

Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens

Educator's Guide

Background

The *Safety First: Real Drug Education for Teens*; a curricular aligned learning resource, was developed by the US Drug Policy Alliance (DPA) in 2017 to provide teens with honest and scientifically accurate information, and to empower them to reduce drug-related harms. It was then updated in 2019, 2020 and 2021. In 2022, the DPA gave permission for Interior Health's Youth Harm Reduction Program to adapt the resource for use in British Columbia, Canada.

Most lessons are approximately 45-50 minutes long and include student handouts and extension assignments for further learning. Because of the addition of Canadian and BC content, some lessons such as lesson two, six and thirteen are longer and may require additional time to complete all activities and discussion. To assist educators in assessing student knowledge, each lesson includes a rubric.

Program Outcomes

Each lesson aligns with the [BC Physical and Health Education Curricular Competencies](#) for Social and Community Health and Mental Wellbeing.

The program will help students:

- Use critical thinking skills to access and evaluate information about alcohol and other drugs.
- Learn decision-making and goal-setting skills that help them make healthy choices related to substance use.
- Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks, benefits and harms of alcohol and other drug use.
- Understand the impact of drug policies on personal and community health.
- Learn how to advocate for restorative drug policies and practices.

Research on Safety First

In Spring 2018, Safety First was piloted with ninth grade students at a New York City Department of Education secondary school. In Spring 2019, the evaluation was expanded to include a district-level collaboration, piloting Safety First in five San Francisco secondary schools with over 600 students.

Highlights from the evaluations include:

- Increased student knowledge of harm reduction and abstinence.
- Increased knowledge regarding alcohol, cannabis and opioids.
- Increased student knowledge of how to detect and respond to a drug-related overdose

To learn more visit: <https://drugpolicy.org/resource/safety-first-real-drug-education-teens>



Tips for Talking with Youth about Substance Use

Be conscious of your tone.

Use a tone and ask questions that encourage honest answers. Try saying things like “I want to understand more about that.”

Be comfortable with some silence.

If there is silence in your discussion, do not stress about filling it! Sometimes young people need time to open up, even if you have a close relationship with them already

Manage your expectations.

Do not strike up this conversation with the goal of teaching a lesson or to change minds. Instead, be open-minded about learning about their perspectives.

Be supportive and empower.

You might not necessarily agree with everything they say, but let them know you stand by them and their right to make their own decisions and have their own opinions.

Listen.

Be present and set aside enough time to have a meaningful conversation. Listen to understand and not to respond.



Source: *Safer Partying Workbook*, [BYTE: Empowering Youth Society](#), Whitehorse, Yukon



Delivering Safety First

While Safety First aligns [BC's Physical and Health Education Curricular Competencies](#) for Social and Community Health and Mental Wellbeing at the grade 9 and 10 level, the content is also appropriate for classes at the grade 11 and 12 levels.

The full program consists of 15 lessons. Evaluations by the US DPA were done on delivery of the entire program. If educators cannot deliver the program in its entirety, we recommend the following:

- Use lessons one, two and three as core lessons (pre-requisites) prior to delivering other lessons.
- Review the class norms regularly to help create a safe space for discussion.

About the PowerPoint slides

Many slides may appear text heavy but they are animated so that one discussion point appears at a time as you click through. Most videos are embedded in the slides if they do not work, the links are available in the notes and teacher guides.

Send us your feedback!

Whether you deliver all the lessons or just a few, we want to hear about your experience and your ideas on how we can make the Safety First program even better! Please take a moment to complete the [Educator Feedback Form](#).

If you have questions about the program or find something that is not working - please let us know! Send an email to YHRC@interiorhealth.ca

The Lessons

Lessons/ Title	Overview	Resources
Class Norms/Group guidelines	To set the tone for a safe and respectful learning space. These guidelines are in lesson one and there are reminders in some of the lessons. If you are not doing all lessons or feel the group needs a reminder, you can refer back to this slide. Alternatively, consider posting these norms on a piece of flip chart paper and have them visible throughout the lesson.	PowerPoint slides
Drug info sheets	Optional info sheets to use as handouts/posters etc. They align with information in lessons 4, 5/6,8,9,10	Stimulants Cannabis Alcohol Opioids Psychedelics
Lesson one	Students examine their own beliefs about alcohol and other drugs by answering the	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan



What is a Drug? <i>(Recommended pre-requisite)</i>	question “What is a drug?”	Student: handouts
Lesson two Introduction to Harm Reduction <i>(Recommended pre-requisite)</i> <i>(Longer Lesson if completing drug alteration activity)</i>	Students learn about harm reduction concepts and strategies including abstinence. They are empowered to make healthy and safe choices for themselves and others regarding substance use.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson three How Drugs Work <i>(Recommended pre-requisite)</i>	Students learn how drugs affect the body and the brain - specifically the teenage brain. They further discuss factors that contribute to substance dependence.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson four Stimulants	Students learn about stimulant drugs, their effects, benefits and risks. They further discuss harm reduction concepts related to prescription stimulant drugs.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson five Cannabis – Part 1	Students play “Fact and Fiction About Cannabis” activity to see how much they know about the drug. They work in groups to research statements about cannabis, and evaluate the credibility of various information sources.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson six Cannabis – Part 2 <i>(Longer Lesson)</i>	Students learn about cannabis’ effects, potential risks and benefits, including the effects of edible cannabis. Students then share and evaluate each other’s research on statements about cannabis. Legalization of Cannabis in Canada (and BC) and implications for youth are discussed.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson seven Vaping and E-cigarettes	Students explore the inner workings of e-cigarettes in-depth. They conduct research to examine the health effects of vaping, and evaluate their source’s credibility.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson eight Alcohol & Other Depressants	Students learn about the effects of depressant drugs with a focus on alcohol. They learn how to put someone in the recovery position and give advice about how to reduce alcohol-related harms using practice scenarios.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson nine Prescription & Other Opioids	Students take an in-depth look at opioid drugs, their effects, risks, and benefits. They will learn how to recognize the signs of an opioid overdose and respond appropriately.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson ten Psychedelics	Students learn about psychedelic drugs, their effects, risks and benefits. They reflect on drug references in the various	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts



	forms of media and how they influence teens.	
Lesson eleven Mental Health and Coping	Students discuss how substances may be used to deal with mental health issues, specifically stress and anxiety. They learn healthier and safer alternatives as well as how to locate resources to help them cope.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson twelve Understanding Zero-Tolerance	Students learn about zero-tolerance drug policies and their impact on health and well-being. Students also learn about restorative practices.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson thirteen Health and Drug Policy (<i>Longer Lesson</i>)	Students learn about drug policies including America's "War on Drugs" and the history of drug policies in Canada. Decriminalization of certain substances in British Columbia, Canada is discussed – particularly as it relates to youth. Students discuss how various drug policies can impact health in positive or negative ways.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Student: handouts
Lesson fourteen Looking Back, Looking Forward	Students review what they have learned by playing the "Just The Facts" Kahoot game. Students reflect on what they have learned by writing a letter to their future selves about drugs and drug use.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan Quiz cards
Lesson fifteen A Healthy Future (<i>Closing activity may be combined with Lesson 14 if time permits</i>)	Students discuss their advocacy assignment from Lesson 12.	PowerPoint slides Teacher: lesson plan

Don't forget to tell us what you think!

One last reminder to complete the [Educator Feedback Form](#)

Thank you!

