

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 child 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 child 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 behaviours

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

What is your child learning in health class?

- Understanding the categories of substance use
- Warning signs of misuse/abuse of drugs
- Understanding emotional health
- Identifying consequences of substance misuse
- Substance use/misuse and mental health
- Managing stressors
- Decision making and help-seeking
- How to communicate effectively



Parent involvement matters

In health class, your child is learning to better understand the difference between substance abuse and substance misuse. They are also learning about the connection between substance misuse and mental health concerns. Conversations in health class will be focused on what it means to be mentally well, stressors that can affect emotional health, and how substance abuse is connected to your mental health. Your child will also have the opportunity to practice communication skills that are crucial in relationships.

Stress can be one of the reasons why people turn to substances. Have a discussion with your child 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 child might feel when under stress? Have them tell you. Do they get upset easily? Do they spend time in their room alone? Do they eat too much or too little? Do they complain of headaches or stomach aches? Talk to your child 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 child about three 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 child 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 child be at risk for substance abuse?

Families aim to find the best ways to raise their children to live happy, healthy, and productive lives. It is not unusual for parents to feel worried about whether their child will start or are already using drugs such as tobacco, alcohol, marijuana, and others, including the abuse of prescription drugs or over the counter drugs. Talking to your child about drug use isn't always easy, but it is crucial. Sometimes, just beginning the conversation is the hardest part. Although it's best to talk about drugs when children are young—when drug use often begins—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 child from substance and drug abuse?

- **Good role modelling**
- **Early recognition of trouble**
- **Open communication**
- **Know your child'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 child as early as possible. Even if you think they are many years away from finding themselves in a situation where drugs or alcohol are available, approaching the discussion with your child in a way that is appropriate for their age can happen at any age.

Here are some easy strategies you can follow:

Keep track of your child activities. Not because you are 'keeping tabs' because you don't trust them, but because you care. Know their plans and their whereabouts.

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

Keep the lines of communication open. Talking to your child about drug and alcohol use should not be a one-time conversation. The communication doesn't always have to be face to face. 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.

For more information about the newsletter or the Fourth R Program, please contact:

Centre for School Mental Health

Western University, Faculty of Education,
1137 Western Road, Room 1154,
London, ON, Canada, N6G 1G7,
Phone: (519) 661-2111 X25154

Email: thefourthr@uwo.ca

Web: www.youthrelationships.org

