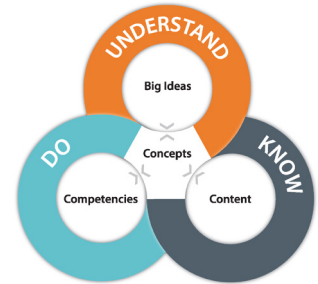


## Highs and Lows: Cannabis use compared with other drugs

This lesson invites students to reflect on their perceptions of cannabis use, alcohol use and vaping in the school community, and beyond. The lesson challenges students to think about where our ideas and attitudes about different drugs come from. It also encourages them to explore the ways our ideas and attitudes about drugs influence our behaviour and the behaviour of those around us, and vice versa.



The lesson uses [Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth](#), a report by the McCreary Centre Society based on the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, completed by almost 38,000 students in Grades 7-12 across British Columbia. Some students filling in the survey also provided comments in the margins or on the back page. McCreary’s Youth Research Academy (YRA)—a group of youth aged 16 to 24 with experience of the government care system—also provided reflections on the issues. Some of these student comments and YRA reflections are used in the dialogue-based instructional strategies.

Talking openly and honestly about cannabis and other drugs may not be easy for students. Drug education classes have tended to tell students what and how to think. Sometimes those with more drug use experience dominate the conversation. This can make it awkward for all students to share their ideas about the ways cannabis and other drugs may affect individuals, families and communities.

Making room for students of all ages and experiences to feel comfortable exploring cannabis and other drug use in a reflective way is key to healthy development. As a teacher, you can help to create such an atmosphere by approaching drug-related topics with a non-judgmental, authentic sense of curiosity about what young people think, feel and experience when it comes to cannabis and other drug use. See [Facilitating Dialogue in the Classroom](#).

### Instructional Strategies

Depending on the time you have available and the context of your classroom, you may want to explore one or both of the cannabis-related themes below.

#### Cannabis and Alcohol:

1. Break students into small groups and give each group a *Comparing cannabis and alcohol* handout (included). Invite each group to discuss their

thoughts about the potential harms and benefits of both cannabis and alcohol, and summarize the group’s ideas in writing in each quadrant. Then facilitate a class discussion using questions such as:

- a. How difficult or easy was it for you as a group to agree on ideas for each quadrant? What might explain this difficulty or easiness?



- b. How would this experience be different had your parents or teachers been in your group? Why?
- c. How do people’s different ideas and attitudes about cannabis and alcohol impact the behavioural norms and rules in your community?

2. Provide a bit of background to *Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth* and distribute or display the quotes below (handout included). Then facilitate a class discussion or have students work in groups to discuss issues raised by some of the quotes. The questions provided may be helpful in facilitating dialogue.

*“I think I need help for my alcohol use which is weird because I smoke waaay more weed than I drink [alcohol].” ~Grade 9 student*

*“Cannabis and alcohol are very different. With cannabis, it seems you are way less likely to do something really angry and impulsive like destroy property or get into a fight.” ~YRA reflection*

*“There needs to be more information about the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis. The symptoms of impairment can be easy to hide, and there isn’t an established method of measuring impairment like there is for alcohol.” ~YRA reflection*

- a. What might the quotes suggest about how each contributor thinks about cannabis and alcohol?
- b. How do you think our ideas and attitudes about drugs influence our behaviours? Give examples.
- c. Do you think our culture influences our ideas and attitudes about different drugs? If so, in what ways? How do you feel about the influence of culture?
- d. How might our ideas and attitudes about drugs influence the ways we perceive the risks associated with drug use, and ways to reach out for help if needed?

**Cannabis and Vaping:**

1. Provide a bit of background to *Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth* and distribute or display the *Cannabis and Vaping* handout (included). Have students work in groups to complete the table. Review their results to

ensure they calculated cannabis use by adding the figures from columns 1 and 2 for each year and by adding the figures from columns 1 and 3 for vaping. The following chart shows the correct figures.

|   | In 2013    | In 2018    |
|---|------------|------------|
| What percentage of youth used cannabis in the past month? | <b>14%</b> | <b>16%</b> |
| What percentage of youth vaped in the past month?         | <b>3%</b>  | <b>28%</b> |

Then facilitate a class discussion using questions such as:

- a. What do you think might explain the small increase in cannabis use?
- b. What do you think might explain the dramatic increase in vaping?

