



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



UNODC Youth Initiative

DRAFT DISCUSSION GUIDE II

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1. Media sells us dreams

Our everyday lives are filled with messages and images conveyed by media. Think of how many times a day you hear music, listen to radio, watch TV, see ads, surf in the Internet, read. Messages delivered by media influence our perceptions, and also our perceptions on drugs. Media creates meanings in various ways, and tries to make us to believe in them. Media literacy can be defined as the ability to access the different forms of the media, to understand and to critically evaluate different aspects of the media and media contents, and it can be learned. It means asking questions on what we watch, listen, see and read.

In general media messages try to convince us and make us to believe in them, and sometimes the messages coincides with the scientific knowledge, where as sometimes not, when for example the commercial interest are emphasized more. Messages delivered by various forms of media can also inspire people to do things that compromise their personal wellbeing. It is important to understand the techniques that media uses. A proper understanding of these techniques helps us to interpret the messages and images correctly, to select the right form of media when we are actually looking for information, and make informed choices.

All media messages try to persuade us to believe or do something. In order to persuade, a variety of techniques is used such as flattery, repetition, superlatives, associations, symbols, humor, celebrities, charisma. We make a mental association with an emotion, a feeling or a desire and a specific product or a brand. Advertisers try to connect a good feeling to their product hoping that once the potential customer is in the store the same feeling will reproduce and the customer will choose their product. Media has the power to affect all of us. Media is also a huge business because of that.

Media messages that seek to promote alcohol and tobacco products use these same techniques. For example, they try to link the product a positive connotation such as fun, beauty, success, wealth. Often the advertisement shows many people using the product – trying to convince us that everyone is using the product. Furthermore, advertisement often use celebrities to grab our attention. In some countries, alcohol and tobacco products are extensively advertised. At the same time they are illegal products for underage use. Also movies, TV shows and music videos are also capable of sending us messages on various substances and even on illicit drugs. Negative consequences for such actions are seldom presented. In countries where advertising for alcohol or tobacco is illegal, the companies might use indirect marketing strategies, such as marketing other product of that same brand, like non-alcoholic beer. Sometimes the companies use also product placement.

One way to understand the ways media can influence our perceptions and attitudes is to think about the “text”, meaning the information we actually see or listen, and the so-called “sub-text”, the meanings underlying in the message. Once the message reaches to

audience, it is interpreted by every person's prior knowledge, experience, values and beliefs. Analyzing the sub-text is called "deconstructing" the messages. Subtexts can be found from all kinds of media products, from newspapers to music and advertisements.

All the messages delivered in the media are constructed by people like you and me, and the techniques they use can be identified, - media messages once constructed can be deconstructed. Deconstructing means analyzing media messages to understand how they work. This might include asking who produced the message and why? What techniques have been used in the production? To whom it is targeted? How it is intended to influence the target audience? How it is intended to make the receiver feel or think? Below are some other questions that might help you in deconstructing messages and interpreting critically the different forms of media you encounter.

- What technologies are used to produce and distribute the messages?
- Who makes the messages?
- Who owns the companies that buy and sell media, delivering the message, and how do they make a profit?
- Who controls the production and distribution of media, and are there laws about this?
- Whose voices are heard in the media and whose are excluded?

- How does media use different forms of language to convey ideas or meanings?
- What are the effects of choosing certain forms of language, such as a certain type of camera shot?
- How is meaning conveyed through the combination or sequencing of images, sounds, or words?

- Is this text intended to be realistic? Why do some texts seem more realistic than others?
- How do media claim to tell the truth about the world?
- What is included and excluded?
- Bias and objectivity: Do media texts support particular views about the world? Do they use moral or political values?
- Stereotyping: How do media represent particular social groups? Are those representations accurate?
- Why do audiences accept some media representations as true, or reject others as false?

- Is the media aimed at particular audiences?
- How do media reach audiences?
- How do audiences use media in their daily lives? What are their habits and patterns of use?
- How do audiences interpret media? What meanings do they make?
- What pleasures do audiences gain from media?
- What is the role of gender, social class, age, and ethnic background in audience behavior?

