have you ever been curious about drugs? Have you ever been tempted to try them because someone said, “Come on, it can’t hurt you”? Have you ever wondered what you’ll say if this happens?

Drugs are a problem in cities and towns across America. They cause accidents, upset families, and lead people to drop out of school or lose their jobs. They can get you in trouble with your parents, cost you the respect of your friends, and interfere with your growth.

If this is true, why would anyone use drugs? There are several reasons. Some people are curious. Others don’t really know how to say “no” when drugs are offered. Others think that “everyone is doing it” and don’t want to feel left out. Some people think it’s OK to just try drugs because they don’t plan to get hooked. But many kids (and adults) have found that “just this once” doesn’t always work that way.

Growing up is exciting. It’s also confusing, hard, and stressful sometimes, just as being an adult can be. Some people like the way drugs make them feel and use them as an escape from the difficult parts of living. Although they don’t mean to, they start to depend on the drug just to get by. When that happens, they’re in real trouble. When you’re dependent on drugs, just quitting isn’t as easy as it sounds.

The purpose of this section is to tell you the truth about drugs, who is using them, and why. We’ll look at the different types of pressure about drug use (there’s more than one kind) and at how you can respond. We’ll talk about skills that help you make decisions, get along with others, and handle stress. We’ll also talk about the many interesting ways you’ll be able to spend your time because you’re drug-free.

activities

1. Look through today’s newspaper for any mention of drugs in an article or an advertisement. Answer these questions: What drug is the article or ad about? Is the drug legal or illegal? What reasons might a person have for using it?

2. Throughout your study of drug awareness, collect drug-related articles and pictures from your newspaper, magazines, and other sources. Pick a theme, such as “Getting the Facts on Drugs,” and create a bulletin board with your clippings.
Drugs are chemical substances that change the structure or functioning of your body. Psychoactive drugs are drugs that change the way you think, feel, or act by affecting your brain. Some psychoactive drugs are legal for people who reach a certain age (alcohol, for example), but many are never legal, for anyone. Illegal psychoactive drugs are sometimes called dope. They include marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and acid.

A person usually turns to psychoactive drugs to make him feel different than he normally does. The drugs may have the intended effect, but they usually have other effects, too. That's why even legal drugs prescribed by a doctor should be used with care.

Two people may be affected differently by the same drug. That's why it's risky to take any drug unless it's needed for a specific purpose and approved by a doctor. Some drugs are so powerful that taking them even once can harm you.

Few people start taking drugs with the thought that they'll become addicted, but it still happens. When a person is addicted, he has developed a physical dependence on the drug. Drug use has caused changes in the chemistry of his brain, and he must continue taking the drug to avoid feeling sick. Not all drugs are physically addicting. Sometimes people become psychologically dependent instead; they need drugs to get them through the day. This is called drug habituation.

Either way, the person dependent on drugs has a problem. Not only does the drug habit affect overall health, it can also cause a person to do other dangerous things. Drinking and driving is one example, as is riding with someone who is drinking.
If you decided to try drugs, what would happen? One of the surest consequences is trouble with the adults in your life — your parents or guardian and other authorities. Using drugs is a quick way to convince them you aren’t ready for more freedom and responsibility.

Regular drug use is often a factor in poor grades and other problems in school. You are likely to have trouble concentrating on your schoolwork or performing well in athletics and other activities if you use drugs. Can you imagine acing a math test while hung over? Driving for a layup while stoned? Playing a trumpet solo while coughing and wheezing?

If you’re like most people, looking and feeling your best is important to you. Drug use, especially on a regular basis, can alter your appearance — for the worse. A drug habit is very hard to hide.

Want more reasons to stay away from drugs? Alcohol, marijuana, and tobacco are mistakenly thought to be “less serious” than some of the other drugs. Let’s look at a few of their possible short- and long-term effects.

**ALCOHOL** — Dulls thinking and coordination, alters perception and judgment. Teens have more trouble processing alcohol than adults do; they can become addicted much more quickly and suffer serious consequences, such as car crashes.

