

7.3

MENTAL HEALTH, SUBSTANCE USE, AND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM

This module focuses on substance use; its connection to mental health; potential effects, risks, and harms related to substance use; and how to reach out for support. Substance use is among the most stigmatized of all health conditions. It's important to talk about it in ways that reduce stigma and decrease barriers to seeking help.

Note: Remind students that the focus is on learning facts and reliable information rather than sharing personal stories. If there is a situation a student would like to speak about, invite them to see you after class. You can also share ideas about additional resources at the end of each module.

It is important to provide students with a **supportive transition** following mental health learning. A list of easy-to-use activities and suggested prompts to encourage students to seek help are included at the end of each module so students can transition to the rest of their day in a positive way.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

D1.2 - demonstrate an understanding of linkages between mental health problems and problematic substance use, as well as between brain development and cannabis use, and identify school and community resources (e.g., trusted adults at school, guidance counsellors, public health services, helplines) that can provide support for mental health concerns relating to substance use, addictions, and related behaviours.

Refer to the [Health and Physical Education curriculum document](#) for a variety of considerations to support planning and delivery of this learning for every student (e.g., students with special education needs and English Language Learners).

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning:

- How substance use and mental health can be connected.
- Potential effects, risks and harms related to substance use (including the impact of cannabis use on brain development).
- To think critically and make healthy decisions for ourselves.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions: "How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?"

For example:

- I know how substance use may affect a developing brain and emotional state.
- I understand ways mental health and substance use can be connected.
- I know factors that will help me with personal decision-making about substance use.

MATERIALS

- Explore Mental Health: A Notebook for Grade 7 Health and Physical Education
- A computer and projector/digital display
- Sticky notes/small squares of paper, or a digital equivalent (optional)

Minds On

Things I've heard ~ 20 min

PURPOSE: This interactive quiz will allow you to learn more about students' knowledge and perceptions of substance use and to dispel some common myths and misconceptions related to substance use while providing basic factual information.

NOTE: As you move through this module, be mindful of creating a non-judgmental tone. People engage with substances for many reasons (e.g., recreational, medical, ceremonial, cultural, religious, and spiritual use). Creating an open, non-stigmatizing conversation can help students ask questions, share ideas, take in information, and be better prepared to make healthy decisions for themselves.

TEACHER PROMPT "Today we are going to talk about substance use. In grade 6 you learned about the effects of cannabis and other drugs on the developing adolescent brain. This year we are going to extend that learning further. The term substances is commonly used as another word for 'drugs.' There are many different types of substances that people may use, such as caffeinated energy drinks, cannabis, alcohol, tobacco, over-the-counter drugs, and prescription medications. Substances can impact us physically, mentally, and emotionally". (Extracted from Ophea's Mental Health Ideas for Action)

PRE-LEARNING ACTIVITY

Prior to the interactive quiz you may wish to complete the first column of a KWL (Know, Wonder, Learned) chart (What do you Know about this topic?) as a class or individually. This activity can help you see what prior learning students have, help identify any misconceptions, and focus the learning for the lesson.

TIP

A KWL chart template with instructions is available. It can also be found in the [student notebook](#), if you choose to use it.

INSTRUCTION 1

Select the method you want to use to deliver this [interactive quiz](#) to students. A slide deck and online quiz are provided for you.

TIP

The questions, answers, and notes to support you with the discussion are available in the Educator Discussion Guide.

INSTRUCTION 2

Following each question pause and use the notes in Discussion Guide to engage in a discussion about the response. The slides provide condensed information. It is important to also engage fully in the discussion guide to cover core content.

TIP

Leave space for students to ask further questions. This could be facilitated using a 'parking lot' or question box. Provide students with a virtual or physical space to do this anonymously if they wish.

TEACHER PROMPT "There is a lot of misinformation out there about substance use, and many of us don't have the basic information we need to help us make informed decisions for ourselves. That's why we're learning about this today".

REFLECTION QUESTIONS (*extension – space for responses is provided in the student notebook*)

- Where do you and your peers tend to learn about substances? Is it from school, friends or family, the media, or somewhere else? How can you decide if the information you are getting is true and fits for you? What might help?

BRIGHT IDEAS

Online quiz formats can be an engaging and strategic option for this activity as they allow students to share their knowledge without worrying about how they may be perceived (e.g., being perceived negatively if they have more detailed knowledge of substances and their

use). Avoid presenting the quiz in a game-like manner (e.g., where students compete for points, playful music is used, and so on). Some students will have deep personal connections to the content. Ensure a sensitive approach when presenting substance use information in this way.