Discussion points

- How much time does media take up in your life? Are you happy with the amount of time you spent using media?
- What are the most common types of media used by your classmates?
- Are your parents interested in what you are watching or listening? Do they know what kind of media you consume? Do you think they should?
- What advertisement do you like the most? What ads do you remember the best? Why? Is it because of the slogan? Colors?
- When do you trust an advertisement, what kind of features in an advertisement make you believe in its message?
- What kind of media contents you think are 'cool', - by whom they are created? How does advertising and media influence your perceptions on what is 'cool'?
- How do your friends influence your media consumption patterns and habits? How do they influence what things you do, buy, or see?
- Do you listen to any music where the lyrics mention drugs? Have you seen lately movies that have portrayed drug use? What kind of images on substance use have you encountered in social media?
- What kind of messages on substance use does popular culture typically carry? Why?
- Do you think there should be ratings on music the way there are on movies?
- What kind of anti-drug campaigns have you seen? Do you think those have affected your perceptions on drug use? What kind of persuasion strategies have they used?
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Activities

Shopping list

Look through newspapers and magazines and make a list of things you would like to buy. Now ask yourself how did every product's ad make you feel? Why you want the product? Is this your own free choice, or are you being persuaded by the advertising techniques?

Deconstruct an ad and share it on Youth Initiative Facebook page!

Collect a sample of alcohol and tobacco ads from variety of magazines. You can also divide the class into two teams, one searching the ads of tobacco and the other group on alcohol. Glue the ad in the center of a poster and start deconstructing it by discussing over following points. Try to make comparison with the facts you already know about drugs:

- **Source and audience:** Whose message is this? Who created or paid for it? Why? Who is the target audience? What is their age, ethnicity, profession, interests? What makes you think so?
- **Color and design:** How does this ad get your attention? What is being empathized? Where are the characters?
- **Relationships:** What kind of lifestyle is presented? What values are expressed? What assumptions does the ad make about gender? Are these assumptions realistic? What "problems" does the ad solve? Does the message create unrealistic expectations?
- **Persuasion techniques:** What persuasion techniques are used?
- **Language:** What comes in your mind when you see these words and phrases? What associations you make when looking at the ad?
- **Subtext:** What are the advertisers trying to make you believe?
- **Accuracy:** What is true and false about the subtext messages in this ad? What is left out? Why do you think the ad works/does not work?

After discussion, you have discovered what is accurate and what is not accurate in the mass media. Now complete the poster by writing down the ideas discussed as short sentences. Make an exhibition at your school to raise the others awareness about the techniques what media is using. Don't forget to post the picture of the poster on Youth Initiative Facebook page.

If you have the possibility to use computer deconstruct a alcohol or tobacco ad by using Voicethread (www.voicethread.com). It is a free website what allows registered students who are at least 13 years old to upload and comment images, video, documents. Make a video of deconstructing an ad and share it on Youth Initiative Facebook page.

Make a poster of The big lie!

Analyze various alcohol and tobacco ads. Make a poster what has two columns. In the first one write the image of what the ad gives about a drug and on the second one write the effect of drugs in real life. For example in some ads tobacco is associated to good taste (menthol) but in reality smoke has a bad smell.

If you cant find alcohol or tobacco adds, or indirect advertisement of alcohol or tobacco (such as Camel boots for example), try analyzing for example a rap-song featuring drug use related lyrics.

Rewriting the script!

The way various drugs are portrayed in the movies is not necessarily realistic. Make a research about risks of different drugs on the health. Then find a movie where you see people using drugs. Discuss how is it seen in the film. Is the drug use shown in the movies what it's really like? Do you think that the people who make movies glamorize drug use? Do they make it look cool? Do they make it look dangerous? Did you see any bad consequences of drug use in movies you have seen?

Now rewrite the transcript and make the film drug free. Use your creativity! Make a video and post it on Youth Initiative Facebook page.