**MARIJUANA** — Alters the ability to remember, concentrate, speak, and listen (all important in doing well in school). Can affect the reproductive system in boys and girls; weakens sperm and lowers male hormones in chronic users.

**TOBACCO (NICOTINE)** — Can stain your teeth and fingers, give you bad breath, and make you smell like smoke. Smoking a single cigarette a week can make you cough and wheeze! Smoking is also one of the most difficult things to STOP doing — and it’s very expensive.

6. As a class, brainstorm to find other results of drug use. Think about relationships, school activities, and other aspects of your life. As a class, decide on the 10 most serious consequences and list them on a poster for your classroom. Use newspaper or magazine photos to illustrate your poster.

7. Look for an article in your newspaper, a magazine, or another source about someone who uses drugs. (Use library resources to research the topic if you can’t find a current article.) Read the article and make a list of short-term and long-term consequences the person faced while using drugs.

8. Research the penalties for selling or possessing drugs in your community. Discuss: How serious is the issue of drug-related crime in your community, based on newspaper coverage?

9. Find a newspaper or magazine advertisement for alcohol or cigarettes that depicts people. How would you describe the people in the ad? What qualities do they appear to have? Discuss: Are the advertisers implying something about their products? Is it realistic?
there's actually more than one type of peer pressure, and it isn’t always as obvious as someone offering you drugs. There is also the kind of pressure that happens when you see others doing something and feel as if you should do it, too. Since no one is forcing you, you may even think you're making up your own mind. That's why hidden pressure can be more powerful than direct pressure.

The first time you feel pressured to use drugs, you might be at a party where others are using them. Or you could be with a group of friends. Even if they don't ask you to try drugs, you'll probably feel the pressure of wanting to fit in. You'll be better able to resist this pressure if you know it's there.

Messages From the Media

There are other types of pressure, too. Often, you will see drug use depicted or implied on television, in movies, and in popular songs. The popular media sometimes portray drug use as cool. If drug use is really dangerous, you might ask, then why do they do this?

Movies and music often cater to the audience they want to reach. Since many young people (and some adults) see drug use as hip or cool, movies and music that target them often show drugs in that light. Remember, their purpose is to sell records or movie tickets, not necessarily to be realistic.

The fact is that although drug use among young people has been increasing, the majority are not users. Fewer than 1 in 5 students in grades 6 through 12 use illicit drugs once a month or more. Fewer still (12.5 percent) use drugs on a weekly basis.

Anyone who uses drugs is in the minority. Everybody is NOT doing it. Most young people (and adults) disapprove of drug use.

What About Peer Pressure?

Activities

10. To examine the power of peer pressure, try this: Make a list of all the items of clothing you’re wearing right now. Compare notes with your classmates to see how many of you are wearing similar brands, styles, etc. Discuss: Was the decision to buy these clothes totally yours, or were you influenced by other factors? If so, what were they?

11. Look for newspaper and magazine advertisements for specific products that appeal to teens (CDs and tapes, soft drink brands, etc.). Make a list of your favorites, and then discuss: How many of these choices are influenced by your perception of “what's hot”? Would any of your choices be different if it weren't for peer pressure? Why or why not?

12. Look through your newspaper's movie listings for movies that target teens. Examine the movie ad(s) and decide what methods the advertiser used to appeal to your age group. (Humor? Shock tactics? Use of interesting characters?) What other advertisers use methods like these? Discuss: Is this type of advertising effective? Why or why not?
The stresses of growing up are real. The preteen and teen years are tough on just about everybody — and they can be even tougher if you have problems at home or school. What makes life so rough for 10- to 16-year-olds? Something called puberty!

Puberty is a period of physical change caused by hormones. Hormones are substances produced by your body that stimulate your cells to specific types of activity. During puberty, your brain produces special hormones that send messages to your reproductive organs. These messages cause a boy’s body to produce sperm, and a girl’s to release eggs. After these changes occur, boys and girls are able to become fathers and mothers.

