

Drug education

Year 7-8, Lesson 3: Alcohol and risk



Alcohol and risk

This is the third of three drug education lessons, for year 7-8. This lesson focuses on specific risks relating to alcohol use, and challenges some of the perceived social norms about drinking alcohol.

Classroom-ready PowerPoint versions of the lesson plans are available to [members](#) of the PSHE Association.

Learning objective

To learn about the risks and consequences of alcohol use.

Learning outcomes

Students will be able to:

- explain that most young people their age do not use alcohol and analyse the reasons why young people's alcohol use is declining
- describe the risks of alcohol use
- describe strategies to manage influences on alcohol use
- identify sources of support for alcohol misuse

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.

Resources required

- Box or envelope for questions
- Large sheets of paper and marker pens
- Students' 'substance use draw and write' baseline activity sheets from lesson 1
- Resource 1: Short and long-term risks of alcohol [one per pair]
- Resource 1a: Card sort of short and long-term risks of alcohol [support option, as required]
- Resource 2: Diamond 9 card sort [one cut up set per pair/small group]

Baseline assessment

Introduction (Slides 10–11, 5 mins)

Ensure ground rules are established with the group before teaching this lesson and make students aware of the question box, which will be available throughout the lesson. Remind students that if they 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.

Introduce the learning objective and outcomes for the lesson, explaining to students that they will be exploring the risks relating to alcohol consumption and ways to manage the pressures on young people to drink alcohol, whilst also recognising the changes to young people's use of alcohol over recent years.

Baseline assessment activity (Slide 12, 10 mins)

Indicate an imaginary line across the classroom with 0% at one end and 100% at the other. Read the questions below, one at a time, and ask students to stand along the line to indicate what they think the correct percentage is in each case. (An alternative approach would be for the class to direct you to stand on the line where they as a group estimate the correct answer to be.)

After you have asked all the questions, give the correct answers and ask students to note whether they had overestimated or underestimated the percentage (answers given in brackets):

In the [Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Survey in England \(SDDU\) 2023](#), what percentage of young people aged 11–13:

1. said they have never tried alcohol? [77%]
2. said they had drunk alcohol in the last week? [3% - so 97% had not]
3. said they usually drank alcohol at least once a month? [3% - so 97% do not]
4. said they thought it was OK to drink alcohol once a week? [8% - so 92% said it was not]

Then, ask them:

- Were the actual answers different from your guesses? How?
- Were there any answers that surprised you?

As in lesson 2 when considering smoking, students are likely to have overestimated their peers' engagement in alcohol use due to media messaging, interactions with only a small section of society which skews perceptions, and some young people claiming to drink more alcohol than they actually do. Correcting this perception of their peers' behaviour supports students to resist internal pressure to 'fit in'. Refer to the evidence briefing paper for further guidance about using positive social norms with care.

Core activities

Alcohol in decline (Slide 13, 5 mins)

Explain that some people will choose not to drink alcohol for religious or cultural reasons, but evidence from a number of surveys in recent years has shown a steady decline in young people's alcohol use generally, across the population. In small groups, ask students to discuss why they think this is the case.

Take feedback. Explain that it is difficult to be certain of the causes for this decline, but researchers have suggested that reasons might include:

- *Drinking less alcohol could be part of a positive change in attitudes and behaviour amongst young people, in which many are adopting a healthier lifestyle, abstaining from substance use, and becoming more environmentally conscious (which may influence food and drink choices).*
- *Advances in digital technology and increased connectivity give young people alternative opportunities to socialise that do not involve alcohol, and that reduce the importance of pubs and clubs for meeting people and building social relationships and networks.*
- *Social media and other online media, together with better health education, can also increase knowledge about alcohol-related harms. Social media can also raise the visibility of online communities that support, celebrate, and further normalise not drinking alcohol.*
- *'Dry months' such as Dry January have become popular and increasingly familiar over recent years, normalising abstaining from alcohol as a positive lifestyle choice.*
- *Changes to alcohol-related policies/laws e.g. on alcohol pricing, making cheap alcohol less available to young people, and requiring proof of age (challenge 25).*
- *Economic factors can reduce the money young people have available to spend on alcohol.*
- *Changes in exposure to alcohol advertising and marketing activities.¹*
- *Changes in parental practice, such as parental modelling, monitoring of children's behaviour, alcohol supply restriction (both in and out of the family home), and alcohol-specific rule setting. Studies have also demonstrated the importance of more general aspects of parenting on adolescent drinking, such as open communication between parents and children, general discipline, and parental support on adolescent drinking.²*

Short-term and long-term risks (Slide 14, 10 mins)

Using **Resource 1: Short and long-term risks of alcohol**, ask students to work in pairs to suggest possible short-term and long-term risks of alcohol use. They should write the short-term risks in the box closest to the image and the long-term risks in the outer box.

Share answers as a class, ensuring students update their work with additional ideas.

