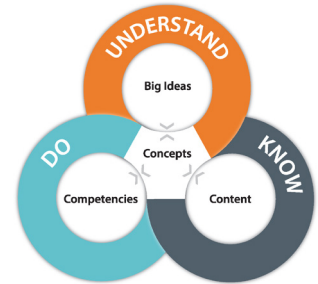


Youth Perspectives: Reasons for Using Cannabis



Young people choose to use substances for various reasons, according to [Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth](#), produced by the McCreary Centre Society. The report is based on the 2018 BC Adolescent Health Survey, completed by almost 38,000 students in Grades 7-12 across British Columbia. Students filling in the survey also provided a rich collection of comments. Moreover, McCreary’s Youth Research Academy (YRA) —a group of youth aged 16 to 24 with experience in the government care system— provided reflections on key issues.

Blunt Talk shows that experimentation is still the most common reason for using cannabis, just as it was in 2013. Other common reasons include wanting to have fun, because their friends were doing it, and to manage their emotions (such as feeling stressed, down or sad). Understanding these reasons, and their root causes, may help us be more effective in addressing problematic and harmful use in the future.

This lesson features figures and reflections from *Blunt Talk* as stimuli for discussion. The aim of the lesson is to engage students in critical thinking and dialogue about the reasons some young people choose to use cannabis, and to explore ways to support them in finding alternatives or being more reflective about their use.

Note: In facilitating dialogue, it is important to realize that the goal is to build partnerships with youth to support their normal socialization and healthy development. While we may be uncomfortable with some of their ideas, it is important to explore those ideas and understand *why* they may hold them rather than simply shutting them down by presenting “facts.” See [Facilitating Dialogue in the Classroom](#).

Instructional Strategies

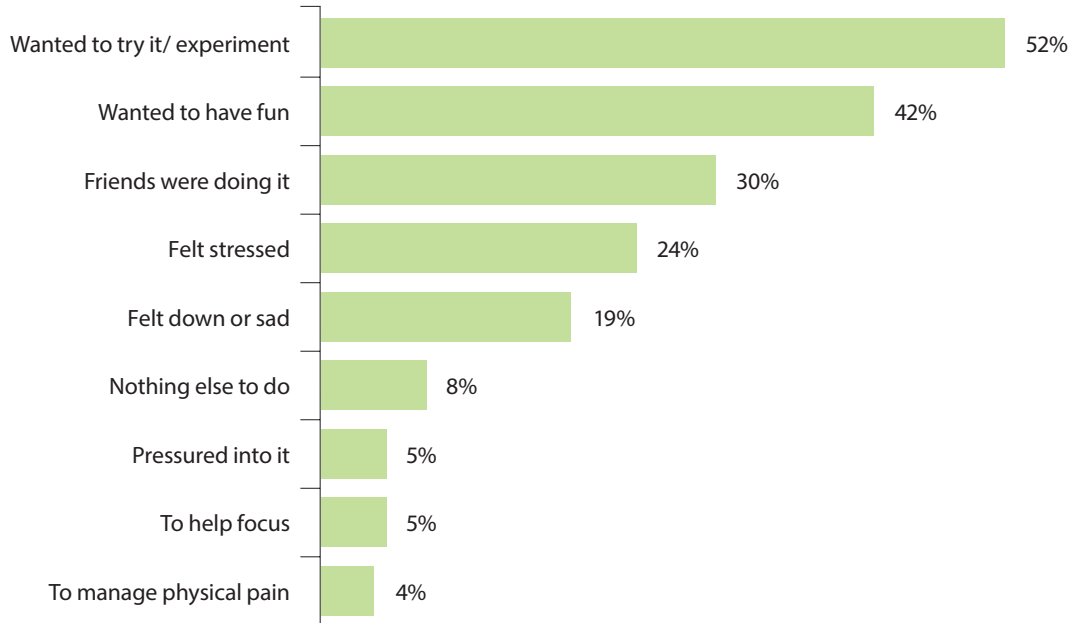
1. Making sense of data

Write the question “Why do you think young people choose to use cannabis?” on the board. Invite students to reflect on it individually. Then, as a class, discuss their responses. List the reasons they mention on the board.

