

Lesson 2: Stages of Substance Use and Addiction

Introduction

In this lesson students explore the stages of substance use from non-involvement to dependent involvement. Students learn about the risks and consequences of substance use and addictive behaviour. Helping students to recognize the stages or levels of involvement in substance use, and addressing the facts and feelings associated with substance use, may promote behaviour change or healthy decision making.

NOTE TO TEACHER

Substance use and abuse is regarded as potentially sensitive content. All aspects of instruction are to be treated with a high degree of sensitivity.



Specific Learning Outcome

11.SU.2 Explain the stages of involvement in substance use or abuse.

Includes: non-involvement, irregular involvement, regular involvement, harmful involvement, and dependent involvement



Key Understandings

- Drug addiction is a complex issue.
- The stages or levels of involvement in substance use range from non-involvement to dependent involvement.
- The physical signs of drug abuse or addiction can vary, depending on the person and the drug being abused.



Essential Questions

1. What are the stages or levels of involvement in substance use?
2. How do you know when someone has a problem with substance use?
3. What are the signs of a dependency and an addiction? What are the similarities and differences?



Background Information

Preventing Addiction

The Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) defines addiction as “an unhealthy relationship between a person and a mood-altering substance, experience, event or activity, which contributes to life problems and their reoccurrence” (*A Biopsychosocial Model of Addiction 2*). Preventing addiction and ensuring that students have the current information for making healthy decisions are primary goals in all drug education programs.

Teenagers often think they are invincible and that risk-taking behaviours will not harm them. Some young people cannot see where the long-term effects of experimentation with substances may lead. They think they will not become harmfully involved by using substances just for fun or just one time.

REFERENCE



For additional information, refer to the following resource:

Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. *A Biopsychosocial Model of Addiction*. Winnipeg, MB: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, June 2000. Available online at www.afm.mb.ca/pdf/BPS-FINAL.pdf

For website updates, please visit Websites to Support the Grades 11 and 12 Curriculum at www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/cur/physhlth/.



Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds

Designed to activate student thinking, this experiential learning activity provides an opportunity for students to learn information about alcohol and to begin to explore their feelings about its effects in a safe environment. To illustrate the potentially devastating path that drug users can take, have students complete RM 3–SU.



Refer to RM 3–SU: From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds for the background information and instructions on this suggested instructional strategy.



Background Information

Levels of Involvement (LOI) Framework

Substance use and abuse is a complex phenomenon that includes diverse drugs, different levels of involvement, and various causes. In 1997, AFM developed a *Levels of Involvement Framework* to describe the various levels of involvement in gambling, alcohol, or other drugs. The AFM framework emphasizes the importance of biological, psychological, and sociological factors in determining an individual's level of involvement with substances or gambling. Other types of models or continua may be available to help students identify usage patterns, but for the purpose of this curriculum, the discussion to follow focuses on the AFM framework.

The levels of involvement identified in the AFM framework range from no involvement to dependent involvement or addiction, as outlined in the following chart.

Levels of Involvement in Substance Use*	
Level/Stage of Involvement	Definition of Behaviours/ Consequences of Involvement
Non-involvement (Non-use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Never used alcohol or other drugs ▪ Have chosen a non-using lifestyle following some involvement in the past
Irregular Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Random or infrequent (including experimental) use of alcohol or other drugs ▪ Little or no evidence of any problems caused by use
Regular Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using alcohol or other drugs regularly, with some pattern (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly) ▪ Some minor or isolated problems may be caused by use ▪ Actively seeking involvement
Harmful Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Using alcohol or other drugs causes problems in one or more areas of life
Dependent Involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Despite use of alcohol or other drugs causing problems in life areas, use is continued, plus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — there are failed attempts to cut down/quit — a lot of time is spent using or thinking about using — strong urges to use are experienced — there are uncomfortable feelings when abstaining — more of the substance is needed to get the same high
Transitional Abstinence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choosing to quit use of alcohol and other drugs after harmful or dependent involvement and struggling with how this feels
Stabilized Abstinence/Recovery	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Abstaining from alcohol and other drugs after harmful or dependent involvement and feeling confident and comfortable with this

* Source: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. *Levels of Involvement Framework*. Winnipeg, MB: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, 1998. Available online at <www.afm.mb.ca/Learn%20More/Levels%20Invol.pdf>. Adapted with permission.