Resources

Office of National Drug Control Policy "Above the influence" campaign
www.abovetheinfluence.com

Nida for teens
teens.drugabuse.gov/

The Media Straight Up! Critical Thinking Skills for Pennsylvania's Youth
medialiteracyguide.org/

Talk about Alcohol
www.talkaboutalcohol.com/

Media Education Lab
www.mediaeducationlab.com

The Center of Alcohol Marketing and Youth
www.camy.org/

Project Look Sharp
<http://www.ithaca.edu/looksharp/>

European Commission. Media Literacy
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/literacy/index_en.htm

European Commission. MEDIA program
http://ec.europa.eu/culture/media/index_en.htm

Canada's Center for digital and media literacy
<http://mediasmarts.ca/>

II. Entertainment venues

The entertainment venues are spaces where youth escape from their daily routine, meet new people, socialize, try new experiences and also assume new risks. These venues can have both positive and negative impact on the health and wellbeing of youth. A relatively large amount of all alcohol, tobacco and illicit drug use takes place in recreational settings. In many parts of the world, legal and illegal drug use has become a consistent feature of nightlife.

Many teenagers typically believe that without alcohol, tobacco or illicit drugs it is not possible to enjoy dancing, be able to dance all night long, have a boost of confidence and energy. Yet the reality is far from that. The short-term consequences of substance use can be for example bad breath, smell, slurred speech, vomiting, drowsiness, decreased coordination and engagement in other risky behaviors, such as unsafe driving or unsafe or involuntary sex. Besides the short-term risks, substance use can also have serious long-term health risks and is closely related to the other party-related risky behaviors such as violence, assaults, unprotected sex and road safety.

One of the core elements of harm reduction in nightlife venues is to be aware of the risks of substance use. First of all, huge and excessive alcohol consumption and binge drinking creates a range of health and social problems. There shouldn't be any selling of alcohol to those under the legal age. Researches have shown that the elements of the brain that encourage impulsivity and risk-taking develop early, while the portions of the brain to improve self control and inhibit impulsive behavior do not fully emerge in most people until the very late twenties. Youth alcohol consumption is also associated with increases in risky behaviors such as alcohol-related violence, injuries, assaults, risky sexual behavior, illicit drug use and unsafe driving under the influence of alcohol.

Secondly, in nightlife settings there is often a lot of smoking. Both active and passive smoking can cause substantial health damage. Tobacco use is one of the main risk factors for a number of chronic diseases, including cancer, lung diseases, and cardiovascular diseases. Many people say that they are only social smokers and smoke only when going out, justifying they can quit whenever they want. Actually, cigarettes contain highly addictive psychoactive ingredient, nicotine. Researchers have shown that one in two recreational smokers will become addicted to nicotine. Smoking on the dance floor or in crowded bars can cause damage or burns. It also poses an extra fire risk. Passive smoking can also cause many health problems such as asthma, respiratory illnesses, sore eyes and throat, breathing problems and an increased risk of lung cancer.

Thirdly, there is a close association between nightlife and the recreational use of illicit drugs. Many people use drugs because they feel it helps them to have good time. Yet, the effects of any illicit drug can be unpredictable and can result in addiction, serious injury or death. Finally, the simultaneous use of multiple different substances occur among youth in the entertainment venues, and can have serious and unintended consequences. Concurrent consumption of alcohol may increase dangers associated with the use of illicit

drugs, and also for example combining the so called energy drinks with alcohol, although in many places popular, can lead to severe intoxication.

Although strong legislation and its good compliance are an important part of safe nightlife, there are numerous other steps that can be taken to reduce the probability of unwanted incidents occurring in entertainment venues. The club owners and party organizers can contribute in many ways: educating the staff on responsible serving practices, and on how to recognize and handle intoxicated clients, on violence prevention and conflict management. The owners and managers of entertainment venues can also create written substance use policies, and inform both staff and clients on the existing legislation concerning substance use and on the consequences of substance use. Further more, they can protect the health of the clients by establishing co-operation with health and social services and with law enforcement, and for example establishing chill out areas where people can cool down and have access to free water. Young people themselves can contribute by being aware of the consequences of substance use, by knowing how to avoid and deal with situations where they are offered substances or experience social pressure to use them, and most importantly looking after them selves and their friends, to make sure everyone arrives back home safely and happily, relaxed from the fun night out.

