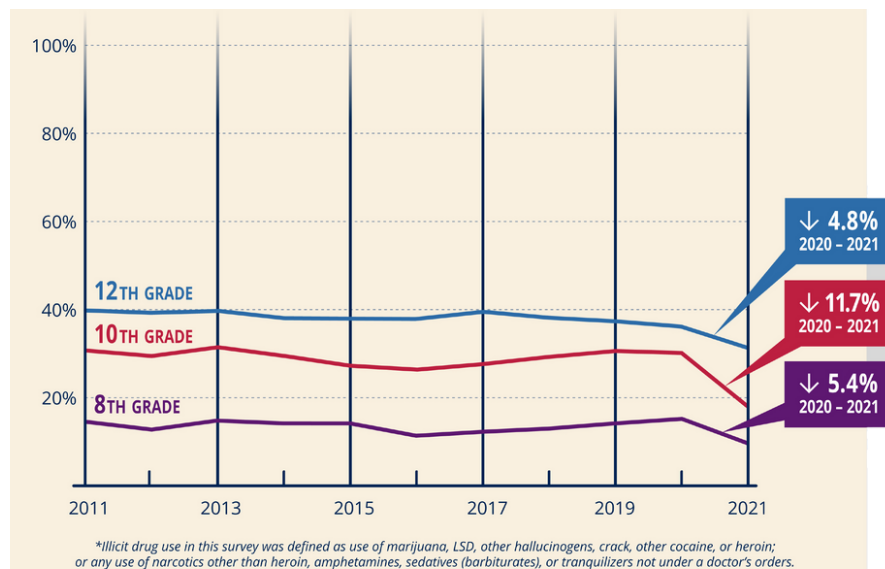


Know Drugs

Kenzie Lock | MPhc

Hi everyone! My name is Kenzie. Today I'm going to talk to you about my capstone project which was building a substance use prevention and harm reduction curriculum for the Washington Poison Center.

Teen Substance Use



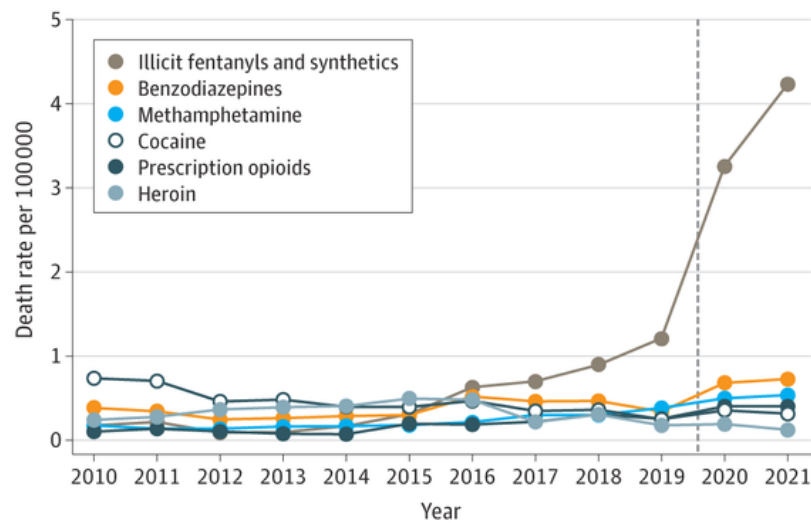
Source: 2021, Monitoring the Future Survey

As you can see in this graph, the COVID-19 pandemic created an unprecedented decrease in teen substance use. This drop was due to less social interactions and increased supervised time with adults as teens stayed home and social distanced.

While rates are significantly lower than pre-pandemic times, studies show that the pandemic also changed how and why teens use drugs. Prior to the pandemic, teens used substances almost exclusively in social settings for experimentation purposes. New data shows that now teens more commonly participate in solitary substance use and use substances for coping purposes.

