 Levels of use

Suggested duration: 40 minutes

This activity provides students with the opportunity to review current statistics about the levels of drug use across Australia. It is important that teachers use the most current statistics available to emphasise that most young people do not use drugs.

Students will have the opportunity to explore reasons for the difference between perceived and actual levels of use amongst young people, and will analyse the role of peers and the media in the perpetuation of this myth.

Course outcomes

1.1 Assess personal strengths and skills to achieve positive outcomes in a range of challenging and changing situations.

1.2 Critically evaluate services and resources to identify sources of reliable information and support.

1.3 Build positive thinking, self-belief and a sense of empowerment to take action to promote meaningful futures for self and others.

What do we want students to know, understand or be able to do?

* Recognise that the majority of young people do not use drugs.
* Feel empowered to make decisions about drug refusal.
* Understand the influence of peers and media on perceptions of drug use.

Suggested content

| Learning context | Content |
| --- | --- |
| Drugs and alcohol  Focus: Making safe and responsible choices | Identifying solutions and responding to situations which involve the use of drugs and alcohol   * avoidance and assertive behaviours * recognising risk * intoxication and its effects * planning strategies to reduce harm in various situations * assessing and applying personal strengths to respond to situations * recognising influences on decision making and problem solving, e.g. personal, social and cultural values   Responsible behaviour   * protective strategies in drug and alcohol related situations * responsible behaviour in venues * responsible behaviour in other environments, e.g. end of school celebrations, festivals and concerts, public places, parties, moving between venues |
| Drugs and alcohol  Focus: Drugs and alcohol in different contexts | Addressing drug related issues in the community   * drug use and related harm in the community * social attitudes to alcohol and drug use and challenging peer expectations |

Teaching notes

There is a common misconception amongst the wider community that levels of drug use amongst young people are substantially increasing, and that the current generation of young people are using drugs and alcohol more than previous generations. This contributes to the belief amongst young people that everyone their age is drinking alcohol or using other drugs. It can be very empowering for young people to know that they are in the majority when they choose not to use drugs.

Creating a safe and supportive learning environment

There are a number of strategies that can be used to create a supportive learning environment which enables students to feel safe to learn and ask questions. They include:

* making students aware at the beginning of Life Ready sessions that disclosing personal information that indicates they may be at risk of harm will be reported to the school principal in all instances. This includes personal disclosures related to instances of abuse, drug use, neglect or sexual activity under the legal age of consent.
* being aware that some parts of Life Ready can be confronting and sensitive for some students.
* enabling students to withdraw if they find issues personally confronting to protect them from making harmful disclosures. Equally, it is important to be prepared for issues that arise as a result of a student making a public disclosure in the classroom.

More information on creating a safe and supportive learning environment can be found on the [Life Ready website.](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready)

Evaluating resources before use

Preview and evaluate all strategies, resources and teaching and learning approaches in full before use with students to determine suitability for student learning needs, stage of development and local school context. Consider the age, maturity, cultural background, sexuality, gender, sex, health and other characteristics of students in your care. Apply professional judgements to all strategies, teaching and learning approaches and resources including audiovisual materials (e.g. videos, media clips and YouTube), interactive web-based content (e.g. games, quizzes and websites) and texts.

Use the [resource review flowchart](https://schoolsequella.det.nsw.edu.au/file/083acd3a-daca-4307-9afe-bc6c888f694a/1/final-resource-flowchart-html5.zip/index.html) to decide about the suitability of teaching and learning resources.

Materials should be reviewed in full and endorsed by the school principal before use in NSW government schools.

Communication with parents and caregivers

Some aspects of Life Ready may be viewed as sensitive or controversial, such as learning about abuse, child protection, drugs, respectful relationships, sexual health, sexuality and violence. Inform parents and carers, prior to the occasion, of the specific details of the Life Ready program, so that parents and caregivers have time to exercise their rights of withdrawing their child from a particular session. In this regard, a parents or caregiver’s wish must be respected.

Establishing how parents and caregivers will be informed about programs and involved in consultation is a school-based decision. Where parents and caregivers indicate they wish to withdraw their child from a program it is useful to negotiate which parts of the Life Ready program they are concerned about. A sample information letter is available on the [Life Ready website](https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/key-learning-areas/pdhpe/life-ready).

Required resources and materials for preparation

* Drug A4 posters – 1 per group 4-5 students, e.g. tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, ecstasy, ice, heroin, cocaine, speed, LSD, synthetic drugs

Learning experiences

Activity one – Estimating levels of use (15 minutes)

1. Students work in small groups with a set of drug A4 posters.

* Students estimate the proportion of the teenage population in Australia that use each drug.
* The group comes to a consensus on the proportion of drug use in the teenage population.
* The group places the posters on a continuum in front of them.
* The continuum should range from 0-100% to demonstrate the level of use for each drug.

1. As a whole group, invite each group to share their order and discussions. Groups should be encouraged to provide reasons for their estimated level of use for each drug.
2. To conclude the activity, share with students how most people over-estimate the levels of use. As a whole group, discuss where our ideas and perceptions of drug use come from, e.g. media.
3. The following activity will involve reviewing actual levels of use based on current research.

Activity two – Analysis of statistics (25 minutes)

1. Introduce and share the [ABC AM Podcast – Teens drinking less alcohol](http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2014/s3982262.htm)
2. In small groups, students discuss the information presented in the podcast.

* Ask students to reflect on how this information compares to student perceptions and estimations from Activity 1.

1. Present statistics from current research to indicate the level of drug use amongst young people. Suggested sources of information include:

* [Trends in Drug Use and Related Harms in Australia 2001-2013](https://ndarc.med.unsw.edu.au/resource/trends-drug-use-and-related-harms-australia)
* [National Drug Strategy Household Survey 2013](http://www.aihw.gov.au/alcohol-and-other-drugs/ndshs/)
* [Australian Secondary Students Alcohol and Drug (ASSAD) survey 2011](http://www.cancervic.org.au/about/media-releases/2012-media-releases/december-2012/nationalsurveyofalcoholandtobacco.html)

1. Individually, students analyse data, depending on the available learning space and access to technology. In their analysis, students should:

* determine the level of use of a number of drugs amongst 12-17 year olds, such as those drugs listed in the previous activity. Where possible, students should attempt to distinguish between statistics for younger teens and people of their own age.
* review trends in the levels of use, to determine whether levels of use are increasing, decreasing or staying the same. The trends should be reviewed over 5 years, 10 years and 15 years where possible.

1. Students compare actual levels of use to their estimated levels of use in Activity 1. In pairs, students discuss reasons for the differences between perceptions and reality.

* How did your estimates differ to the actual levels of use?
* Suggest reasons for the differences between estimates and the actual levels of drug use.
* How might the media influence your perceptions?
* How might peers influence your perceptions?
* What role might social media play in influencing perceptions about drug use?

1. Conclude the activity by emphasising:

* the levels of drug use amongst young people are much lower than most people think
* that the majority of young people choose not to use drugs.

Drug posters

Tobacco

Alcohol

Marijuana

Ecstasy

Ice

Heroin

Cocaine

Speed

LSD

Synthetic drugs