Discussion points

- Are your parents aware where and with whom you spend your free time?
- Do you think they should be?
- What are the 'cool' places to hang out and spend leisure time among your friends?
- Are the entertainment venues and night life always safe in your community? What are the most common health risks affecting youth in them?
- How common is the substance use in the entertainment venues you go to? What are the reasons for substance use?
- How is the substance use perceived by your peers? How are the persons abusing drugs perceived? How are the persons not abusing drugs perceived?
- How you ever been offered drugs in entertainment venues? If yes, how did that feel? If not, how would you think you would react?
- How can you recognize when somebody is intoxicated?
- What are the national policies in your country regulating the substance use among youth? If you would have the power to decide, would you change them? How?

Activities

Be part of the tobacco free OxyGen generation!

Test your knowledge on tobacco by playing games on the OxyGen website.

<http://www.oxygen.org.au/games/>

Think of the situation in your community and try to find accurate information in the internet concerning your community. Is the situation similar?

Come with me

It is a short game what can also be used as icebreaking idea. Find a partner. You tell your partner "Come with me" but your partner has to reply "No". For the next three minutes you have to convince your partner to come with you but your partner still refuses. Then, change the roles. You only use the lines "Come with me" and "No". The emotions, mimics and body language are the essential part.

Short stories

Write a short story about how you would say no to tobacco, alcohol and drugs in nightlife venues and how would all this contribute to making nightlife safer. Post the story on Youth Initiative Facebook page. Feel free to comment all the other stories already posted.

Additionally, to find the most effective NO's play the games on:
<http://www.thecoolspot.gov/index.asp>

Classroom CSI: creating your own crime scene investigation

There are so many news about accidents occurring to youth after a night out: drunk driving, bar fights, drowning, rape etc. Crime scene investigation is a great way to learn about the dangers of drug use in nightlife venues. The objective is to work your way backward through a story that you create, so that you and your friends can use the facts to figure out what happened. In working to solve the case, you will investigate all the possible factors that may have led up to the „crime scene“. You and your peers can use this chance to talk openly about which drugs may be in the victim's system, why, and what other factors may have served as a motivation to use drugs in nightlife venues.

First make a research about drugs, then draft the plan of the story and scenario. It should link to a real-life scenario. Be creative! Think of who would be suitable to play the teen victim, the doctor or forensic scientist, teen's parents, teen's friends, investigators or detectives to examine the "crime scene" and figure out the victim's cause of death.

Start the story of a young person who dies or winds up in the hospital emergency room as a result of a night out partying. Start asking your peers to think about what substance could have caused this teen's death or health condition. Let the researchers explore the facts about the substance and make the side effects and consequences as realistic as possible. How did the victim come into possession of the drugs? Why did he or she do it? What factors influenced his or her choices? How could this been avoided?

Make a video and post it to Youth Initiative Facebook page!

Can't think of a scenario? Check out the guidelines how to create a classroom CSI : <http://teens.druguse.gov/peerx/activity-guide/documents/create-a-classroom-csi.pdf> or Google for some more ideas. Now think how you can use these ideas to develop a crime scene of drug use in nightlife venues.

Cartoon

Discuss what you have learned. Draw cartoon featuring the possible ways you can experience pressure to experiment with drugs, the consequences of substance use in entertainment venues and/ or the most efficient ways to resist this pressure and to protect your and your friends' health.

Resources in English

Healthy Nightlife Toolbox

<http://www.hnt-info.eu/default.aspx>

European Council Pompidou Group, Safer Nightlife in Europe

http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/Pompidou/Source/Activities/EXASS/Guide_SaferNightLife_en.pdf

Dance Safe. Promoting health and safety within the rave and nightlife community

<http://www.dancesafe.org/>

Safer Festival

<http://www.saferfestival.org/>

Safer nightlife

<http://www.safernightlife.org/>

Safer nightlife

<http://www.democitydrug.org/index.php?page=safener-night-life>

Resources in Spanish

Energy Control

<http://energycontrol.org/>

Si vamos de fiesta

<http://www.sivamosdefiesta.com/>

Juego de Exeo

<http://www.exeo.info/>

Q de festa! (Catalonia)