Teen Overdose Mortality

by substance type



Source: 2022, Trends in Overdose Deaths Among US Adolescents

While teen substance use rates are lower, there has unfortunately been a dramatic increase in overdose deaths among teens aged 14-18 due to deadlier drugs like fentanyl. Not only has fentanyl use increased, but it is contaminating the drug supply.

The effects of an increasingly dangerous drug supply and the repercussions of behavioral shifts will likely be unknown for years, but it is clear that teens need reliable information about substance use.

Educating Teens

- Center on young teens (12-14 years)
- Effective curricula focus on
 - Social resistance training
 - Normative education
 - Competence enhancement



Studies show that the best time to educate teens about substances and substance use is in early adolescence, meaning young teens age 12-14 who typically attend middle school. Schools provide the necessary infrastructure to educate large groups of teens making them an ideal place to implement curricula.

Truly effective substance use prevention and harm reduction curricula will focus on social resistance training, normative education or competence enhancement.

Social resistance training teaches teens how to avoid or directly address high pressure situations.

Normative education aims to correct inaccurate societal norms and narratives about substance use.

And competence enhancement helps teens expand their social and emotional coping skills, and develop their problem- solving and decision-making abilities.

These types of curricula are effective because they increase knowledge, establish shared values between teens and their peers and build practical skills that teens can use in the real world.

Methods



To develop an effective curriculum with the necessary characteristics I performed an environmental scan and evaluation of existing poison center curricula, observed students at a middle school, and interviewed educators.

Scan & Eval of Curricula

State	Curricula Focus	Developmentally Appropriate	Interactive	Narrative	Training & Boosters	Score
UT						0
WV						0
WI						0
MO	X		X	X		3
NM	X	X	X	X		4
OR*	X	X	X	X	X	5

*same curricula used by GA and MD

For the environmental scan I analyzed curricula from the 55 poison centers across the US. However, only 8 centers provided substance use prevention curricula for middle schoolers and oregon, georgia and maryland shared the same curricula.

I evaluated these curricula using a criteria I developed based on the characteristics of effective curricula from my literature review. Each curricula that contained the listed characteristic received one point and was scored out of 5.

As you can see, only three curricula scored 3 or more.

While the quality of curricula varied greatly, I was able to find concrete examples of each characteristic.



Observations

- Students were eager to learn more, but hesitant to take information
- Parents were uninterested in information on vaping/marijuana

To better understand student needs, I attended a middle school health fair with the Poison Center.

We provided information about the poison center and how community members can access its services. We also provided safety information about vaping and marijuana. You can see our table on the left. Over the course of the night we interacted with 58 students parents and teachers.

Middle schoolers came to the table for Mr Yuk stickers and tattoos, but they stayed to chat and had lots of questions. The students were curious about the substance use information at the table but were unsure if they could take it. After we assured them they could, they happily took all flyers and fact sheets, and some even returned with friends.

In comparison, parents were interested in the poison center's helpline, but they were uninterested in the substance use information. One parent in particular told their middle schooler "just don't do it" while pointing to the marijuana pamphlet.

Though this was one instance these observations showed that teens are looking for information on substance use and will need skills to navigate the information they find. Especially if the adults in their lives are using an abstinence-only approach to substance use.



Interviews

Curricula should be:

- For small groups in short lessons
- Simple with zero prep necessary
- Focused on general substance use
- Fact-based and non-judgmental
- Leverage student strengths

Over the course of two months I interviewed five individuals involved in varying educational positions across the state about student wants and needs for a poison center curricula.

The interviewees reflected what I found in my research. Interviewees asked for short lessons built for small groups, that can be taught without preparation.

They also asked for a curricula with a generalized focus on substance use, as opposed to focusing on one specific type of substance. They wanted fact-based non judgmental information that would empower students to make healthy choices.

Finally they talked about student strengths like their interest in finding information, ability to advocate and how aware they are of the world.