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Suggestion for Instruction / Assessment

Levels of Involvement in Substance Use

Recognizing the levels or stages of involvement in alcohol and other drugs, as outlined in the AFM framework, and learning about the facts (consequences, behaviours, and feelings) associated with the levels should help students gain a better understanding of how to make healthy decisions or how to provide help for self or others.

The levels of involvement in substance use and the behaviours/characteristics associated with each level are identified on separate cards in RM 4–SU. Cut up the cards and provide groups of students with their own “deck” of cards. Have students use the Think and Link strategy (see Appendix E) to match the behaviours/characteristics to the applicable levels of involvement. Have them compare their results to the answer key provided.

As an extension of this learning activity, students could write case scenarios representing the various levels of involvement in substance use.



Refer to RM 4–SU: Levels of Involvement in Substance Use.

RM 3–SU: From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds*

Teaching High School Students about the Progression of Alcoholism

Simply giving young people the facts about substance use and abuse is not a very effective prevention tool by itself. It has been shown that long-lasting behaviour change is more related to internalizing concepts than just to the simple intake of facts. Education guidelines generally reinforce the fact that when students have the opportunity to internalize or personalize learning – to realize how it can affect their lives – they are more likely to show changes in behaviour.

To promote behaviour change, one needs to blend both facts and feelings into the decision-making process. Young people need opportunities to practise their decision-making skills, beginning with exploring their feelings in a safe environment, so they can then apply these skills in more risky situations.

Young people readily understand the fact that using and abusing alcohol and other drugs can lead to serious health and emotional problems. Unfortunately, their belief in their own invincibility convinces them that these problems will never happen to them.

In the following experiential learning activity, which is designed to engage students in a discussion about alcohol, students learn information about alcohol and begin to explore their feelings about its effects in a safe environment. Alcohol was chosen as the medium because of the common adolescent misperception that alcohol is not a very harmful substance. Exploring feelings is important in the decision-making process, and this learning activity is a beginning step toward that goal. The affective impact of this learning activity is what makes it a powerful learning experience.

Learning Activity

Give each student one packet of 12 slips of paper. A letter-size sheet of paper folded in thirds like a business letter, then folded in half, and then folded in half again will produce 12 equal slips of paper. Assure students that they are the only ones who will see their slips of paper. Then give the following instructions:

- On three slips of paper write the names of three separate people who are very dear to you.
- On three slips of paper write three things or possessions that you regard as special.
- On three slips of paper write three different activities in which you enjoy participating.
- On three slips of paper write three personal attributes of which you are proud.

Continued

* Source: Kolaya, Linda, and Barb Grimes-Smith. "From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds: Teaching Junior High and High School Students about the Progression of Alcoholism." *Journal of Health Education* 30.3 (May/June 1999): 185, 189. Adapted with permission. Permission is granted by the American Association for Health Education/American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance which owns and publishes the *American Journal of Health Education*.

RM 3–SU: From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds *(Continued)*

Instruct students to hold the slips of paper in their hands like playing cards. Tell them that you want to walk them through a few different scenarios related to the papers they just filled out. Read the scenarios below to the class, and follow the instructions provided in parentheses.