<http://www.qdefesta.cat/espais/>

Resources in French

Fêtez Clairs

<http://www.fetez-clairs.org/>

Association Avenir Santé : Monte ta soirée: pour une fête plus responsable
<http://www.montetasoiree.com/index.html>

Party Wise
http://www.partywise.be/tips_index.html

Quality Nights: des organisateurs de soirées s'engagent pour votre bien-etre.
<http://www.qualitynights.be/index.php/accueil>

III. What do drugs cost to environment?

There are probably public areas in your community where you find garbage and cigarette butts because people smoke there, areas that feel unsafe because of the risk of encountering intoxicated people. These examples show how social environment suffers from the substance use. But have you ever thought what are the consequences of the substance production and use to the natural environment?

The cultivation of illicit drugs and tobacco cause a lot of environmental damages. In general, the cultivators focus on maximizing the harvest rather than the needs of environment or of the local populations. In many cases drug production causes severe lacks in food cultivation, and makes also the soil unfertile in the long run. Deforestation, soil erosion, contamination of soil and water, the disappearance of flora and fauna are just some of the examples of the negative consequences of drug production. The intense use of agrochemicals have a considerable negative impact on the environment, as the fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides seep into the soils and pollute waterways and ecological systems.

Since the manufacturing of drugs is illegal, there is no need for the people involved to follow any kind of environmental norms. The environmental concerns of tobacco growing are also legitimate. The tobacco industry generates a number of chemical by-products that are considered harmful for the nature. In developed countries, appropriate disposal of these chemicals is strictly regulated. However, the same might not be true in developing countries. All this affects the land we live on and the water what we drink.

Some drugs are manufactured synthetically. It is a chemical process where highly inflammable and poisonous chemicals are used. The waste created during the manufacturing is simply thrown into water supplies, farmlands, road-sides. Sometimes, the waste is highly toxic and can eventually lead to soil and groundwater pollution what persist for years. For example, producing one pound of methamphetamine to supply to drug abusers produces up to six pounds of toxic waste.

The zones most gravely affected of drug industry are in South America, Middle East and Southeast Asia. There are many programs trying to reduce the environmental consequences of illicit drug growing. Their purpose is to create crop substitution programmes helping the communities to replace the drug industry with the production of other products, such as wool or bananas. However, in many regions drug industry is more profitable.

There is a lot that countries and communities can do to reduce environmental consequences of drug and tobacco production. Similarly, now that you are aware of the extreme environmental harm created by the drug production can help to spread the word and curb the consumption down!

Discussion points

- What consequences of substance use can be seen in your surroundings, both in the environment and in the social environment?
- Do you think people often think these environmental issues when deciding to use tobacco or other substances? Why or why not?
- Do you think awareness about these issues would reduce substance use? Why or why not?
- Are you aware what has been done to reduce the illicit drug cultivation? What do you think should be done?
- How could you raise the awareness of your community about the environmental consequences of drug abuse?
- Why in some countries people use more substances than in others?

Activities

Brainstorming

How do you think that growing and producing drugs/tobacco might have an impact on the environment? Think as many consequences you can (forests, pesticides, impact on food production, pollution, fires, climate change, ozone layer, crop displacement)

What do drugs cost to our earth? – Research by youth

Log on to the Internet and start finding out more about environmental consequences of the growth and production of drugs, including the effects of the tobacco industry.

Divide the class into small groups. Give one research topic to every group, for example natural illicit drugs, synthesized illicit drugs, tobacco. Have the students find relevant background information. Then let them present the findings in front of the others. Make a list of as many environmental impacts as possible. You could have some groups consider only local impacts and other consider only global impacts. Ask students to present/discuss what their recommendations would be to reduce the environmental impact of these substance production and use.

As an extension activity, groups could be asked to create a model, display or poster depicting the local and global impacts of these substance production and use on the environment.

You can also use the findings to write an article for the school newsletter or local paper about how the substance production and use affect our social and natural environment.