For more specific information about Ontario students and substance use, check out the current **Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey** (OSDUHS). This survey has been provided to Ontario students in grades 7-12 every two years since 1977. It's a great way to amplify student voice. It includes a variety of information related to substance use, such as the most commonly used substances, the number of students reporting past year substance use, and substance use by grade level.

Action

Making connections between mental health and substance use ~ 15 min

PURPOSE: To help students identify the connections between mental health and substance use, and to help them identify factors that may influence our decision-making related to substance use.

TEACHER PROMPT “We just discussed some basic facts and information related to substance use. Now we are going to think more about the connection between mental health and problematic substance use.

Problematic substance use refers to the use of substances in ways that have a higher risk of physical and mental impacts. It includes both potentially harmful use (the use of substances in ways that are illegal, not medically recommended, and risk physical and mental impacts), and substance use disorder”. (Definition from Ontario HPE curriculum)

Note: A video has been prepared with pauses built in for discussion. The discussion questions and space to take notes are provided in the student notebook.

[Access the video transcript here.](#)

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

REFLECTION QUESTIONS (*extension – space for responses is provided in the student notebook*)

CRITICAL THINKING and DECISION MAKING:

- Imagine yourself in a situation similar to the one described in the video.
- What or who guides you when making important decisions? Is it your identity, relationships, values and beliefs, goals, mental health, or something else?

Thinking about SEEKING HELP:

- If Nia or Haris needed help for a substance use problem, where could they go for support? Remind students of the supports they learned about in the previous module.
- Why might it sometimes be challenging to seek support for a substance use problem? Note there can be stigma related to substance use.

TEACHER PROMPT

“Remember, the first step to seek support for substance use problems is the same as seeking support for mental health problems--connecting with a caring adult and telling them how you feel. There are supports in your personal life, school, and community that can help you”.

BRIGHT IDEAS

The video scenarios have intentionally been left open-ended so that students can imagine the possible outcomes (including negative impacts of substance use). The hope is that, should it come from students, this conversation will be more openly received without stigma and judgement.

Educator Note: As educators help students to identify school and community resources that support mental health problems and those relating to substance use, it's important to note that resources and services can vary greatly across different regions and change over time. In addition, there may be many less-known formal and informal culturally responsive resources and services available.

Regardless of the type of mental health problem, the first step for students at this age and stage is the same: reaching out to a caring adult in their personal life, school, or community to seek help (which can mean calling or texting a help line). **From there, caring adults can work together to help students navigate the resources and support available to them.** It's important to stay up to date on the resources available within the school and board, and work collaboratively with other professionals to ensure students are provided with the most helpful information.

Additional information on supporting students is available in the Educator Guide.

Extension Activity

Planning for the Future

PURPOSE: This activity is a natural follow-up to the learning about identifying factors that impact our decision-making.

CURRICULUM CONNECTION

This activity has natural connections to expectations within the Grade 7 Language curriculum. For example:

Writing - Voice 2.2 establish a distinctive voice in their writing appropriate to the subject and audience

TEACHER PROMPT "We are going to create a letter to your next year self. Think about what is important to you and the hopes and plans you have for the next year. It's helpful to think about these things and write them down. It will also be helpful to look at this letter and reflect on and refine your thinking one year later".

Instruction A

- Suggest students may wish to include some of the following:
- reminders of their skills and strengths, things they can be proud of, and encouraging words
- reminders of the supports they have available

- reminders that sometimes things haven't turned out the way we expected and that it was okay and even led to learning, growth, and other positive outcomes
- reminders that as we learn and grow, sometimes we set new goals for ourselves (so it's okay if goals have changed!)
- support managing their expectations
- acknowledgement of positives, even if they are not what students had hoped for or expected

TEACHER PROMPT "I'm going to share a letter template that includes some prompts, but you can write a letter or audio/video message that is all your own. The important thing is that you reflect meaningfully and set some meaningful goals for yourself. You don't have to have everything figured out and things may not go to plan, but it is helpful to think about a possible path while remembering that sometimes new and different pathways can lead great places."

Instruction B

Share this template provided with students and provide time for them to create their own message. If students wish, they can use an online site that allows them to create and send a message to themselves or send themselves their letter in an email by specifying a future send date of their choosing.

TRY IT!

Your mental health matters too! Consider creating your own letter to your next year self-alongside students. Include your hopes and plans as an educator, and reminders of your skills, supports, and strengths. Send yourself a little encouragement! Then check in with yourself a year from now.

Consolidation

Sharing Strategies and Learnings ~ 5 min

PURPOSE: To give students the opportunity to reflect on the learning and share their ideas.

NOTE: This student reflection is intended to be flexible. You may ask students to reflect individually or share their reflections (e.g., orally with a partner or the larger group, or through sticky notes or other digital tools). Students may also capture their reflections in their notebook.