Know Drugs

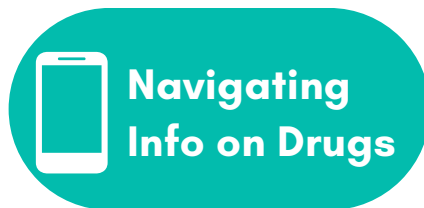
- Main focus: normative education and competence enhancement
- Five lessons, 35–45 mins
- Can be taught as needed
- Covers 6 of the 8 state health standards

Using the information from my methods I developed a substance use prevention and harm reduction curriculum titled "Know Drugs".

Know drugs focuses on normative education and competence enhancement.

The curriculum contains five 35-45 minute lessons that can be taught in order or separately according to student needs.

To incentivize educators to use the curriculum the lessons cover 6 of the 8 middle school health standards for the state .

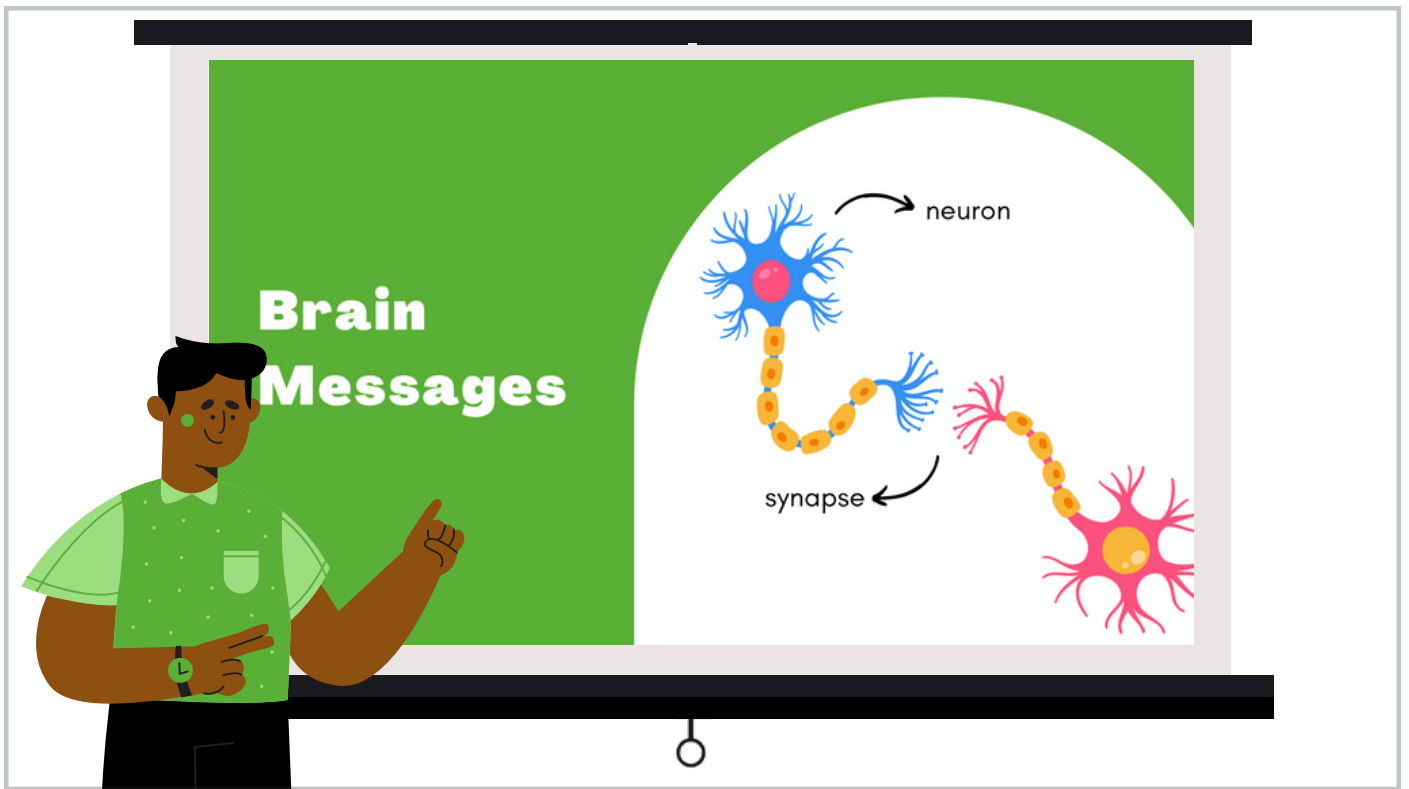


These are the five lessons, they are: what are drugs, how do drugs work, why do teens use drugs, messages in the media and navigating info on drugs. In the next few slides I'll cover what these lessons include show what some of the slides look like.

