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who have ever tried a cigarette is 30%.
  + Answer: Lower (14.7%)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students currently smoking cigarettes is 10%.
  + Answer: Lower (0.5%)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who have ever tried vaping is 30%.
  + Answer: Slightly lower (28.4%)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who regularly vape is 5%.
  + Answer: Lower (1.4%)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who have tried alcohol is 15%.
  + Answer: Higher (22.5% — a decrease from 2019)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who have use prescription pain medication differently than how prescribed is 2%.
  + Answer: Higher (8.4%)
* The percentage of Ohio middle school students who have ever used marijuana is \_20\_%.
  + Answer: Lower (8.3%)
  + Overall, the rates of “abstainers,” those with no use of alcohol, marijuana or nicotine has increased in 10th and 12th graders in 2023 to the highest levels since the survey began tracking in 2017. The increase in abstainers was attributed to decreases in nicotine vaping and alcohol use. ([Monitoring the Future, 2023](https://monitoringthefuture.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/mtf2023.pdf))
* How many answers did you overestimate? Underestimate? What did you learn?
* Showcase the difference in students’ perceptions vs. reality. Often, students greatly overestimate the percentage of their peers who participate in a risky health behavior.
* Did you overestimate or underestimate your guesses, or were you spot on?
* Why do you think you guessed the way you did?
  + Sometimes our perceptions are not accurate. Most teens are not using substances; 95% of teens are making healthy choices. There are more people ready to be positive influences than negative influences.
* How could your perceptions influence your decisions?
  + Most of your peers are not using or trying substances. You, your friends, and classmates are making healthy and safe choices.
  + We have learned about how our decisions can be influenced. Today, we’ll learn more about how our peers and social norms influence our decisions.
* Let’s learn key vocabulary words to help us analyze influences.
  + Peers are people similar in age, grade, or status. Who are your peers?
  + Peer influence prompts you to do something you wouldn’t otherwise do because you want to feel accepted, wanted, or valued by your peers.
  + Social norms are the values, beliefs, attitudes, or behaviors shared by a group of people.
* Discussion questions:
  + How could our peers be an influence on substance use?
  + How could they be a positive influence?
  + How could they be a negative influence on substance use?
  + What should I do if I encounter a negative influence? (Look for a positive influence or an alternative.)
* Let’s look at our estimates about substance use. How could our perception of our peers’ behavior be a positive or negative?
  + Share a recent trend among middle schoolers (e.g., favorite sports team, fashion, etc.). What happens when we perceive that all of our friends or peers are doing something? It makes you more likely to do that behavior.
* What would happen if you thought most of your peers were using substances? You might be more likely to try, experiment or use substances. But we know that most of your peers are not using substances. We know that the healthy and safe choice is the most popular choice among middle school students.
* What is more common for our peers — a healthy or unhealthy choice?
  + Based on the statistics, making healthy choices is the norm. We value healthy choices and believe that they are important. The expectation is that you will make healthy and safe choices.
* We learned about positive influences and protective factors in Lesson 5. Let’s work to make a list of healthy and safe choices middle school students are making instead of using substances

Activity 2: Resisting Peer Pressure (Attachment 6.2)

* Students will create an awareness sticky note promoting a health-enhancing behavior related to substance use. After students have created the sticky note, they will can share it with the class poster.
* Peer pressure is when people their own age pressure, influence, or force someone do something.
* Peer pressure can be positive or negative. Can you think of a positive and a negative example?
* We hope that you encounter peer pressure that is a positive influence, but we’re going to share strategies on how to deal with peer pressure that is a negative influence.
* What are strategies you might use to deal with negative peer pressure?
  + Remember your personal values and beliefs.
  + Stay focused on making healthy and safe decisions.
  + Leave or avoid the situation or peer group.
  + Exercise your power to make your own decisions.
  + Exercise control over your words and actions.
  + Use your assertive communication skills and strategies to make a safe and healthy choice.
* Complete Attachment 6.3 to recognize peer influence and practice resisting peer pressure using assertive communication.

Closure:

* Distribute exit slip
* Describe a social norm that could be a positive influence to prevent substance use.
* Describe a social norm that could be harmful.
* How could you be a positive influence for your peers?

Attachment 6.1: Sticky Note Template

A pink square with tape around it

Description automatically generated

1. Describe a social norm.
2. Describe a social norm that could be a positive influence to prevent substance use.
3. Describe a social norm that could be a harmful or unhealthy influence.
4. How could you be a positive influence and promote healthy behaviors to your peers?

Attachment 6.2: Peer Pressure Scenario

Alex, Jordan, and Taylor are talking about going to the game tonight. Alex is going, and Taylor wants to go too. Jordan doesn’t want to go, but they will go because they can walk to the game and vape. Alex says, “Sure, bring it — I don’t care.” Taylor says, “You know they don’t let anyone use vapes or smoke at games.” Alex and Jordan both say, “So what? We’ll use it before we get there. Come on, Taylor — it’s not a big deal.”

1. \_\_\_\_\_\_ Which person is being a positive influence to prevent substance use?
2. Alex
3. Jordan
4. Taylor
5. \_\_\_\_\_\_ What would you say or do to make a healthy and safe choice if you were Taylor?
6. Go to the game with another group of friends.
7. Get a ride to the game from your parents.
8. Walk with Alex and Jordan, but tell them no if they ask you to use the vape.
9. Walk with Alex and Jordan.
10. Add your own strategy: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

3.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ You decided to walk to the game with Alex and Jordan. Jordan offers you the vape, saying “I’m not going to hang out with you anymore if you keep saying no to the things we want to do.” What would you say or do?

1. “I’m not doing it. Just put it away.”
2. Walk to the game, but do not use the vape.
3. Find other friends to walk to the game.
4. Ask a trusted adult for a ride to the game, then hang out with other people at the game.
5. Decide to leave the situation and walk back home.
6. Share your own option: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_