- c. What different kinds of factors might contribute to changing drug use phenomena? Using your knowledge of the period 2013-2018, try to give examples of things that may be contributing to the observed changes in drug use patterns.



2. Provide a bit of background on the Youth Research Academy and distribute or display the reflections below (handout included). Then facilitate a class discussion or have students work in groups to discuss issues raised by the quotes. The questions provided may be helpful in facilitating dialogue.

*"It was surprising to us that fewer youth are using cannabis than in the 2000's. Maybe it's because it is not as popular in pop culture or it could be that it is now so normalized that it is not as cool anymore. These days, using pills and other party drugs might be more popular with youth who are looking for a more energizing experience, and they see cannabis as more relaxing than energizing." ~YRA reflection*

*"It might be that fewer youth wrote about cannabis in 2018 because of legalization. Since cannabis was about to be legalized in 2018, it might not have been as much of a hot topic as it was in 2013." ~YRA reflection*

- a. What makes something "cool"? Who defines what is or is not "cool"? Why does what is "cool" change over time?
- b. Why do we sometimes engage in "cool" activities even when we know they are potentially harmful? Can being illegal make something "cool"? Explain.
- c. What different kinds of factors influence drug use patterns according to the quotes? Do you agree or disagree? Why? What other factors might influence drug use patterns?

## Drug Literacy

### BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful.
- ✓ We can learn how to control our drug use by reflecting on the different ways people have thought about drugs, exploring stories from various cultures and listening to each other.

### COMPETENCIES

- ✓ Assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and societies
- ✓ Explore and appreciate diversity related to the reasons people use drugs, the impact of drug use and the social attitudes toward various drugs
- ✓ Recognize binary constructs (e.g., good vs bad) and assess their limitation in addressing complex social issues like drug use
- ✓ Recognize how official responses to drugs may have less to do with the drug than with other factors
- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs

Check out the full list of [drug literacy competencies](#), as defined by the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research.



## Links to curriculum

### CORE COMPETENCIES

This lesson helps build capacity in all three Core Competencies: Communication (communicating and collaborating), Thinking (creative, critical and reflective thinking), and Personal and Social Development (personal awareness and responsibility, positive personal and cultural identity, and social awareness and responsibility).

### PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION 7

#### BIG IDEAS

- ✓ We experience many changes in our lives that influence how we see ourselves and others
- ✓ Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional and mental well-being
- ✓ Learning about similarities and differences in individuals and groups influences community health

#### COMPETENCIES

- ✓ Identify factors that influence healthy choices and explain their potential health effects
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used
- ✓ Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others

### PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION 8

#### BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional and mental well-being
- ✓ Healthy relationships can help us lead rewarding and fulfilling lives

#### COMPETENCIES

- ✓ Identify factors that influence healthy choices and explain their potential health effects
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used
- ✓ Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others



## PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION 9

### BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Healthy choices influence our physical, emotional and mental well-being

### COMPETENCIES

- ✓ Identify factors that influence health messages from a variety of sources, and analyze their influence on behaviour
- ✓ Reflect on outcomes of personal healthy-living goals and assess strategies used
- ✓ Assess and evaluate strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others

## PHYSICAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION 10

### BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Understanding our strengths, weaknesses, and personal preferences helps us plan and achieve our goals
- ✓ Healthy choices influence, and are influenced by, our physical, emotional, and mental well-being

### COMPETENCIES

- ✓ Explore factors contributing to substance use
- ✓ Explore and describe factors that shape personal identities, including social and cultural factors

This resource was developed by the **Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research** with funding provided by the **BC Ministry of Health**. Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the BC Ministry of Health or the Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research.



## Comparing Cannabis and Alcohol

Reflect on the potential harms and benefits of cannabis and alcohol. Then, as a group, write your thoughts in the following quadrant.

|                                    |                                       |
|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>Potential harms of CANNABIS</b> | <b>Potential benefits of CANNABIS</b> |
| <b>Potential harms of ALCOHOL</b>  | <b>Potential benefits of ALCOHOL</b>  |



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### Comments and reflections by youth.