There are emotional changes to go along with the physical ones. Most adolescents (those who have gone through puberty) begin to take more of an interest in the opposite sex, which can be an awkward and confusing experience. On top of it all, the hormonal changes can cause moodiness. You may feel down in the dumps one minute and on top of the world the next.

Adolescence involves other stresses, too — fitting in, having friends, planning for the future, feeling important, etc.

Since drugs alter the body’s functioning, they can interfere with the processes of growing and maturing. Among the areas that can be affected are decision-making, problem-solving, and social skills. Marijuana use, for instance, affects the ability to learn and complete tasks and, in frequent users, can also decrease motivation.

13. Role-play the following situations in class. First choose a student to role-play what might happen if the person involved was influenced by drugs. Then have someone play the situation “drug-free.”

- A student who comes to class for an important exam.
- A student on the first day of a part-time job.
- A student whose girlfriend/boyfriend is breaking up with him/her.
- A student sneaking into the house after missing curfew who is confronted by his/her parents.
- A student who unexpectedly meets his/her favorite teacher in a public place.
- A student with a group of friends whose car is stopped by a police officer.
- A student who is meeting his/her best friend’s parents for the first time.

14. Write a newspaper-style review of your favorite book about an adolescent. What problems does the character face, and how does he or she solve them?
the brain sends and receives messages through the nervous system, a network of nerve cells. Messages travel from one nerve cell to the next with the help of chemical transmitters. Psychoactive drugs interfere with this process. For instance, some drugs cause the messages that control breathing to stop. If this happens, a person will die.

A person might take so many drugs that her body chemistry changes. The brain's pleasure center, the part that tells you to eat, sleep, and do the other things you need to do to survive, is turned on by some drugs. The brain can become so accustomed to the drugs that it thinks it needs them more than food or sleep. When the dependence becomes so strong that only drugs can turn the pleasure center on, the person is addicted.

15. Look through your newspaper for items that "turn on" your pleasure center in a way. Use the items to make a poster, labeling each item with the need it fulfills.
following is a list of several of the most commonly used drugs. All of these drugs work by changing the way the brain functions. They may speed up or slow down the rate at which the brain receives messages from other parts of the body, or they may affect it in ways we don’t completely understand.

**ALCOHOL** — Alcohol affects the part of the brain that controls judgment and behavior. In small amounts, it makes the user more relaxed. In large amounts, it can damage vital organs.

**AMPHETAMINES** — Amphetamines provide pep and can help a person stay awake. One type of amphetamine, speed, sometimes causes violent behavior.

**BARBITURATES** — In small doses, these drugs can produce calmness and muscle relaxation. Larger amounts cause confusion, grogginess, and breathing problems. Barbiturates are especially dangerous when mixed with alcohol.

**COCAINE** — Cocaine can produce feelings of happiness and alertness; it can also cause hallucinations, breathing problems, and fearfulness.

**HEROIN** — Heroin gives a brief burst of pleasurable feelings called a rush. Heroin is highly addictive; an addict may neglect everything, including his or her health, to get more heroin. An overdose can interfere with breathing and cause death. Addicts often share needles, which can spread infections such as AIDS.

**INHALANTS** — These substances are sniffed or huffed for a quick rush. Heart palpitations, breathing problems, headaches, and dizziness can result, as can suffocation, hallucinations, mood swings, and sudden death.

**LSD** — This drug is often called acid. It can cause powerful hallucinations and flashbacks, which might occur long after the drug is taken. Some scientists think acid damages the nervous system.

**MARIJUANA** — Marijuana use causes feelings of calmness and contentment, mild hallucinations, and loss of coordination. Marijuana has some medical uses, but there are concerns about its effects on the lungs and heart.

**METHAQUALONE** — This drug can cause relaxation, sleepiness, loss of coordination, dizziness, breathing problems, convulsions, and coma.

