

Drug education

KS5/Post-16, Lesson 1: Understanding risks and consequences



Understanding risks and consequences

This is the first of five lessons for key stage 5 on understanding the risks and consequences of substance use; and making informed decisions about alcohol and other drugs. This lesson explores the effects of illegal drugs, consequences for possessing or supplying illegal drugs, and the impact of drug supply chains on the wider community.

Learning objective

To learn about the risks and consequences of drug use.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- identify illegal drugs and describe their associated risks
- explain the consequences of possessing, using or supplying illegal drugs
- analyse the impact of drug supply chains on communities at a local, national and international level

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Flipchart paper and pens
- Post-it notes
- Resource 1: *What I know now* [1 per student]
- Resource 2: *Risks and effects* [1 per pair]
- Resource 2a: *Risks and effects – alternative* [support option, as required]
- Resource 2b: *Risks and effects – answers* [1 copy for teacher reference]
- Resource 3: *Choices and consequences* [1 per small group]
- Resource 4: *What's the impact?* [support option, as required]

Climate for learning

Make sure you have read the accompanying teacher guidance notes before teaching this lesson. These include relevant subject knowledge for this topic, guidance on creating a safe learning environment, and curriculum links.

Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 10–11, 2 mins)

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes. Explain that today's lesson will explore the risks of using illegal drugs, including potential effects on mental and physical health, the consequences of possessing or supplying illegal drugs, and the impact of supplying drugs on the wider community.

Use slide 11 to establish or revisit ground rules and explain that if students have worries or questions during or after the lesson that they do not want to raise in front of the class, they can write their question on a piece of paper, anonymously or with their name, and put it in the question box.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 12, 10 mins)

Ask students to respond to the questions on **Resource 1: What I know now**, to demonstrate their prior learning from key stage 4. As this is a baseline assessment, they should complete it on their own, without any further prompting or discussion with others.

Circulate as students complete the activity, to gauge what they already know, especially regarding the law relating to alcohol and other drugs, and the effects of drug and alcohol use.

Use this activity to identify any gaps or misconceptions about alcohol and other drugs that students might have, and plan how to address these over the course of the lesson. For example, if students show less knowledge and understanding of the risks associated with a range of drugs, you may want to spend more time on the first core activity, using the teacher notes to address the gaps in their knowledge.

Core activities

Understanding drugs and their risks (Slides 13–14, 10 mins)

In pairs, ask students to use **Resource 2: Risks and effects** to match examples of drugs to the correct type of drug, by writing the corresponding numbers in the table. Then, ask them to identify the associated risks of those drugs by writing the corresponding letters into the correct row. Some letters may be used across multiple rows.

When students have completed the activity, ask volunteers to share their answers, as students self-assess their work. Use **Resource 2b: Risks and effects – answers** to guide feedback and answer any questions that students may have.

Draw out key learning, using slide 14:

- *Although some drugs listed may be used legally (e.g. benzodiazepines when prescribed by a healthcare professional; alcohol, or nicotine for over 18s), all drugs carry risks to physical and mental health and wellbeing when used other than for their intended purpose.*
- *As illegal drugs are unregulated, there is always an increased risk of harm, and it is often impossible to tell what is in a substance. Illegal drugs may be sold as different products, or in packaging designed to look like those which are prescribed by a healthcare professional. For*

example, a vape which is said to contain the substance THC may actually contain synthetic cannabinoids, while drugs sold illegally, under the guise of being medicines, may contain synthetic opioids.

- *Some drugs, such as nicotine, are restricted in their availability to young people due to the increased risk of developing dependence on the substance. For more information about challenging misconceptions related to the use of alcohol and other drugs, including dependence or ideas about 'addiction', see pages 6–8 of the **Teacher guidance**.*



Support: Give **Resource 2a: Risks and effects – alternative** to any students who might need extra support and ask them to complete the missing information.



Challenge: Explain that the government has recently classified a wider group of synthetic opioids, known as 'nitazenes', as Class A drugs. Ask students to discuss what the positive impact of this classification might be, and what other measures might help people to understand the risks of using illegal drugs and seek support. Finally, ask students to consider why the government needs to keep classifying drugs.

