

Welcome! This newsletter is for families and is offered to you by The Fourth R program. The Fourth R is a healthy relationship curriculum that your teen receives at school. The goal of the newsletters is to provide practical and usable information, resources, and strategies related to health education that aligns with what your teen is currently learning in class.



## The Fourth R Program – Healthy Relationships, Safe Choices, Connected Youth

The Fourth R promotes healthy relationship skills and reduces risk behaviors

Your teen’s health class consists of four units of study. This newsletter is related to the second unit of study: **Substance Use, Addictions and Related Behaviors**.

What is your teen learning in health class?

- Understanding what resiliency is
- What influences decisions and behaviors
- Consequences and support for substance use and other addictive behaviors
- Binge drinking and sexual consent
- Practicing communication skills
- Building skills to resist social influence and pressure



Parent involvement matters

In health class, your teen is learning about the ways that they may be influenced to use drugs or alcohol and also ways to resist these influences. Protective factors help your teen build resiliency and protect them from difficult situations. Talk with your teen about protective factors they could work on, such as having a positive outlook or joining extracurricular activities. Your teen will also practice communicating assertively and using techniques like delay, refusal, and negotiation that will help them resist certain pressures that they may face in real life.

Stress can be one of the reasons why people turn to substances. Have a discussion with your teen about some of the reasons they might feel stressed. You might be surprised at what they tell you. What are some of the signs that your teen might be under stress? Have them tell you. Talk to your teen about some of your stressors. What do you do as a parent to help cope and manage your stressors? It is important that youth *and adults* consider ahead of time healthy coping techniques that work for them. Talk to your teen about techniques that would work for them during times of stress (e.g., listening to music, going for a walk, talking to a friend, parent or sibling).



**Parent To-Do:** Ask your teen to consider who in their lives could support them and help them through times of stress. You could start the conversation by telling them who you turn to when you need help (“When I am stressed, I can turn to...”).

## Could your teen be at risk for substance abuse?

Research has demonstrated that transition periods in an individual's life are associated with risk for experimenting with substances. As your youth has transitioned to high school, there is larger and more diversified peer groups where drugs or alcohol may be encountered. Talking to your teen about substance use isn't always easy, but it is crucial during this transitional period. Sometimes, just beginning the conversation is the hardest part. Although it's best to talk about substance use when children are young, it's never too late to start the conversation.

### Answering the question: Did you do drugs?

For many parents, a child's "Did you ever use drugs?" question is a tough one to answer. Unless the answer is no, you might find it difficult to know what to say. Many experts recommend that you give an honest answer, but you don't have to tell your kids every detail. Understand exactly why they are asking about your history by asking lots of questions. The discussion can provide a great opportunity to speak openly about what pressures you faced, why substances are dangerous, and why you want your kids to avoid making the same mistakes as you may have made.

#### Did you know?

The most common combinations of substance use problems and mental health problems are substance use and anxiety disorder and substance use and a mood disorder such as depression.

### What protects my teen from substance and drug abuse?

- **Good role modeling**
- **Early recognition of trouble**
- **Open communication**
- **Know your teen's friends**
- **Extracurricular activities keep kids busy doing activities they will enjoy**

#### Did you know?

Alcohol is by far the most commonly used addictive drug for Canadian and American youth, followed by marijuana.

Teens who use alcohol are more likely to be victims of violent crime, to be involved in alcohol-related traffic crashes, and to have serious school-related problems.

### How can parents help?

Begin the conversation about the dangers of drugs and alcohol with your teen as early as possible. It is also important for you to build a strong relationship with your teen and be a positive role model. The better you know your teen the easier it will be to guide them towards positive relationships and activities that do not involve drugs or alcohol.

#### Here are some easy strategies you can follow:

**Get involved in your teen's life.** Spend time with your teen doing something they want to do and support their pro-social activities. Know their plans and their whereabouts. Make sure your teen knows they have a caring adult in their life.

**Help your teen build healthy friendships.** Friends have tremendous influence on whether your teen will begin to experiment with alcohol or drugs. Help your teen find different ways to say no to potentially dangerous situations.

**Keep the lines of communication open.** Talking to your teen about drug and alcohol use should be an ongoing conversation, not a one-time speech. The communication doesn't always have to be face to face. Sending a caring text before they head out with friends about being safe or that they should call anytime if something doesn't seem right is totally acceptable.

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