



[http://kidshealth.org/kid/grow/drugs\\_alcohol/know\\_drugs.html?tracking=K\\_RelatedArticle#](http://kidshealth.org/kid/grow/drugs_alcohol/know_drugs.html?tracking=K_RelatedArticle#)

### **Health & Physical Education- By the end of Grade 6, students will:**

Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours

C1.1 describe the range of effects associated with using cannabis and other illicit drugs (e.g., crack, cocaine, Ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine) and intoxicating substances (e.g., gas, glue, prescription medications)

C2.4 use decision-making strategies and skills and an understanding of factors influencing drug use (e.g., personal values, peer pressure, media influences, curiosity, legal restrictions, cultural teachings) to make safe personal choices about the use of drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis [CT]

Drugs are chemicals that change the way a person's body works. You've probably heard that drugs are bad for you, but what does that mean and why are they bad?

### **Medicines Are Legal Drugs**

If you've ever been sick and had to take [medicine](#), you already know about one kind of drugs. Medicines are legal drugs, meaning doctors are allowed to prescribe them for patients, stores can sell them, and people are allowed to buy them. But it's not legal, or safe, for people to use these medicines any way they want or to buy them from people who are selling them illegally.

### **Cigarettes and Alcohol**

Cigarettes and alcohol are two other kinds of legal drugs. (In Canada and the United States, adults 18 and older can buy cigarettes and those 18 -21 can buy alcohol.) But smoking and excessive drinking are not healthy for adults and are off limits for kids.

### **Illegal Drugs**

When people talk about a "drug problem," they usually mean abusing legal drugs or using illegal drugs, such as marijuana, ecstasy, [cocaine](#), [LSD](#), crystal meth, and [heroin](#).

### **Why Are Illegal Drugs Dangerous?**

Illegal drugs aren't good for anyone, but they are particularly bad for a kid or teen whose body is still growing. Illegal drugs can damage the brain, heart, and other important organs. Cocaine, for instance, can cause a heart attack — even in a kid or teen.

While using drugs, people are also less able to do well in school, sports, and other activities. It's often harder to think clearly and make good decisions. People can do dumb or dangerous things that could hurt them — or other people — when they use drugs.

## **Why Do People Use Illegal Drugs?**

Sometimes kids and teens try drugs to fit in with a group of friends. Or they might be curious or just bored. Someone may use illegal drugs for many reasons, but often because they help the person escape from reality for a while. A drug might — temporarily — make someone who is sad or upset feel better or forget about problems. But this escape lasts only until the drug wears off.

Drugs don't solve problems, of course. And using drugs often causes other problems on top of the problems the person had in the first place. Somebody who uses drugs can become dependent on them, or **addicted**. This means that the person's body becomes so accustomed to having this drug that he or she can't function well without it. Once someone is addicted, it's very hard to stop taking drugs. Stopping can cause withdrawal symptoms, such as [vomiting](#) (throwing up), sweating, and tremors (shaking). These sick feelings continue until the person's body gets adjusted to being drug free again.

## **Can I Tell If Someone Is Using Drugs?**

If someone is using drugs, you might notice changes in how the person looks or acts. Here are some of those signs, but it's important to remember that depression or another problem could be causing these changes. Somebody using drugs might:

- lose interest in school
- change friends (to hang out with kids who use drugs)
- become moody, negative, cranky, or worried all the time
- ask to be left alone a lot
- have trouble concentrating
- sleep a lot (maybe even in class)
- get in fights
- have red or puffy eyes
- lose or gain weight
- cough a lot

- have a runny nose all of the time

## What Can I Do to Help?

If you think someone is using drugs, the best thing to do is to tell an adult that you trust. This could be a parent, other relative, teacher, coach, or school counselor. The person might need professional help to stop using drugs. A grownup can help the person find the treatment needed to stop using drugs. Another way kids can help kids is by choosing not to try or use drugs. It's a good way for friends to stick together.

## Words to Know

Understanding drugs and why they are dangerous is another good step for a kid to take. Here are some words that may be new to you:

**Addiction** (say: uh-**dik**-shun) — Someone has an addiction when he or she becomes dependent on or craves a drug most or all of the time.

**Depressant** (say: dih-**preh**-sunt) — A [depressant](#) is a drug that slows a person down. Doctors prescribe depressants to help people be less angry, anxious, or tense. Depressants relax muscles and make people feel sleepy, less stressed out, or like their head is stuffed. Some people may use these drugs illegally to slow themselves down and help bring on sleep — especially after using various kinds of stimulants. (See below.)