Photo exhibition

Organize a photo competition in your class on the theme "social effects of the substance use". Use photography to document all the negative consequences of substance use you

find in your community, such as cigarette butts, alcohol beverage bottles, a public place that feels unsafe at night because there might be a risk of encountering intoxicated people there, a shop that sells alcohol to minors or anything else you can think of. Make a photo exhibition of the best shots in your school hallway/youth center.

Cleaning up the community!

Divide class into small groups and ask them to develop strategies for disposing of cigarette butts safely and in an environmentally friendly manner. Now plan a campaign in your community to raise awareness of the people and to make the community cleaner. Think who will be the target, what would you like the campaign to achieve, how the campaign messages and activities could be promoted. Think how could you highlight this issue to the target audience. Poster displays, video interviews, letters to the editor and newspaper articles are some suggestions to present the issue to a target audience.

Role play

Divide the class into groups of six. Allocate each person one of the following roles: environmentalist, health worker, tobacco company representative/ drug mafia boss, local landowner, local unemployed person, and government Minister.

Ask students to investigate the issue from their role perspective. The issue is the following: the class is considering going into the production of tobacco/illicit drugs. Assume that you need 10,000 hectares land to produce enough tobacco/illicit drugs to be profitable. Before making a decision you need to investigate: the impact on the environment from using this much land for tobacco production; where you could buy this much land; the health impacts on the surrounding population of this type of land use; whether you have an available workforce to work the land.

Now think of what are the alternative uses of this 10,000 hectares of land. What good things would come out of this alternative? How do you think you would feel if you were living in this community and this much land is being used for illicit drug/tobacco industry. How do you think you would feel if you were living in this community and the land is being used for the alternative activity?

In conclusion, what decision do you think you would make about this business opportunity?

Resources

Environmental effects of illicit drug cultivation and processing in the Andean region

http://www.unodc.org/pdf/andean/Andean_report_Part2.pdf

Tobacco in Australia

<http://www.tobaccoinaustralia.org.au>

Clean up Australia

<http://www.cleanup.org.au/au/>

Clean Up the World

<http://www.cleanuptheworld.org/en/>

OxyGen Resources for schools to be part of the tobacco free OxyGen generation

www.oxygen.org.au/resources

Get the Facts about Environment

<http://www.drugwarfacts.org/cms/Environment>

Justthinktwice Fiction: drug production does not damage environment

http://www.justthinktwice.com/factsfiction/fiction_drug_production_does_not_damage_the_environment.html

HuumeBoikotti Environmental impact 2005

<http://www.huumeboikotti.org/en/environment.html>

Tobacco and the Environment. Smarter than smoking campaign fact sheet

http://www.oxygen.org.au/downloads/New_StS_FS/Tobacco_and_the_environment.pdf

The Cigarette Butt Pollution -project

<http://www.cigwaste.org/>

Butt Free Australia -campaign

<http://www.buttlitteringtrust.org/>

IV. Genetic Vulnerability and Drug Use

Why are some individuals predisposed to drug use, while others are not? What are the factors that lead to drug use? At any given time, young people are influenced by a number of risk and protective factors by their environments, but different individuals are effected by those differently. As shown in the previous chapters, many reasons could explain why some young people use or experiment with drugs and others do not (such as imbalanced family environment, or drug-using peers). One of them is genetics.

Currently, the role of genetic vulnerability in substance use has received considerable attention. In recent years, various studies on the human genome have been conducted seeking to determine if genetic influences are involved in substance use and dependence; in simpler words, to explore whether substance use or dependence 'runs in families'. The same studies also aim to identify the specific genes involved in substance use. To date, researchers have identified numerous genes as affecting risk for dependence on alcohol and other drugs. More specifically, a number of scientists discovered structural biological differences in drug addicts and their non-addicted siblings, suggesting that there is an inherited vulnerability to addiction. Adoption studies suggest that individuals adopted from substance-abusing parents are less likely to become substance dependents than the non-adopted counterparts raised in identical environments. Similarly, other studies focusing on identical twins indicate that as much as half of an individual's risk of becoming addicted to drugs can be explained by his or her genes.