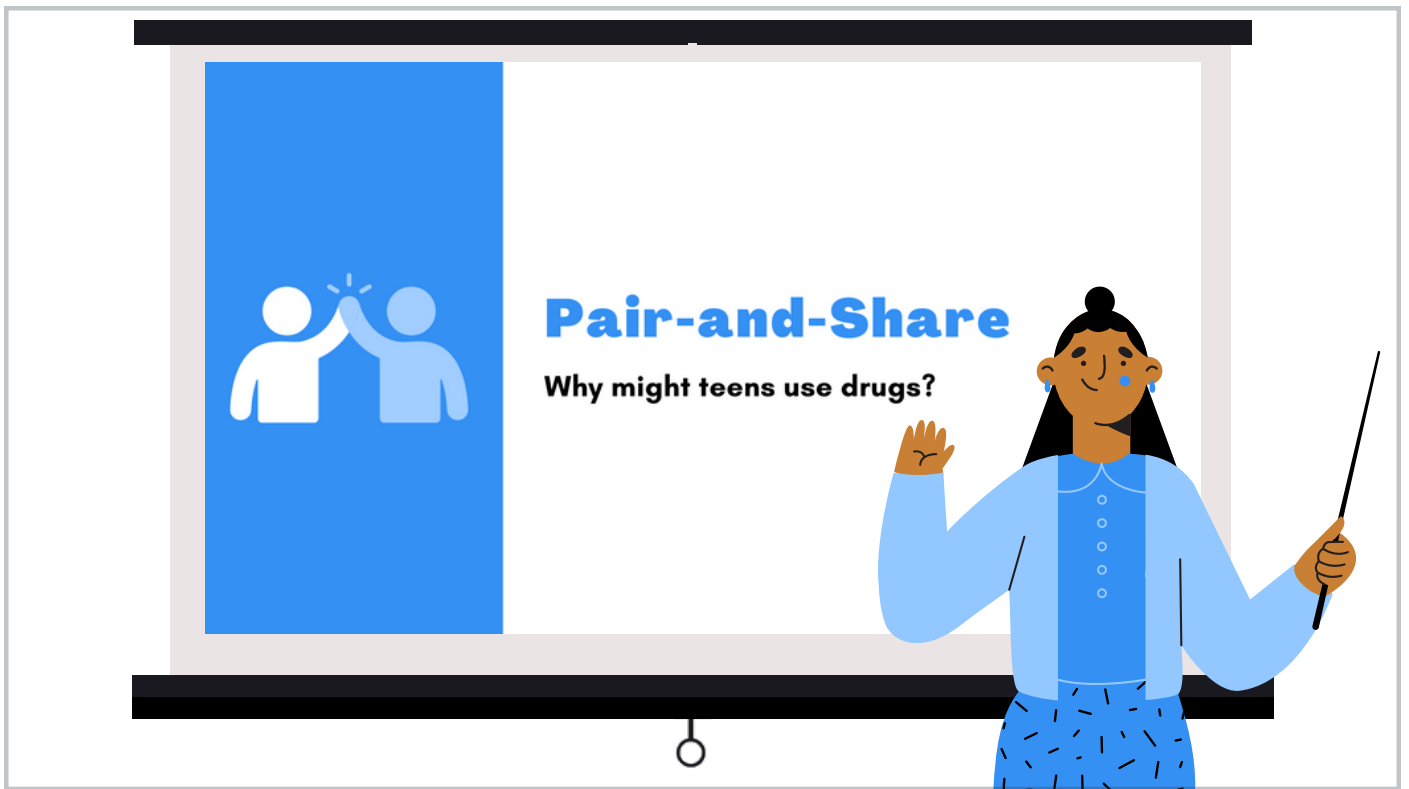


Lesson one: What are drugs? serves as a knowledge check for students and the instructor. During this time students learn the definition of a drug and reflect on what they know and don't know about drugs through a true or false game, which you can see on the slide. read slide

