

## TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT DRUG USE AND GAMBLING



Only a minority of students in British Columbia use drugs or gamble regularly. Nonetheless, adults should be having conversations with kids about these behaviours. The goal is not to scare our children and young people. It is not to tell them what to think or which choices to make. Our job, as teachers, parents and mentors, is to help them understand their world and achieve their own goals for well-being. This means engaging in meaningful two-way conversations. But how?



### A CRITICAL INSIGHT FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

The task of education is to arouse the desire in students to want to engage and connect with others and the world around them. It is through this connection that they can

experience the feeling of well-being (being-at-home in the world). This communicative interaction and mutual curiosity leads to learning.

Education helps children and young people learn how to think for themselves, ask questions, and make sense of all the information and perspectives available to them. This requires interacting and being in dialogue with others who act and respond in ways that are different and not always predictable but whose ideas are needed for growth and development.



### IMPLICATIONS FOR TALKING WITH KIDS

- 1. Relationships are central:** The most important thing we can do is maintain a positive relationship and open communication with our students and children. While this may not always be easy, it is worth the effort.
- 2. Dialogue requires openness and curiosity:** Dialogue is a way of communicating in which all parties are both open to listen to each other and truly curious about how others think and why they see the world the way they do. This kind of communication allows us to share ideas without demanding acceptance and challenge assumptions without passing judgement.
- 3. Questions are more important than answers:** Open questions that we can explore together, and learn from each other in the process of engagement, are far more useful for our students and children than attempting to give them ready-made answers to accept.
- 4. Ground conversation in the child's life-world:** Conversations are most powerful when they relate to the child's experiential world (e.g., when the child observes a member of their extended family engaging in a particular behaviour; or when the issue of drug use or gambling is being discussed in the media; or when walking past a casino, liquor, cannabis or vape store ).



## THE ART OF GOOD QUESTIONS

Open questions are best – that is, questions that don't have simple or readily-available factual answers. E.g.,

- Why do people think drug use/gambling is cool?
- Why do people do things that might hurt them?
- Why do people gamble/use drugs when they know it might lead to harm?
- How does drug use/gambling affect others?
- How could we make gambling/drug use safer?

*How* and *why* questions tend to be more powerful in generating dialogue than *what* questions. E.g.,

- I wonder, why are there so many vaping stores popping up everywhere?
- How did you feel when Uncle Bill was a bit tipsy last night?
- Why, do you think, so many older students are gambling online these days?
- How can we know if something might hurt us?
- When you're using drugs, how do you ensure you respect the rights of kids who don't use?

Factual (*what*) questions can be useful, but usually only after a spirit of openness and curiosity has been established. When using *what* questions, be prepared to do some research together to find answers, and practice critically assessing all sources of information together.