Indicating that higher rates of drug use (especially heroin and cocaine) are found in the relatives of drug users than in the relatives of non-drug users. According to experts, this means that having an addicted family member increases a sibling's risk of addiction by 8-10% above the base rate in the general population. This common genetic liability, which also extends to antisocial behaviour, has been conceptualized as a general predisposition towards a variety of psychopathological forms. Indeed, epidemiological surveys indicate high frequencies of drug use among individuals who are also diagnosed with antisocial personality disorder, depression, and alcoholism; disorders that themselves display only modest overlaps.

After all, there may not be an actual gene but aspects of a person's genetic makeup which make them more vulnerable to drug addiction. It could also be a combination of factors (socio-economic background, peer pressure, parental behaviour, genetics, and so on) that causes drug use. In other words, genetic traits are always interconnected to the socialization process via which individual has grown, and together they affect to high or low vulnerability to substance use.

Discussion points

- What could be some protective factors that reduce the risk of drug dependence among people with high genetic vulnerability?
- How could community protect person with a high genetic vulnerability?
- What is being done in your community?
- What kind of risk factors making you vulnerable to drug use and/or other risky behaviours are present in your life?
- Which do you think effect drug use more, societal or genetic factors? Why?

Activities

Understanding by filling in the blank

Take a short informational paragraph about genetics and drug use, either from a text already used in class or from an outside source (e.g. website, scientific articles), and copy it onto the board. Once students have read the paragraph and understand the text, erase one word per sentence, for example, then have the students fill in the blanks. Once they do so, start a new round erasing more words. Continue this process until they rewrite the entire paragraph.

What's in a photo?

Place four poster-sized photos in four corners of the classroom depicting drug dependents of different race, gender, age and so on, within various causal settings (family, school, peer groups). Divide the class into four groups to rotate and spend a few minutes observing each photo. Instruct the student to write his first impressions of each photo. When the students return to their desk, let them write few lines about the photo that affected them most. Once complete, hang the descriptions under each photo and allow students to circulate to read each. The student will understand how others view art differently, but respect each interpretation.

Invisible traits

Separate the students into pairs. Try not to pair best friends together, since you want an objective view for this activity. Have the students study each other's physical appearance and write down the obvious different traits that each other has, such as hair, facial characteristics, skin marks, bone structure etc. Explain to the students that these are some of the traits that other people can see and that they could possibly pass down to their own children in the future. Go a little further by asking the students about illnesses in the family, such as asthma, cancer, blood pressure or any other diseases that may be hereditary, placing an emphasis on drug use. Make sure they understand that not only visible traits pass down, but also invisible traits.

Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse

<http://www.drugabuse.gov/>

Genetics Science Learning Center. The University of Utah

<http://learn.genetics.utah.edu/>

Home Box Office (HBO) Addiction Project

<http://www.hbo.com/addiction/>

Neuroscience for kids

<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/introb.html>

The Brain: Understanding Neurobiology Through the Study of Addiction

<http://science.education.nih.gov/customers.nsf/HSBrain?OpenForm>

V. Risks and Protective Factors

Research over the past decades has aimed to determine how drug use begins and how it evolves. Many factors can add to or reduce a person's risk for drug use. Scientists have proposed various explanations of why some individuals become involved with drugs and then escalate to dependence. As mentioned earlier, one explanation focuses on the biological cause, such as having a history of drug or alcohol abuse within family. Another explanation is that drugs dependency can lead to affiliation with drug-using peers, who in turn, may expose the individual to other substances. Nevertheless, despite all those risk factors that can increase a person's chances for drug use, there also exist protective factors that can reduce such a risk.

Risk and protective factors can influence young people in several ways and at different stages of their lives. The more risks a child is exposed to, the more likely the child will use drugs. A risk factor for one person may not be for another. Also, some risk factors may be more powerful than others at certain stages in development. Studies have also shown that abuse of drugs in late childhood and early adolescence is associated with further drug involvement. However, it should be underlined that most youth do not actually progress to using other drugs. Thus, not all individuals at risk for drug abuse necessarily start using drugs or become addicted. Some signs of risk can be already observed in early childhood, such as aggressive behaviour, and lack of self-control; or later, during the teenage years via the form of pressure exercised by drug-abusing peers combined with ineffective parenting, or weak parental bonds and control. Interactions outside the family, and during the school years, can also involve risks for both children and adolescents, such as poor classroom attendance, and academic failure, as well as delinquent behaviour.