**NICOTINE** — Many tobacco users say nicotine calms them down, but it’s actually a stimulant (a drug that speeds up the brain’s activities). Some minor effects include dizziness and headaches. Long-term dangers include the risk of heart disease and lung cancer.

**PCP** — “Angel dust,” or PCP, has unpredictable effects. It might cause the user to feel either excited or calm. It might produce violent behavior, panic attacks, paralysis, and convulsions.

**STEROIDS** — Besides increasing muscular development, these drugs can damage several organs, including the heart and liver. Users may become violent.

**TRANQUILIZERS** — They can make the user feel calm but might also produce dizziness, fainting, and low blood pressure.

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16. Pick one of these drugs and do some research to find out more about it. Be sure to find out whether the drug is physically or psychologically addictive. Use encyclopedias, library books, and other sources. Share your findings with your class. Also look for newspaper articles that mention any of these drugs and see if you can tell which drugs pose the biggest problem in your community.

17. Does your newspaper have a listing of drug treatment agencies? (If you can’t find one in your newspaper, look in the telephone directory under “Drug Abuse and Addiction — Information and Treatment.”) See if you can arrange to have someone from one of these agencies visit your class to talk about drug addiction. Prepare a list of reporter’s questions to ask him or her.
to be assertive is important in many situations, not just those involving drugs. Being assertive is part of becoming your own person and means being able to express your feelings and thoughts confidently. It’s not the same as aggression, which involves a disregard for others’ feelings. An assertive person respects the feelings of others as well her own.

How can you make sure you’re assertive, not aggressive? Start by talking to others the way you want them to talk to you. In other words, no name-calling, ridiculing, or threatening. Focus on your feelings ("I’m upset because I thought you were going to help me."), not on the other person’s faults ("You’re not trustworthy." “You never do what you say you’ll do.”).

You can’t change other people, but it’s OK to let them know how their behavior affects you. If you do this assertively, they are more likely to listen and understand you. Even when someone doesn’t respect your feelings, you still have the right to assert them.

Remember these guidelines for assertive communication:
1. What you say should be intended to improve the relationship between you and the other person (not make things worse).
2. You should both benefit from what’s said.
3. What you say should move you toward resolving the problem.

18. Think of a situation (with a friend, a family member, someone at school, etc.) in which you didn’t assert yourself but wish you had. With a classmate, replay the situation using assertive language and behavior.

19. Look through the newspaper want ads for a job you would like to have. Write an assertive letter of application that explains why you’re the best person for the job.

20. Look for one comic strip with an assertive character and another with an aggressive character. On the lines below, describe the differences in their behavior.

___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________

activities
A Word of Advice

It's usually best to solve conflicts on your own, but there will be times when you can't. If you think there's a danger of you or someone else getting hurt, it's OK to walk away from a situation. **You don't have to assert yourself every time.**

The way you respond to any conflict will have one of two effects. It will increase the conflict, or it will cool it down.

**These conditions can cause a conflict to escalate.**
1. Emotions such as anger or frustration are acted out.
2. One or both parties feel threatened by the other.
3. Other people get involved and take sides.
4. There's a past history of negative conflict between the parties or a lack of interest in maintaining a good relationship.
5. Important needs are ignored.
6. The parties lack problem-solving skills.

**On the other hand, these conditions can cause a conflict to cool down.**
1. The people involved focus on the problem instead of each other.
2. Emotions are expressed but not acted out.
3. The participants choose non-threatening behavior and words.
4. The parties involved have handled conflicts well in the past.
5. Needs are acknowledged and discussed.
6. The parties know how to solve conflicts creatively.

If all else fails, refusing to be drawn into a dangerous situation is a smart way to go.

Saying No

If someone offers you drugs, especially if the person is a friend, it might be difficult to know the right way to refuse. Actually, the right way is the way that makes sense to you. And with practice, saying no gets easier.

There are lots of things you can try. You can give a reason, such as having something else to do. If you don't want to give a reason, that's fine, too. If someone approaches you in a teasing or joking way, you can respond in the same way. You can change the subject. Or, if the pressure is too heavy, you can walk away.