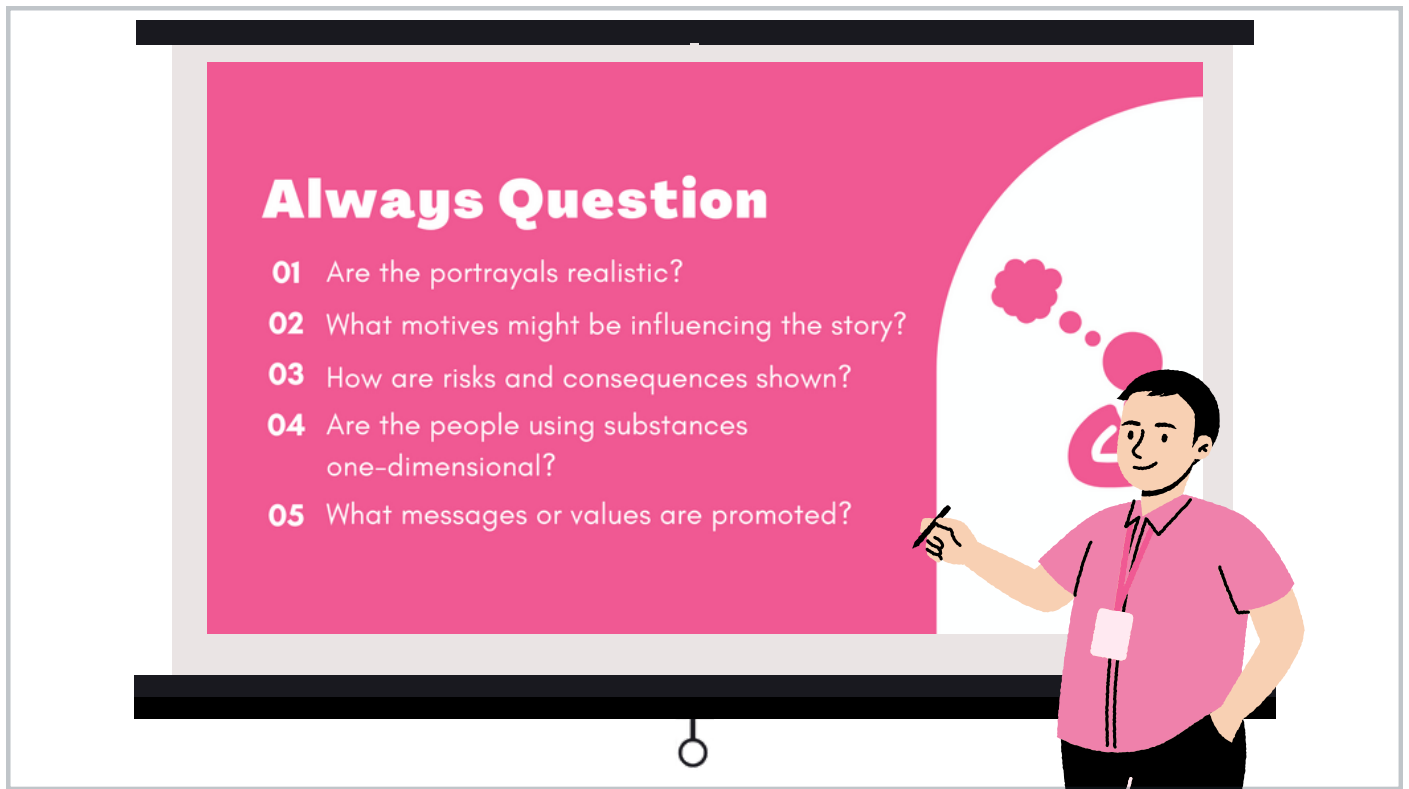
--the answer is true!