Of course, gender, race, and geographic location can also play a role in how and when children begin abusing drugs. Other factors that could pose risks able to influence young people to use drugs is drug availability, general trafficking patterns, and perceptions that want drug use to be socially tolerated. In all cases, though, positive interactions with family, empowered learning and peer bonding at school, as well as effective assessment of community risk and protective factors associated with drug problems could play an important role on reducing child's risk for later drug use and dependence. Indeed, relevant research has shown that interventions (e.g. in Jamaica, Paraguay, Nicaragua and Bulgaria) that aim to promote human development through required use of education, health, and sometimes nutrition services giving to families great potential to reduce both immediate and chronic poverty and, at the same time, to contribute significantly to improving nutritional outcomes, could have had a positive spill-over effect on the consumption of tobacco, drugs and alcoholic beverages. This means that youth who rapidly increase their substance abuse have high levels of risk factors with low levels of protective factors. Therefore, altering the balance between risk and protective factors so that protective factors outweigh risk factors appears as a viable solution. Due to the fact that risks appear at every life transition, protective factors should be strengthened at each stage of development so to prevent escalation to drug abuse.

Discussion points

- What factors do you think could influence drug use in your community?
- Does vulnerability differ between individuals? Can you think of examples?
- What could be some protective factors that reduce the risk of drug dependence among students?
- How could families contribute to high vulnerability of drug use among their siblings?
- In your opinion, what are the most serious risk and protective factors in your community?

Activities

True or False?

Write four facts about drug vulnerability on an overhead transparency. Three of the facts are true, and one is false. Students take my little true-false test. Then survey students to learn the results. Go back over each question to see what they thought about each statement. That gives a chance to tell a little about each statement. Then, on a sheet of paper, students write three risk and three protective factors that are true and one that is false. Throughout the day, ask a few students to try to confuse the rest.

Going in Circles

Arrange all the desks in a large circle, with everyone facing the center. This makes it easy for the students to talk and see one another. Then ask each student to think of one risk factor that could increase drug vulnerability. If possible, the students could also provide one case that such factor has actually led to drug use. As you go around the circle, students try to repeat the information (factors and facts) about each of the other students in the circle. Repeat the same game asking students to focus on protective factors.

Ranking Roll!

Split the classroom into small groups of 4 and tell students to think of all the risk and protective factors that could have an effect on drug use. Then ask them to list all their ideas in two sheets. Give them few minutes to rank both risk and protective factors according to their perceptions starting with the ones that appear stronger to them. After they have done so, tell them to exchange lists with other groups, reminding them how different impact risk and protective factors could have on individuals. At the end prompt them to think why their classmates ranked differently the above factors and allow them to explain – providing some examples – on what criteria their own ranking was made.

Resources

National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA). Preventing Drug Use Among Children and Adolescents. A Research-Based Guide for Parents, Educators, and Community Leaders <http://www.drugabuse.gov/sites/default/files/preventingdruguse.pdf>

NIDA for Teens
<http://teens.drugabuse.gov>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Common Risk and Protective Factors for Alcohol and Drug Use
<http://captus.samhsa.gov/access-resources/common-risk-and-protective-factors-alcohol-and-drug-use>

UNODC Guide to implementing family skills training programs for drug abuse prevention
http://www.unodc.org/pdf/youthnet/family%20based/FINAL_ENGLISH_version%20for%20PRINTING%20received%20120209.pdf

Federal Resources for Educational Excellence: Substance Abuse
http://free.ed.gov/subjects.cfm?subject_id=61&toplvl=60&res_feature_request=1

Find Youth Info: Substance abuse risk and protective factors
<http://findyouthinfo.gov/youth-topics/substance-abuse/risk-and-protective-factors-substance-use-abuse-and-dependence>

European Institute of Studies on Prevention
<http://www.irefrea.org/>