



# A health literacy resource for K-12 schools

*iMinds* is a health education resource that seeks to maximize young people’s drug literacy—the knowledge and skills they need to survive and thrive in a world where caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and other drug use is common. Building health literacy (including drug literacy) is one part of a comprehensive school health approach to addressing substance use (along with other behavioural health matters relevant to youth).

“Really enjoyed the philosophy of *iMinds* and having students discuss “their” opinions”  
~grade 6 teacher

“I’ve changed the way I teach and am using a more critical thinking approach”  
~grade 7 teacher

## Developing drug literacy

Drug literacy is built by engaging students in honest, thoughtful discussions and projects that involve issues relevant to their daily lives. The goal is to encourage students to both express and think critically about drug-related beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.

Awareness, actions, decisions and behaviours are influenced by multiple factors including personal factors requiring self-awareness and self-management skills, relationships requiring social awareness and skills, and the physical and cultural environments requiring life knowledge and navigational skills. Therefore, students need to learn to ...

- assess the complex ways in which drugs impact the health and wellbeing of individuals, 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
- develop personal and social strategies to manage the risks and harms related to drugs

## What’s in it for students?

Students examine the factors that influence the way they think, feel and behave. They learn about and discuss ways to address issues related to health and drug use that may arise for them, their families or their communities.

Drawing on social ecological theory, *iMinds* helps students develop awareness of themselves, their relationships and their environments and helps them build skills in all these dimensions. By addressing all three areas, students develop healthy connectedness—a sense of both autonomy and social belonging.

*iMinds* aims to give young people an opportunity to

- understand the long relationship humans have had with tobacco, alcohol, cannabis and other substances
- analyze personal, social and environmental influences related to drug use and other lifestyle choices
- develop strategies for attaining and maintaining physical, emotional and social health during childhood, adolescence and young adulthood

## What teachers like about *iMinds*

*iMinds* does NOT require teachers to be “experts” on drugs or mental health. Instead, teachers serve as facilitators who explore ideas and issues along with their students. *iMinds* is based on a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. This involves the belief that learning occurs when students are actively involved in the process of carving out their own meaning of things they both experience and come to “know” from various sources.

*iMinds* is consistent with the new BC curriculum.

Rather than passively receiving information, learners are motivated to think critically and become actively involved in the pursuit of knowledge. Together, the class identifies their current knowledge, explores other ideas and opinions, and acquires and demonstrates new knowledge related to drugs and health.

*iMinds* is not a program that teachers are expected to implement in a rigid fashion. Rather, it is a “way of thinking” about drug education and a collection of materials and ideas that teachers are encouraged to adopt and adapt as needed in their classroom and community contexts.

*iMinds* is relatively easy to implement in that it does not require a lot of preparation or any special equipment or materials.

## What is available?

Initially, *iMinds* consisted of a set of multi-lesson modules for Grades 4-10. These are currently being supplemented by a wide range of learning ideas that can be easily incorporated into various curricular areas such as Social Studies, English Language Arts, Science and other subjects and settings. Resources are available in both English and French.



# A constructivist approach to drug literacy

*iMinds* is based on constructivist educational theory. A constructivist approach is ideal for teaching drug literacy because it avoids setting the teacher up as the “drug expert.” Teachers need not worry about being asked questions for which they do not have answers. The role of the teacher is not to provide answers—it is to create a context of inquiry.

## The value of a constructivist approach

In constructivist learning all questions and comments can be heard, discussed, explored and weighed against evidence. Even students who go for shock value will soon learn that their ideas are simply that—ideas. By validating all students’ inquiries and providing them with sources of information, facilitators encourage young people to become active thinking beings.

## Tips for constructivist teaching

- **Stay neutral** and acknowledge all contributions in an unbiased but questioning manner. By showing respect to all students regardless of their opinions, you encourage them to do the same.
- **Insist on a non-hostile environment** where students respond to ideas and not the individuals presenting those ideas. Make it clear from the start that everyone must be open to listening to, and considering, views that may be different from their own.
- **Encourage all students to take part** in discussions, but avoid forcing anyone to contribute if clearly reluctant. Ensure students know their feelings and opinions are important and will be respected.
- **Keep discussions moving in a positive direction** by questioning or posing hypothetical situations that encourage deeper thinking about the topic.
- **Understand that consensus is not necessary** on issues, and that a lack of consensus is in fact a better reflection of “real life.”
- **Get comfortable with silence** as sometimes discussions require reflection.

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## The 5-i model

*iMinds* materials are developed using a 5-i model that reflects the various phases of constructivist learning. Each module and lesson idea has been developed with these different aspects of learning in mind. Teachers are encouraged to pay particular attention to these as they adapt and construct lessons based on *iMinds* materials.

identify

Students come to a learning situation with prior knowledge. The “identify” activities provide students and teachers with a means of assessing what they already know. The activities serve to engage students and encourage them to share their current ideas.

*“I cannot teach anybody anything. I can only make them think.”*  
~Socrates

investigate

Learning requires students to observe, analyze and evaluate as they interact with materials and ideas introduced through the “investigate” activities. The new evidence may be provided through the ideas of their peers as well as by other sources.

*“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.”*  
~Aristotle

interpret

Students are encouraged not only to reach conclusions but also to assess the strength of evidence for those conclusions within a range of possible interpretations. The “interpret” activities encourage students to weigh evidence and assign meaning.

imagine

Students who know how to understand evidence and manage a range of possible interpretations are in a better position to use knowledge creatively. The “imagine” activities encourage students to consider how knowledge might apply to new possibilities.

integrate

Knowledge involves the ability to incorporate new ideas into what is already known, and to use this new knowledge in further explorations. The “integrate” activities allow both students and teachers to make a summary assessment of what students know and can do.