**activity**

21. Find an example in your newspaper of a conflict that resulted in someone getting hurt. How might the conflict have been handled in a different way? Incorporate your thoughts into a short essay and be prepared to share it with your class.

22. Role-play one of the following situations and practice saying no.
   a. An adult you don't know offers to give you drugs in a neighborhood park.
   b. A classmate whom you know only from school offers you cigarettes.
   c. Your best friend asks if you want to try a beer at a party.
   d. An older teen pressures you to prove you're "not a baby" by smoking marijuana.

23. Look for a newspaper article about an assertive person. Write a paragraph explaining which behaviors make that person assertive.
You're wondering why it would hurt just to try drugs. Maybe you'd just like to know what drugs are like, and you don't plan to continue using them. Would it really be such a big deal just to take one hit?

Using drugs once might not get you hooked; you might try drugs just once, or a few times, and decide you don't want to do it again. But then again, it might not work that way. You could get into trouble with your parents or the police by using drugs, even if it's your first time. While under the influence of drugs, you could do something you'll regret later. You could overdose or endanger yourself or others.

Even if you don't enjoy the experience, any of those things could happen. But suppose you did enjoy the drug? What if you liked it so much you wanted to keep using it? The likelihood of getting into trouble or endangering your health would increase the more you used the drug. And no matter what your intentions are, you could end up getting hooked. Once the drugs are in your body, you can't control what happens. Is satisfying your curiosity worth the risk?

Remember, none of the people you know with drug problems ever planned to have that trouble. They always thought they could stop, any time they felt like it.
You want to feel good, using drugs is not the best way to do it. Although drugs can alter the way you feel, their effects vary. Even if you just try them once, they may not make you feel the way you want to — you might feel sick or disoriented instead. Also, because the effects are temporary, you would have to keep using the drug to get the effect.

It's easier and healthier to relax in ways that don't require substance use. Doing something that gives you a sense of well-being is the best relaxer. It often doesn't cost anything, it's good for you, and if it's something you can do with others, it may help you make new friends — in a healthy way.

27. Make your own list of favorite ways to relax. We've included a few ideas below to get you started. Have a competition to see who can think of the most. (Hint: Your newspaper is a good source of ideas for fun and relaxing activities. Check lists of local happenings and calendars of events for ideas to complete this activity and those that follow.)

- Read _________________________
- Play cards/board games _________________________
- Have a picnic _________________________
- Play with your cat/dog/hamster/bird _________________________
- Go to the pool _________________________
- Go for a walk _________________________
- Listen to music/play music _________________________
- Work in a garden _________________________
- Do yoga _________________________
- Run _________________________

28. Look through your newspaper for pictures of people doing something you've never tried before (performing a gymnastics routine, speaking in public, playing a sport, etc.). Pick one and write a paragraph explaining what's happening in the picture and why you'd like to try it.

29. Here are some ideas for what to do the next time you find yourself saying, "There's never anything to do around here." See how many additional ones you can think of and write them in the blank spaces.

- Learn a new dance ____________________________________________
- Cook a new dish ____________________________________________
- Go to a museum ____________________________________________
- Put all your pictures in a scrapbook ____________________________________________
- Write a song or a poem ____________________________________________
- Go to a movie ____________________________________________
- Call a friend you haven't seen in a while ____________________________________________
- Help a neighbor with yard work ____________________________________________
- Go to the gym ____________________________________________
- Write a letter ____________________________________________
- Teach a younger child how to ride a bike/play ball ____________________________________________
- Ask an adult what he or she used to do for fun ____________________________________________

Think of boredom as something bad — a tired, restless feeling. But boredom can be good if it spurs you to try something new. Boredom can be a signal that you're in a rut and are ready for a new challenge.

You don't have to turn to a dangerous or illegal activity to relieve boredom. There are many alternatives. And who knows? Giving something new a try may open up a whole new area of interest for you, meaning you'll be less likely to get bored in the future.
I LIKE EXCITEMENT!