Scenarios

1. You have been invited to a party. You came home late, after curfew, smelling of alcohol. Your parents are waiting up for you. You're in big trouble! One of your possessions is taken away as punishment. You must choose which one. (Give participants 15 seconds to choose one possession and tear up the slip of paper.)
2. After a Friday night football game you and a friend go to a mutual friend's house. His or her parents aren't at home and there is beer available. You decided to drink quite a bit. The next morning you have a hangover and don't feel well and are not able to participate in or enjoy one of your favourite activities. Tear up one activity and one attribute. (Give participants 10 seconds to choose and tear up the slips of paper.)
3. Drinking has become one of your favourite pastimes. You are now looking forward to drinking every weekend. You feel you can handle it—it's not a problem. Tear up one person's name and one attribute. (Give participants 8 seconds to do this.)
4. You now find yourself drinking daily, with serious consequences: suspension from school, stealing money, fighting with parents. Tear up one person's name and one attribute. (Give participants 5 seconds to choose.)
5. After a weekend of partying, on your way home you are picked up for driving under the influence (DUI) of alcohol. Tear up one possession and one activity. (Give participants 5 seconds to choose. Then have them turn over their last three slips of paper.)
6. You are experiencing total loss of control over your use of alcohol. Without looking or discussing, remove and tear up two slips of paper from someone sitting near you.
7. You will end up with only one slip of paper.

Continued

RM 3–SU: From Experimenting to Dependency in 43 Seconds *(Continued)*

Processing the Learning Activity

Ask students the following questions:

- How did you feel as this activity progressed?
- How did you feel as the speed and tempo of the activity increased?
- What were the easiest items to give up? What were the most difficult items to give up?
- What was your reaction to having the last two slips of paper taken from you?
- How do you feel about the one item you have left?

Explain to students that as they went through the progression activity, they experienced the loss of control, just as though they were experiencing the stages of alcoholism. Talk about the stages of progression: experimentation, regular use, daily preoccupation, and dependency.

Talk about why young people progress through this addiction process faster than adults do. Two reasons are

- body physiology – organs are still maturing even after reaching full body growth
- patterns of use – binge drinking, multiple drug use

Ask students what could be done to regain some of the losses. Suggestions might include the following:

- Talk to someone (e.g., counsellor, school nurse, trusted adult).
- Get help (e.g., from Alcoholics Anonymous, community agency, treatment facility).

Conclusion

Approaching the subject of substance use and abuse with young people can be very tricky. Many young people already know a lot about alcohol and its effects, but they may not understand why they are much more vulnerable than adults are to the psychological and physical risks associated with alcohol use. This learning activity was designed to present facts while letting young people explore their feelings in a safe environment, and to help them understand how alcohol can affect their lives.

RM 4–SU: Levels of Involvement in Substance Use*

Levels/Stages of Involvement

Non-Involvement (Non-Use)	Irregular Involvement	Regular Involvement	Harmful Involvement	Dependent Involvement	Transitional Abstinence	Stabilized Abstinence/ Recovery
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Behaviours/Consequences

Never used alcohol or other drugs	Have chosen a non-using lifestyle following some involvement in the past	Random or infrequent (including experimental) use of alcohol or other drugs	Little or no evidence of any problems caused by use	Using alcohol or other drugs regularly, with some pattern (e.g., daily, weekly, monthly)	Some minor or isolated problems may be caused by use	Actively seeking involvement
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Using alcohol or other drugs causes problems in one or more areas of life	Despite use of alcohol or other drugs causing problems in life areas, use is continued	There are failed attempts to cut down/quit	A lot of time is spent using or thinking about using	Strong urges to use are experienced	There are uncomfortable feelings when abstaining	More of the substance is needed to get the same high
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Choosing to quit use of alcohol and other drugs after harmful or dependent involvement and struggling with how this feels	Abstaining from alcohol and other drugs after harmful or dependent involvement and feeling confident and comfortable with this
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* Source: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. *Levels of Involvement Framework*. Winnipeg, MB: Addictions Foundation of Manitoba, 1998. Available online at <www.afm.mb.ca/Learn%20More/Levels%20Invol.pdf>. Adapted with permission.

**RM 4–SU: Levels of Involvement in Substance Use (Continued)
(Answer Key)***

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