Exploring legal consequences (Slides 15–16, 15 mins)

Using slide 15, ask students to 'think-pair-share' what is meant by the 'supply' of drugs.

Take feedback, drawing out that the 'supply' of illegal drugs includes selling to others as well as sharing them with family or friends, for example as a gift or reward. Sharing or selling controlled substances, such as prescription-only medicines including antibiotics or antidepressants, is also illegal.

Then, working in small groups of three to four, give students one of the scenarios in **Resource 3: Choices and consequences** and ask them to use it to help them note down their answers to the questions on slide 16, on flipchart paper.

After five minutes, ask groups to swap their flipchart paper with another group and look at the other scenario, adding any additional points they can think of.

Take feedback about both scenarios.

Students might suggest:

Joanna:

- *If Joanna decides to purchase the drugs, she is at risk of being found in possession of an illegal substance. The consequences she might face depend on what the substance is. For example, if the drugs contain substances such as ecstasy, cocaine, psilocybin mushrooms, or LSD, she would be in possession of a Class A drug. Joanna may face a fine or time in custody, depending on the amount of the substance that she possesses, or if she has an existing criminal record¹.*
- *Short-term consequences might include Joanna feeling embarrassed or worried if reprimanded by police in public or taken into custody. She might feel nervous or anxious about being found with illegal substances. She may become unwell if her body responds negatively to the substance, and her behaviour might change if she takes the substance, for example, becoming less aware of her surroundings, making decisions that lead to harm for herself or others, or doing something that might damage her relationships with others.*

¹ In Scotland, someone found in possession of a class A, B, or C drug may receive a Recorded Police Warning. This is not the case in England or Wales, although possession of a controlled substance is still a criminal offence across the UK. (www.copfs.gov.uk/about-copfs/news/lord-advocate-statement-on-diversion-from-prosecution/ [Accessed 12.06.2024])


- *Long-term consequences might include Joanna receiving a criminal record if found with illegal substances. This might impact her employment, now or in future, if an employer asks Joanna if she has any criminal convictions (although explain to students that it is still very possible to find stable employment with a criminal conviction, depending on the severity of the offence). If Joanna is asked to share this information and chooses not to, this would be a further criminal offence. It could also affect factors such as her ability to travel, as some countries will restrict entry with a prior conviction.*


Ivan:

- *If Ivan decides to speak to the friend about selling the 'product', and this involves him selling illegal drugs, he could face legal consequences for the supply of classified drugs, or for possession with intent to supply. These might include being referred to his local Youth Offending Team and being placed on a plan to prevent further offending (for example, attending regular meetings with a member of the team). Depending on the severity of Ivan's actions, he could face time in custody, for example, if he is found in possession of a large quantity of classified drugs with intent to supply, or if he becomes involved in other related criminal activity.*
- *Short-term consequences might include Ivan being placed in danger by the person arranging to have him supply illegal products. This is a form of child criminal exploitation, and Ivan may suffer from mental or physical harm.*
- *Long-term consequences might include Ivan's wellbeing being impacted if he experiences harm as a result of supplying illegal drugs. If he is found with illegal drugs, with intent to supply, he will face a criminal record. This might affect his current employment, where he could lose his job, or future employment, if he is asked to share this information. It could also impact his education, for example if he faces temporary or permanent exclusion from college.*

Finally, ask the class to identify any differences between the consequences the two characters might face, and take feedback.

Students might suggest: Ivan and Joanna might face different consequences, such as Ivan facing a more serious penalty for the supply of drugs. As he is a minor, this would also be shared with his parent(s) or guardian(s). If taken into custody, Ivan's legal identity as a minor would mean he might be kept in youth custody, rather than an institution for adults as Joanna would be. However, if he is convicted after his 18th birthday, he may face more serious consequences as an adult. As an adult, Joanna would likely have to declare that her conviction is 'not spent' (not yet finished) for a longer time period than Ivan.