What's the most exciting thing you ever did? Was it winning a sports competition? Performing in public? Riding in an airplane? Riding a horse?

Again, there are many ways to bring excitement into your life, without doing something dangerous or illegal. In fact, the best kind of excitement comes from doing something that you'll be able to remember later. Drug experiences will not give you this lasting excitement.

Activities

30. Here's a list of ideas for things to do the next time you're looking for excitement. Fill in the blanks with ideas of your own.

- Spend the day at an amusement park
- Ride a roller coaster
- Play football/basketball/baseball/soccer (or watch your favorite team play)
- Go rock climbing/water skiing/sailboarding
- Go sailing
- Go to a concert
- Watch a thunderstorm
- Play laser tag
- Climb a mountain
- Play video games
- Go to the ocean and watch the waves crash against the cliffs

Reasons You Might Be Tempted

I'm a Risk Taker!

Testing your boundaries and doing things your own way is another part of growing up. It's a lot like a baby learning to walk; she has to take steps without Mom and Dad's help if she's ever going to learn. Taking risks — and falling down — is a part of learning.

But doing something risky doesn't have to involve drugs. There are many ways of testing yourself, physically and mentally. A healthy risk could be learning to ski, for example. If you learn under safe conditions, the risk is small. And the potential benefits — having fun, getting exercise — outweigh the risk.

Life is risky all by itself. You don't have to make it any more so by doing foolish or dangerous things. But it's OK to challenge yourself by taking worthwhile risks and learning from them!

Activity

31. Here are suggestions for ways to challenge yourself. Write your own ideas on the lines below.

- Introduce yourself to someone you've been wanting to meet
- Learn to rollerblade/ice skate/ski
- Try some ethnic food you haven't tried before
- Volunteer for a new project
- Run for office
- Go to a dance (even if you don't know how to dance)
- Try out for a play
- Speak up in class
- Try a new hairstyle

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I DON'T WANT TO BE LEFT OUT

it's normal to want to fit in and be accepted, and it's especially important for adolescents. When you're going through difficult and confusing times, it's reassuring to know your friends are there for you.

Fitting in, though, doesn't mean doing everything other people ask you to do. If you stand up for what you think is right and remember to think for yourself, others usually respect you more than if you never have a mind of your own.

Think about it! Who would you rather be with, someone who copied everything you said or did, or someone who had things in common with you but always had interesting ideas of his or her own? No matter how much you and your friends have in common, the differences between you are what make you individuals. A real friend respects your beliefs and doesn't put you down for having them. If fitting in with a group requires you to take drugs, ask yourself whether it's worth endangering yourself to do so.

Don't forget that you have the power to influence, too. If someone else sees you sticking to your beliefs, it might help them to do what they think is right.

Peer pressure works both ways. If you really want to fit in, there are many positive things you can do. Working on your social skills, learning how to meet and talk with new people, and getting involved in worthwhile projects are good ways to do this.

Remember: Social situations are awkward for everyone! Using alcohol or drugs as an escape will prevent you from developing this confidence because it puts the reliance on the substance rather than on you.

activities

32. Learning social skills is just like learning anything else. It takes practice. This role-playing activity will help you share ideas with your classmates for the best ways to handle situations. Take turns playing the roles. Afterward, discuss what the role players said or did that you thought was especially effective. It's best to have several people play the same roles so that you get a variety of ideas. Remember, there's no single "right way" to handle a situation.

1. Two sixth-graders (one male, one female) meeting for the first time at a party.
2. A new student in school who is sitting next to a friendly looking classmate in English class.
3. An eighth-grader who wants to ask a classmate to the school dance.
4. A student who wants to join a group of older neighborhood teens in a game of pickup basketball.
5. A person in today's newspaper that you would like to meet; imagine yourself sitting next to him or her on a bus. What will you say to start the conversation?

33. Extend the above activity by involving your parents or another adult at home. Ask them to role-play one or more of the situations with you. Ask them what works for them in situations in which they feel awkward.
understanding drugs