**Hallucinogen** (say: huh-**loo**-sun-uh-jun) — A hallucinogen is a drug, such as LSD, that changes a person's mood and makes him or her see or hear things that aren't really there or think strange thoughts.

**High** — A high is the feeling that drug users want to get when they take drugs. There are many types of highs, including a very happy or spacey feeling or a feeling that someone has special powers, such as the ability to fly or to see into the future.

**Inhalant** (say: in-**hay**-lunt) — An inhalant, such as glue or gasoline, is sniffed or "huffed" to give the user an immediate rush. Inhalants produce a quick feeling of being drunk — followed by sleepiness, staggering, dizziness, and confusion.

**Narcotic** (say: nar-**kah**-tik) — A narcotic dulls the body's senses (leaving a person less aware and alert and feeling carefree) and relieves pain. Narcotics can cause someone to sleep, fall into a stupor, have convulsions, and even slip into a coma. Certain narcotics — such as codeine — are legal if given by doctors to treat pain. Heroin is an illegal narcotic because it has dangerous side effects and is very addictive.

**Stimulant** (say: **stim**-yuh-lunt) — A stimulant speeds up the body and brain. Stimulants, such as [methamphetamines](#) and cocaine, have the opposite effect of depressants. Usually, stimulants make someone feel high and energized. When the effects of a stimulant wear off, the person will feel tired or sick.

## Dealing With Peer Pressure

"Come on! ALL of us are cutting math. Who wants to go take that quiz? We're going to take a walk and get lunch instead. Let's go!" says the coolest kid in your class. Do you do what you know is right and go to math class, quiz and all? Or do you give in and go with them?

As you grow older, you'll be faced with some challenging decisions. Some don't have a clear right or wrong answer — like should you play soccer or field hockey? Other decisions involve serious moral questions, like whether to cut class, try [cigarettes](#), or lie to your parents.

Making decisions on your own is hard enough, but when other people get involved and try to pressure you one way or another it can be even harder. People who are your age, like your classmates, are called peers. When they try to influence how you act, to get you to do something, it's called **peer pressure**. It's something everyone has to deal with — even adults. Let's talk about how to handle it.

## Defining Peer Pressure

Peers influence your life, even if you don't realize it, just by spending time with you. You learn from them, and they learn from you. It's only human nature to listen to and learn from other people in your age group.

Peers can have a positive influence on each other. Maybe another student in your science class taught you an easy way to remember the planets in the solar system, or someone on the soccer team taught you a cool trick with the ball. You might admire a friend who is always a good sport and try to be more like him or her. Maybe you got others excited about your new favorite book, and now everyone's reading it. These are examples of how peers positively influence each other every day.

Sometimes peers influence each other in negative ways. For example, a few kids in school might try to get you to cut class with them, your soccer friend might try to convince you to be mean to another player and never pass her the ball, or a kid in the neighborhood might want you to [shoplift](#) with him.

## Why Do People Give in to Peer Pressure?

Some kids give in to peer pressure because they want to be liked, to fit in, or because they worry that other kids might make fun of them if they don't go along with the group. Others go along because they are curious to try something new that others are doing. The idea that "everyone's doing it" can influence some kids to leave their better judgment, or their common sense, behind.

## **Walking Away From Peer Pressure**

It is tough to be the only one who says "no" to peer pressure, but you can do it. Paying attention to your own feelings and beliefs about what is right and wrong can help you know the right thing to do. Inner strength and self-confidence can help you stand firm, walk away, and resist doing something when you know better.

It can really help to have at least one other peer, or friend, who is willing to say "no," too. This takes a lot of the power out of peer pressure and makes it much easier to resist. It's great to have friends with values similar to yours who will back you up when you don't want to do something.

You've probably had a parent or teacher advise you to "choose your friends wisely." Peer pressure is a big reason why they say this. If you choose friends who don't use [drugs](#), cut class, smoke cigarettes, or lie to their parents, then you probably won't do these things either, even if other kids do. Try to help a friend who's having trouble resisting peer pressure. It can be powerful for one kid to join another by simply saying, "I'm with you — let's go."

Even if you're faced with peer pressure while you're alone, there are still things you can do. You can simply stay away from peers who pressure you to do stuff you know is wrong. You can tell them "no" and walk away. Better yet, find other friends and classmates to pal around with.

If you continue to face peer pressure and you're finding it difficult to handle, [talk](#) to someone you trust. Don't feel guilty if you've made a mistake or two. Talking to a parent, teacher, or school counselor can help you feel much better and prepare you for the next time you face peer pressure.

## **Powerful, Positive Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure is not always a bad thing. For example, positive peer pressure can be used to pressure [bullies](#) into acting better toward other kids. If enough kids get together, peers can pressure each other into doing what's right

