Challenges and Choices: Early Adolescence 2016

Sample activity

Activity 3: Illicit drugs

Learning intention

• Students develop an awareness and an understanding of illicit drugs

Equipment

• Get the facts – Student Workbook page
• Activity sheet Illicit drug effects – photocopy one set of cards per group
• Internet access
• Family information sheet Drug use: the real story – photocopy one per student
• Family information sheet Over-the-counter and prescription drugs – photocopy one per student
• Family information sheet New Psychoactive Substances – photocopy one per student

Teaching tip

View or download booklets and fact sheets from the:

• Mental Health Commission
  www.mentalhealth.wa.gov.au
• Drug Aware
  www.drugaware.com.au or
• Australian Drug Foundation
  www.adf.org.au
1. Place students in groups and distribute a range of information materials about illicit drugs such as ecstasy, amphetamines, methamphetamine, LSD, heroin, cannabis, cocaine and tranquillisers. (Although tranquillisers are not illegal, there are trends showing that these drugs are being used without a doctor’s prescription or purchased with someone else’s prescription, so it is important to include them in this activity.) Explain that students are to research the drug they have been allocated using the information materials and the internet, and record their findings on Get the facts page x of their workbook.

2. Conduct a jigsaw (refer to page x) where each group contains a representative (or expert) on one of the drugs. Allow time for students to discuss each drug using their workbook notes and information materials.

Ask

- Which drugs fall into the category of depressants (eg heroin, tranquillisers), stimulants (eg amphetamines, cocaine, methamphetamine), hallucinogens (eg LSD, magic mushrooms), and multi-action (eg ecstasy, cannabis)?
- What was one interesting fact about the drug you researched?
- Why do you think drugs are often given street or slang names? (The names maybe descriptive of the actual drug or the effects the drug has on the user. Slang is often specific to certain geographic areas. Some users often create their own street names for drugs to disguise their activity and actions, and also to increase their attractiveness and make them more marketable. Write a list of street or slang names for each of the drugs, for example.)
What physical or mental health effects do you think would most likely discourage a young person from using these drugs?

- Why are illegal drugs potentially dangerous? (Explain that drugs which are manufactured illegally are potentially dangerous as the user can never really know the contents and the strength or dosage. This means that batches of the same drug can be very different and can result in different outcomes for the user. The line between dose and overdose, between desired effects and dangerous effects, can also be very fine and impossible to predict.)

- All methods of taking drugs have risk, regardless of whether a person has used the drug before or not. What are some possible harms associated with injecting drug use? (Injecting drug use is particularly risky due to the possibility of contracting HIV,
a virus that attacks the immune system and causes AIDS; Hepatitis C, a virus that inflames the liver and may result in liver cancer; tetanus and other blood borne viruses.)

- **What do the statistics tell us about students and these drugs?** (The Australian School Students Alcohol and Drug Survey statistics show that most 12-17 year olds do not use illicit drugs and that the use of cannabis (15.4%) was reported. It is still relevant to consider the harms and consequences of illicit drugs as they impact not only on the user but also their family, friends and others in the community.)

3. Give each group a set of cards from *Illicit drug effects*. Explain that each student is to take a card. The first student reads out the question on their card and the student who thinks they have the corresponding answer places it next to this person’s card. Repeat the process until all question and answer cards have been matched. (Note: The correct answer to each question appears alongside the following question, as printed on the activity sheet.) Check and discuss the answers with the class.

Remind students that dexamphetamine, or the group of drugs used to treat people diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are not illegal, but buying, selling or using these drugs without a doctor’s prescription is illegal.

Highlight that using any prescription medicines that have not been prescribed by a doctor is dangerous and illegal. If students have further questions about illicit drugs refer them to [www.drugaware.com.au](http://www.drugaware.com.au) (Drug Aware) or [www.adf.org.au](http://www.adf.org.au) (Australian Drug Foundation).

4. Have students complete a **3-2-1 reflect** (refer to page x) to: recall three interesting facts, consider how knowing information about illicit drugs may impact on their choices, and one question they have that still needs to be answered. Responses can be written in their workbook.

5. Send home a copy of *Drug use: the real story* and *Over-the-counter and prescription drugs* and *New Psychoactive Substances* for students to share and discuss with their family.
**Activity sheet: Illicit drug effects**

Note: The answer for each question is found next to the following question on the activity sheet.

| True: High doses and frequent use of ice (crystal methamphetamine) may also cause ‘ice psychosis’ which is a condition characterised by paranoid delusions, hallucinations and aggressive or violent behaviour. These symptoms may disappear a few days after the person stops using ice. | TRUE OR FALSE
Methamphetamine can cause brain damage. |
|---|---|
| True: Methamphetamine can cause brain damage. Methamphetamine often contains other substances that are toxic to the brain. Regular use of methamphetamine can also affect the brain causing problems with concentration, moods and psychosis. | TRUE OR FALSE
Combining crystal meth (ice) with other stimulants such as ecstasy or cocaine is very risky. |
| True: Combining crystal methamphetamine (ice) with other stimulants can result in severe dehydration, high body temperature, heart seizure and even death. Combining two drugs of a similar nature, such as two stimulants or two depressants can lead to overdose. Any drug has the potential to cause harm. | TRUE OR FALSE
Illicit drugs are often mixed with other drugs when they are sold on the street. |
| **True**: Most illicit drugs are mixed or ‘cut’ with other substances to increase the weight and the dealer’s profits. Some cutting agents include milk or talcum powder, brick dust, cleaning agents, fertilisers and rodent poisons. The purity level of these drugs is difficult to predict and overdoses may result when a drug with an unusually high level of purity is used. |
| **True OR FALSE** |
| Injecting drug use is no more dangerous than any other way of using drugs. |

| **False**: Injecting drug use is very dangerous. Sharing needles can result in infections such as HIV, Hepatitis B and C, blood poisoning. Injecting undissolved solids from impure drugs can block blood vessels and cause vein collapse or gangrene. Abscesses at the site of the injection are also common. Once injected a drug reaches the central nervous system within seconds and cannot be removed from the blood. This makes overdosing a real risk. Drugs that are taken by mouth may be vomited or pumped from the stomach. |
| **True OR FALSE** |
| Combining alcohol and ecstasy can result in dangerous dehydration. |

| **True**: Alcohol dehydrates the body and so can ecstasy. If the user is exercising (eg dancing) dehydration can reach dangerous levels and cause brain damage. Mixing drugs of a different nature can lead to unpredictable, often dangerous results. |
| **True OR FALSE** |
| HIV can be transmitted by sharing needles and other injecting equipment. |
### TRUE: HIV is transmitted when infected blood, semen or vaginal fluids pass through the skin and into the bloodstream of an uninfected person.
Sharing needles and having unprotected sex can transmit the HIV virus.

### FALSE: Hepatitis C is a blood borne virus that can be transmitted by sharing needles, getting a needle stick injury, using unsterilised tattooing or piercing equipment, or having unprotected sex.
If an injecting drug user does not use new or sterilised equipment they are at high risk of contracting Hepatitis C.

### FALSE: Alcohol can make the liver damage that Hep C causes even worse. People who have Hep C are advised not to drink alcohol.

### TRUE: Drug users in Australia who have been injecting for 4-8 years have an 80% chance and, over 8 years, a 100% chance, of being infected by Hepatitis C.
Rates of infection have fallen since 1985 when safer injecting drug strategies were introduced.