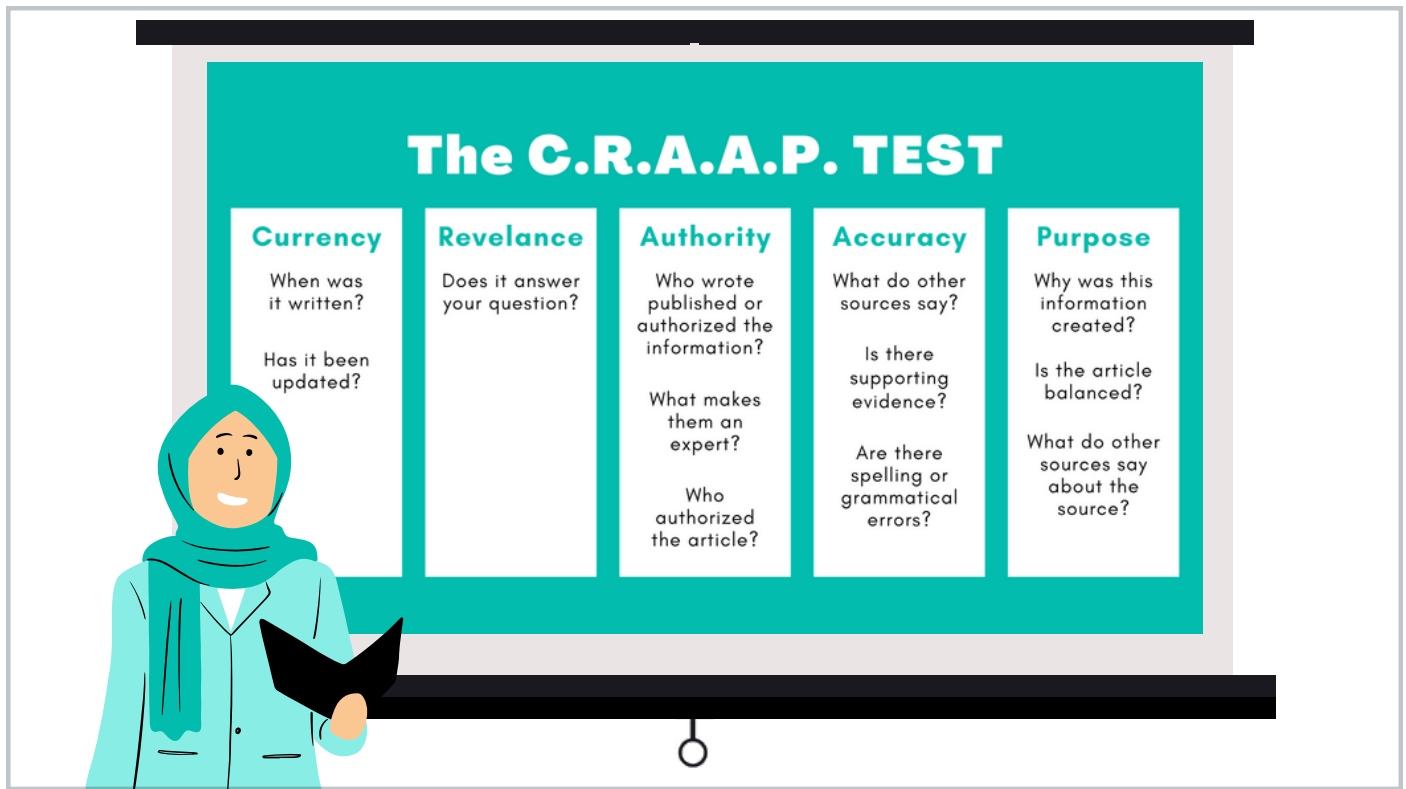
Lesson two: How do drugs work? focuses on the science of substance use. Students learn about the importance of brain development during the teen years and play a game of "neuron telephone" to understand how substances effect developing brains and how they deliver messages. This activity helps students understand why delayed substance use is safest. During this lesson students also learn about the science of addiction and understand that addiction is a medical condition and not a moral failing.