 **Support:** To help students identify consequences for each character, ask them to consider the following factors: education, employment, relationships, feelings.

 **Challenge:** Ask students to identify any factors which might impact Joanna or Ivan's decision to purchase or supply drugs. How might they overcome, or turn away from, any factors that influence them to make a decision that could be harmful or risky?

Considering the wider impact (Slides 17-19, 10 mins)

Ask students to read the conversation between two friends on slides 17-18.

In pairs, ask them to discuss what the impact of the drug trade might be at the local, community level (e.g. direct impact on the area where drugs are traded); the national level (the impact on the UK); and the international level (the impact on different countries, or communities in different countries).

Take feedback, collating answers on the whiteboard or flipchart paper. Use the suggestions in **Resource 4: What's the impact?** to help guide discussion.

Students might suggest:

- *At a local level, the drug trade might cause crime rates to rise in certain areas, making people feel unsafe. This may attract further crime, raise tensions in the area, or make community relations break down. This may also impact the local economy, if an area is seen as at higher risk of violent crime. The drug trade can lead to worse health outcomes for the local population, for example if more people are hospitalised or face health complications due to using illegal substances, or if they have experienced harm as a result of exploitation and drug trafficking.*
- *At a national level, the drug trade can lead to an escalation of policing against drug offences. This might increase tensions between different groups and the police, and lead to increased costs for the police and other emergency services. It may also lead to higher spending in the healthcare sector in response to drug-related illnesses or casualties.*
- *At an international level, the drug trade can contribute to higher levels of violent crime in areas where there are high levels of drugs and human trafficking. These areas may also experience higher levels of poverty compared to areas where drugs are consumed, for example in countries with a higher gross national income. This economic inequality can be made worse by the exploitative nature of the drug trade.*
- *The drug trade also has a significant and damaging environmental impact. For example, the harvesting, production and transportation of illegal substances create a significant carbon footprint and other harms, such as water and air pollution, and deforestation. Consuming illegal substances also produces high levels of waste pollution.*



Support: Ask students to use **Resource 4: What's the impact?** to sort the suggestions into the three categories, and then add their own ideas.



Challenge: Ask students to consider how Friend B's thinking might be challenged by Friend A's ideas. What factor might most impact their future decision about whether to buy or use illegal drugs?

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slides 20-21, 10 mins)

Ask students to return to the questions from the baseline assessment. Remind them of the learning outcomes for the lesson, and using these to reflect on their learning, ask them to correct any misconceptions they may have written initially, or add any new learning (in a different coloured pen). Circulate as students complete the activity, to check student progress and identify if there are any remaining gaps in their understanding, or misconceptions, to address in future lessons.

Give each student a post-it note and ask them to write down either:

- one way the lesson has changed or challenged the way they think about drugs and/or,
- one question they still have about drugs

Ask them to write their answers anonymously and drop them in a box when they leave the lesson in a few minutes.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 22, 3 mins)

If time allows, answer any questions from the question box that are appropriate to answer in front of the class. If students have written their names, keep the answers anonymous.

Remind students how they can access further advice, guidance and support related to substance use, including:

- Speak to staff in school such as their form tutor, head of year, school nurse, or a member of the safeguarding team
- Speak to another trusted adult such as a parent/carer, or family member, or visit their GP
- Visit Childline, which can be contacted by young people under 19, at www.childline.org.uk; or by phone on 0800 1111
- Visit their GP or www.nhs.uk/live-well/quit-smoking/nhs-stop-smoking-services-help-you-quit/ for help quitting smoking
- Visit FRANK at www.talktofrank.com/get-help/find-support-near-you to find local support services
- Visit Release, which provides a free, confidential and non-judgmental information and advice service in relation to drugs and drug laws, at www.release.org.uk/drugs-legal-advice, 0207 324 2989, or ask@release.org.uk

Extension activity

Blog post (Slide 23)

Ask students to write a short article for the school or college's student paper/website about the social or environmental impact of using or buying illegal and harmful substances.