*"I think I need help for my alcohol use which is weird because I smoke waaay more weed than I drink [alcohol]."*  
~Grade 9 student

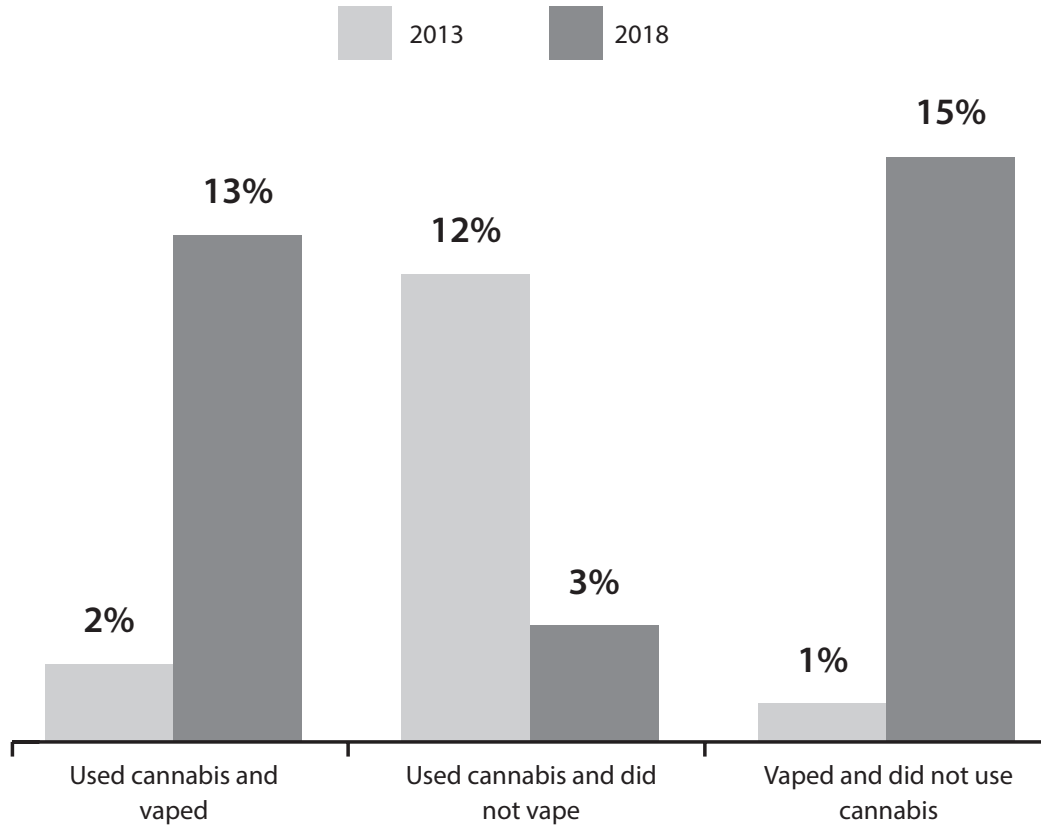
*"Cannabis and alcohol are very different. With cannabis, it seems you are way less likely to do something really angry and impulsive like destroy property or get into a fight."* ~YRA reflection

*"There needs to be more information about the dangers of driving under the influence of cannabis. The symptoms of impairment can be easy to hide, and there isn't an established method of measuring impairment like there is for alcohol."* ~YRA reflection

### Reflective questions

- a. What might the quotes suggest about how each contributor thinks about cannabis and alcohol?
- b. How do you think our ideas and attitudes about drugs influence our behaviours? Give examples.
- c. Do you think our culture influences our ideas and attitudes about different drugs? If so, in what ways? How do you feel about the influence of culture?
- d. How might our ideas and attitudes about drugs influence the ways we perceive the risks associated with drug use, and ways to reach out for help if needed?

### Youth who used cannabis and/or vaped in the past month



|   | In 2013 | In 2018 |
|---|---------|---------|
| What percentage of youth used cannabis in the past month? |         |         |
| What percentage of youth vaped in the past month?         |         |         |





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