Lesson three helps teens understand why people use substances. What you see on the screen is a pair and share activity that starts off the class. Students discuss why some teens use drugs and brainstorm healthier alternatives. The lesson also aims to reduce stigma and stereotypes around people who use substances by teaching teens how to respond when they see or hear it happen.



Lesson 4: Messages in the media helps teens analyze narratives about teen substance use that they see in the media they consume. Students practice identifying and challenging false narratives through group discussion using the questions you see on the screen.



Lesson 5: Navigating info on drugs increases students media literacy and critical thinking skills. Students work together in groups to analyze information about drugs from online sources using the CRAAP Test which stands for currency, relevance, authority, accuracy and purpose. Students use the questions you see on the screen to evaluate and rank the information they've found to determine whether the information is accurate and useful or if it's CRAAP.

Lesson 3: Why Do Teens Use Drugs?

Summary

Lesson three encourages discussion around why teens might use drugs and provides alternatives for these reasons. Students learn about stigma and stereotypes and how they can harm people who use drugs or those who struggle with addiction. Students practice stopping stereotypes through group work with scenarios.

Agenda

I: Welcome (5 mins)
II: Why teens use drugs (10 mins)
III: Stigma + stereotypes (10 mins)
IV: Scenarios (15 mins)
V: Summary + close (5 mins)

Materials Needed

- Slides + script
- Computer + projector
- Printed Scenarios

Learning Objectives

1. Understand why people use drugs and alternatives to these reasons
2. Understand stereotypes and stigma around drug use
3. Practice stopping stereotypes by decreasing stigma and increasing empathy

Aligns with Washington State OSPI health standards 1, 2, 5, 7 and 8 for middle schoolers

Resources

- [Partnership to End Addiction](#)
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) Call 988
- [Teens and Stress: Practical Coping Skills](#)

4

Materials

- Slides + scripts
- Educator guide
- Handouts for exercises

Each lesson comes complete with slides (which you just saw) scripts for the instructor, and an educator guide. This guide contains educator instructions (seen on the left) which include lesson overviews, agenda, learning objectives, materials needed and additional sources for educators to increase their background knowledge of the subject matter. The guide also contains handouts needed for exercises and activities.

Next Steps

- Piloting & evaluation
 - Survey educators and students
- Curriculum expansion
 - Social resistance skills
 - High School



I offered two main recommendations for the WAPC now that they have "Know Drugs".

The first is to pilot and evaluate the curriculum with a few of the interviewees and any other willing educators.

Evaluation of the curriculum can be done by surveying the piloting educators about the curriculum's ease of use and class response to the lessons.

Evaluation could also be done by surveying students or conducting focus groups after the curriculum is taught to discuss the usefulness of the skills and information, and offer feedback or suggestions for future use.

The second recommendation is to expand the curriculum. This could be done in many ways. For example, the WAPC could build additional modules that focus on social resistance skills. Another way is to expand the curriculum to high schoolers. This expansion can cover these topics in greater depth, especially harm reduction since more teens in high school are likely to start using substances at that time.

As the WAPC continues to develop and expand this curriculum they will be able to better serve teens across the state of Washington. Doing so will help teens make safe and healthy choices about substance use in their youth and throughout adulthood.

Thank You!

All Participants

Washington Poison Center

Meghan King, MPH & Alex Sirotzki, MPH

Hallie Pritchett, MPH

Friends & Family

Our awesome cohort!

Finally, I want to thank all the participants in my capstone, the washington poison center for giving me this opportunity, meghan and alex my site supervisors for their kindness and support and my capstone advisory Hallie for her guidance.

I also want to thank my family and friends for their support and our awesome cohort for their snacks, study sessions and friendship!