Provide some background to *Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth* and display the graph (on the next page) from the report. Then, engage students in a discussion using questions such as those provided below.



**Youth’s most common reasons for using marijuana the last time
(among those who had used marijuana exclusively)**



- a. What do you see as significant in this graph? What, if anything, surprises you? How closely does the graph match the reasons you gave? If different, why might that be?
- b. Do you think the results would be different if the graph showed what parents/teachers thought the reasons were? How do you think they would compare? Why?
- c. What implications does this information have (if any) for understanding cannabis use among teens?
- d. Why do you think some youth choose to use drugs to cope with stress, pain or difficult times? What is appealing about drugs? What may prevent them from seeking alternatives?

- e. How might understanding reasons for cannabis use help us support each other?

Next, point out that youth who had experienced challenges in the past year were more likely to have used cannabis because they felt down or sad, including those who were

- bullied (26% vs. 11% who had not had this experience),
- discriminated against (28% vs. 12%), and
- went to bed hungry at least sometimes (36% vs. 16%).

Ask students to reflect on this and discuss implications and solutions.



2. Exploring diverse voices

Distribute copies of the *Youth Voices* handout (included) and have students work in groups to reflect on and discuss the comments and reflections provided by their peers.

Following the group discussions, you might have groups report on some of the key insights or different perspectives they had, using the questions provided.

- a. Why do different people have different reasons for using, or not using, cannabis?
- b. If cannabis helps some students, how can it also be harmful? If it is both helpful and harmful, how should we deal with it?
- c. How could students better support each other around cannabis-related issues?
- d. How could parents or schools better support students around cannabis-related issues?

Drug Literacy

BIG IDEAS

- ✓ Drugs can be tremendously helpful and also very harmful.
- ✓ As humans, both individually and as communities, we need to learn how to manage the drugs in our lives
- ✓ 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
- ✓ Develop social and communication skills in addressing discourse and behaviour related to drugs
- ✓ Develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks, benefits and harms 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.

The quotes below come from *Blunt Talk II: A picture of cannabis use among BC youth*. This report, by the McCreary Centre Society, is based on the 2018 Adolescent Health Survey completed by almost 38,000 students in Grades 7-12 across British Columbia. Students filling in the survey also provided a rich collection of comments. Many of the comments gave reasons for using or not using cannabis. Moreover, McCreary's Youth Research Academy (YRA)—a group of youth aged 16 to 24 with experience of the government care system, provided reflections on the issues. The following are some of those quotes and reflections from the report.

Comments and reflections by youth

"Marijuana is very good and can help with stress, anxiety, as well as be fun." ~Grade 11 student

"I don't need supplements to make myself happy." ~Grade 10 student

"I smoke a weed strain 'charlottes web' to help with my muscle spasms. It also helps to regulate my mood." ~Grade 9 student

"Seriously? Have you ever used "medical" cocaine? Wake up." ~Grade 10 student

"I have been smoking weed for a while now and it seems to really help me get through since I started. I am too young to get a prescription and I don't know if I should tell my doctor." ~Grade 9 student

"Many youth use cannabis to manage anxiety or depression, and to numb their feelings. It is therefore important to teach youth coping skills to manage their mental health and understand any symptoms they experience. ~YRA reflection

"[I use] CBD oil for my epilepsy." ~Grade 12 student

"[My] parents said it's not acceptable, so I stopped [using cannabis]." ~Grade 9 student

"WEED doesn't kill you. If you know where you are getting it from it's completely harmless. My health stays the same after smoking. Instead of trying to stop us why not try and make it safer, more accessible drug test kits." ~Grade 12 student

"I'm very scared of impaired driving." ~Grade 8 student

"It makes sense that youth who don't get to participate in after-school activities would smoke cannabis more often. Smoking cannabis turns 'having nothing to do' into something to do." ~YRA reflection

Reflective questions

- a. Why do different people have different reasons for using, or not using, cannabis?
- b. If cannabis helps some students, how can it also be harmful? If it is both helpful and harmful, how should we deal with it?
- c. How could students better support each other around cannabis-related issues?
- d. How could parents or schools better support students around cannabis-related issues?