- What did you find interesting or helpful about what you learned?
- Did anything surprise you? Is there anything you are still wondering about?
- Has anything changed in terms of the way you think about mental health?
- What is one thing you learned that you can use to make healthy decisions for yourself about substance use?

KEY LEARNING

- Substance use can affect each of us differently. When we are **younger** (age 25 or less), some substances (e.g., cannabis) can have particularly **negative effects** on our brains because they are still developing.
- Our mental health **can play a role** in substance use and substance use can negatively impact our mental health.
- We can **seek support** for substance use problems the **same way** we seek support for mental health problems.

SUPPORTIVE TRANSITION

A **supportive transition** from mental health learning is recommended. Please see a list of easy-to-use transition activities, as well as suggested prompts to support students in seeking help within the [Supportive Transitions Tip Sheet](#). This is an important part of the learning and should be repeated each time the module is paused or completed.

PARENT/GUARDIAN COMMUNICATION

You can use this brief [parent/guardian communication](#) to share and continue the learning following student participation in this module.

Things I've Heard - Substance Use Quiz Educator Discussion Guide

Question	Answer	Potential Discussion Points
Someone in my class told me that cannabis is legal. Does that mean that it is safe for young people to use?	No	Cannabis and alcohol are legal in Ontario for recreational use for adults, but not for those under the age of 19. Just because something is legal does not mean that it is safe or healthy, especially considering that cannabis is damaging to an adolescent's developing brain. It's important to remember that even legal substances can harm our health if used excessively Source: Cannabis Educators Toolkit.
I'm really close with my Auntie. I read online that having strong relationships could make it less likely to have substance use problems. Is that true?	Yes	Feeling connected to a family member, or someone at school or in the community, is one way that we can help prevent substance use problems. This feeling of acceptance also supports our mental health and overall well-being. When we have meaningful relationships in our lives, we are less likely to explore other things that may not be as healthy or helpful. Source: What is substance use? Kids Help Phone
I heard vaping is less harmful than smoking cigarettes. Is that true?	No	We don't fully understand the impact of vaping. We know vaping can lead to addiction and affect brain development (e.g., if you are vaping nicotine or cannabis); expose you to harmful chemicals, like formaldehyde and acrolein, and metals and contaminants like nickel, tin, and aluminum; and cause lung damage. But we don't know the impact of some of the chemicals found in vaping liquid, like vegetable glycerin and propylene glycol. The long-term health consequences of vaping aren't yet known. Source: Consider the Consequences of Vaping Canada.ca
My big sister is old enough to try cannabis, but she said she doesn't want to. She heard that it could cause changes to her brain. Is that true?	Yes	Teenagers and younger children are especially susceptible to the negative effects of any substance use, including cannabis use. That's because the brain is still developing. It continues to develop until about age 25. Cannabis use before that time can cause

		changes to the developing brain, leading to damage. Source: YouthREX - An Indigenous Perspective, Cannabis and Vaping, A Toolkit for Educators
I've heard that you can eat as many cannabis gummies as you want, and you won't get sick. Is that true?	No	Using too much cannabis at one time can cause us to feel very unwell. We can experience things such as severe anxiety/panic, increased heart rate, dizziness, nausea and vomiting, or even difficulty telling what is real and what isn't. It can be hard to tell how much cannabis you are using when eating or drinking cannabis (edibles), or even when you are inhaling cannabis (smoking or vaping). Source: YouthREX - An Indigenous Perspective, Cannabis and Vaping, a Toolkit for Educators
I follow a counselor on social media and he says that substance use and mental health problems can be connected. Is that true?	Yes	Problematic substance use and mental health problems are often closely connected. That doesn't mean everyone who uses substances has a mental health problem. But many people experience both (regardless of which one comes first), although it is important to note that one doesn't necessarily cause the other. The causes can be different or related to a common factor (e.g., our genetics/physical makeup, environment, or experiences). Source: <u>HPE curriculum document</u> .
My friend said the way we feel about our looks can be connected to substance use. Is that true?	Yes	Worries about our body image (the way we picture our bodies/how we look and how we think and feel about them) or athletic performance can be linked with problematic substance use (including steroid use). For example, substances can be used to impact our appetite or to try to manage negative feelings about ourselves. This is another example of the connection that can occur between mental health problems and substance use. Source: Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse and the National Eating Disorder Information Centre
I read an article that said having goals and dreams for the future can help prevent	Yes	Yes! Goals and dreams for the future are like a roadmap that can motivate us and help remind us of what is important to us. They help us

substance use problems. Is that really true?		focus on making choices that get us closer to where we want to go and avoid anything that might impact the future we see for ourselves. Source: What is substance use? - Kids Help Phone
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