Take feedback, drawing out key learning:

- *Short-term risks could include: dehydration, lack of inhibitions and feeling sociable – leading to 'out of character' behaviours, feeling sick, feeling drowsy, vomiting, headache, diarrhoea, dizziness and lack of coordination, loss of personal possessions, making poor decisions such as overspending, etc., being at greater risk in certain situations, accidents and injuries due to falling over, memory loss, a 'hangover' the following day, and alcohol poisoning.*

¹ Vashishtha et al. (2019) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16066359.2019.1663831>

² Vashishtha et al. (2019) <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/16066359.2019.1663831>

- *It is against the law to buy alcohol under 18 years old. 16 or 17-year-olds accompanied by an adult can drink - but not buy - beer, wine or cider with a meal. Under 18s can be stopped, fined or arrested by police if caught drinking alcohol in public.*
- *Long-term risks of alcohol use (which can take many years to develop) include health issues such as high blood pressure, stroke, cirrhosis/liver disease, effects on mood such as anxiety and depression, fertility issues, cancers including liver, bowel, breast and mouth; alcohol dependency; fallout from unwise actions while drunk including relationship changes and feelings of regret, and serious injuries. There are also sugar-related concerns including obesity, dental health issues and acne.*



Support: Use **Resource 1a: Card sort of short and long-term risks of alcohol** to make labels that students can use to add to **Resource 1**.



Challenge: Ask students to give examples of how short-term effects of alcohol use can have long-term consequences. *Students may identify: impaired decision-making, leading to an accident resulting in long-term injuries, or lack of inhibitions and impaired decision-making leading to unsafe sex, which in turn could lead to unplanned pregnancy or STIs.*

Diamond 9 of influences (Slide 15, 10 mins)

Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to sort the cards in **Resource 2: Diamond 9 card sort**, ranking the different influences on young people's alcohol use into a diamond shape. The influence they think is the most significant should be at the top of the diamond and the least significant at the bottom of the diamond shape. Cards placed next to each other in a row are equally significant.

Explain that there are no right or wrong answers and that this activity allows them to assess their own opinions.

Share some of the answers as a class and ask those who did the challenge activity how answers might differ for adults and why.



Support: Students who need additional support can be given fewer cards to sort into a Diamond 5. Ensure the reasons provided are distinctly different.



Challenge: Ask students to rearrange the reasons to show which are most to least likely to influence adults to drink alcohol.

Managing influences (Slide 16, 10 mins)

From the feedback to the diamond 9 activity, choose six influence cards that students have tended to place highest in their diamonds. Divide the class into six groups and allocate one of the influences to each group.

Ask each group to imagine that someone who was being influenced in that way (e.g. someone who drinks alcohol to fit in with their peers, or to help with stress) had asked them their advice. Each group should discuss and then write their advice on a large sheet of paper.

Ask someone from each group to stick their sheet on the wall and invite the groups to visit each sheet to look at all the points, adding to the other groups' ideas:

- any additional advice they can think of
- possible sources of support – people or organisations – they could go to for help

Ask students to summarise key pieces of advice.

Suggestions might include:

- *If you tell your friends you would prefer not to drink alcohol, some of them are likely to agree – they may only be drinking to ‘fit in’ too.*
- *If you’re feeling stressed, alcohol could make things worse. It would be more helpful to talk to a trusted adult about any problems or worries.*
- *It is much healthier and safer to find other activities that help you feel happy and confident e.g. a hobby, taking part in a sport, or organising social events that don’t involve alcohol.*
- *There are lots of alcohol-free versions of popular drinks that taste much the same, so you can have the taste without the harmful effects. These are great for social events and celebrations too.*

Reflection and endpoint assessment

Reflection and endpoint assessment (Slide 17, 5 mins)

Give students back the baseline assessment activity they completed at the start of lesson 1 (Lesson 1 **Resource 1: Substance use draw and write baseline activity**). Ask them to think back over the last three lessons and now re-visit this draw and write activity, editing their initial ideas and adding any additional information in a different colour pen, to demonstrate their learning over the scheme of work.

Their updated draw and write activity sheets can be used to inform future teaching and as evidence of progress over the three lessons.

Signposting support

Signposting support (Slide 18, 5 mins)

Summarise sources of support students identified in the Managing Influences activity above. Ensure that students know where they can seek help and advice, both now and in the future, if they are concerned about drug use. Students wishing to seek further guidance can:

- speak to a parent/carer, tutor, pastoral lead, or other trusted adult
- contact Childline www.childline.org.uk 0800 1111
- visit www.nhs.uk
- visit www.talktofrank.com
- You may also wish to make them aware of the [National Association for children of alcoholics](http://www.naah.org.uk)

Extension activity

Public information campaign (Slide 19)

Ask students to design a public information campaign to raise awareness about the statistics relating to young people’s alcohol use. The aim is to get across the message that most young people do not misuse or currently use alcohol, so young people should not feel pressurised to drink alcohol to be cool or fit in.