

# Substance Abuse ©

## <Narrative Notes>

H.E.L.P. for Kids 2008-2009

### **Teaching Messages:**

1. Recreational drugs act on the nervous system through neurotransmitters or neurotransmitter receptors. They affect how one feels and acts, what one thinks and sees.
2. Marijuana is one of the most common recreational drugs that young people encounter.
3. Marijuana is a relaxant and a depressant. It can affect memory, sense of time, and coordination. Long-term use can cause damage to the reproductive and immune systems.
4. Cocaine is stimulant, which speeds up the activity in the central nervous system. It is highly addictive.
5. Inhalants act on the nervous system to produce a number of effects on sensory and motor activities. High doses and long-time use could cause death.
6. Clubs drugs can damage the neurons in the brain, impairing the senses, memory, judgment, and coordination.
7. It is illegal to use, possess, buy, and sell recreational drugs.

**Teaching Message 1 – Recreational drugs act on the nervous system through neurotransmitters or neurotransmitter receptors. They affect how one feels and acts, what one thinks and sees.**

*What are some slang or nicknames for recreational drugs that you have heard of?*

Unlike drugs prescribed by our doctors, **recreational drugs** are those, which people take for fun and are generally not used to treat illnesses. Most are illegal to use.

These drugs act on the nervous system through neurotransmitters and neurotransmitter receptors to change the user's sensations, feelings, thoughts, actions and so on. They can be categorized into three major groups: **depressants**, **stimulants**, and **hallucinogens**.

- **Depressants** – drugs that slow down the transmission of messages in the nervous system and thus diminish the actions or functions of specific parts of the body.
- **Stimulant** – drugs that stimulate the transmission of messages in the nervous system and thus increase alertness and awareness.
- **Hallucinogens** – drugs that alter perception, thinking, emotions, and consciousness.

**Teaching Message 2 – Marijuana is one of the most common recreational drugs that young people encounter.**

*What do you think is one of the most common drugs that young people encounter?*

Marijuana is made from dried flowers and leaves of the cannabis hemp plant. The active chemical in marijuana is called THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol). Though it had been used for a long time for medical, social, and religious purposes, it was made an illegal drug in the US in the 1930's. There is a continuous discussion about the legality of the medicinal use of marijuana.

One of the dangers about marijuana is that it is sometimes laced with other dangerous drugs without the user's knowledge. "Blunt" sometimes has substances such as crack cocaine, PCP, or embalming fluid added.

*Do you know how many kids your age are actually using marijuana?*

Unlike what most kids believe, very few kids your age have ever used marijuana. So even though you may see marijuana being used in the movies or written about in songs, or even represented on T-shirts, it is not as commonly used by kids your age as you might have imagined.

**Teaching Message 3 – Marijuana is a relaxant and a depressant. It can affect memory, sense of time, and coordination. Long-term use can cause damage to the reproductive and immune systems.**

Marijuana is a relaxant and a depressant. A **relaxant** causes the muscles to decrease tension, and a **depressant** causes various organs to slow down their activity. Marijuana slows down the reaction time as alcohol does. The pleasant feelings of relaxation could be followed by drowsiness, impaired coordination, impaired memory function, lapses of attention, disturbed thought patterns. At high doses, feelings of body-mind separation and sensory distortion could occur.

Marijuana increases the heart rate, and causes dilation of the blood vessels. It could also cause damage to the respiratory system if smoked. It reduces the capacity for the user to absorb and retain information and thus the user's ability to learn. Long-term use can also damage the reproductive system and the immune system.

Marijuana has certain medicinal benefits. For some patients, such as those suffering from the side effects of chemotherapeutic drugs and those suffering from AIDS, it reduces nausea and increases appetite. Its medicinal use is legal in California, but illegal in federal law.

Marijuana does not appear to cause permanent damages. Not everyone who uses marijuana becomes addicted, but some users do develop signs of dependence. However, just because it is not always addictive does not mean that it is not dangerous.

*Can anyone tell us what a “gateway” drug is?*

A **gateway drug** is a drug that, if used, could lead to involvement with other, more addictive, harmful and dangerous drugs. Marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco are all considered gateway drugs. The use of gateway drugs makes the users acquire behavior changes and get into social circumstances that lead to the use of other drugs.

**Teaching Message 4 – Cocaine is stimulant, which speeds up the activity in the central nervous system. It is highly addictive.**

The word “cocaine” refers to the drug in both a powder (cocaine) and crystal (crack) form. It is made from the coca leaves in Peru and Columbia. Drug users snort it as a powder or convert it to a liquid form for injection with a needle, or processed into a crystal form to be smoked. It is extremely addictive. That is, the user becomes dependent on it. Users need more and more of the drug just to feel normal. People who become addicted start to lose interest in other areas of their life, such as school, friends, and sports.

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Cocaine is a stimulant. A **stimulant** increases the activity of the nervous system. Stimulants increase feelings of well-being and increase energy and alertness.

Cocaine speeds up the activities in the brain. It makes the user feel “high”, euphoric, energetic, talkative, and mentally alert - especially to the sensations of sight, sound, and touch. It can also temporarily stop the need for food and sleep. It can make some people feel contemplative, anxious, or even panic-stricken.

The high is short-lived that is immediately followed by the opposite, such as intense feelings of depression, edginess, and a craving for more of the drug. Other physical symptoms include faster heartbeat and breathing, and higher blood pressure and body temperature. Muscle spasms and convulsions can also occur. These effects can easily lead to respiratory failure, heart attacks, seizures and strokes.

Cocaine can cause sudden death in healthy young people.

**Teaching Message 5 – Inhalants act on the nervous system to produce a number of effects on sensory and motor activities. High doses and long-time use could cause death.**

*What are inhalants?*

**Inhalants** are substances that produce gas vapors that can easily be inhaled through the nose. Inhaling vapors to change one’s state of mind dates back to the times of the ancient Greeks. Inhalants slow down the body’s functions.

Inhalants are extremely dangerous, because they affect the brain so quickly and strongly that they could cause physical and mental damages before one knows what has happened. Inhalants also starve the body of oxygen and force the heart to beat irregularly and more quickly. People who use inhalants could also lose their sense of smell, have nausea and nosebleeds. Inhalants could also cause sudden death. Inhalant users could die by suffocation, choking on their own vomit, or having a heart attack.

*Can you name some inhalants?*

Common chemical inhalants include paint solvents, glues, gasoline, white out, and aerosol sprays.

*What population are most at risk of using inhalants and why?*

Young people are most at risk because these substances are readily available around the house and they do not have money to buy other drugs. Because they affect your brain quickly, they can cause irreversible physical and mental damage before you know what has happened.

Inhalants can kill instantly through suffocation, choking on vomit, or having a heart attack.

**Teaching Message 6: Clubs drugs can damage the neurons in the brain, impairing the senses, memory, judgment, and coordination.**

The term “club drugs” includes a wide variety of drugs used at dance parties, nightclubs, etc. An example is ecstasy, which is a stimulant. Another example is GHB, which is a depressant. Different drugs have different effects. Some common effects include loss of muscle and motor control, blurred vision, and seizures.

High doses can cause severe breathing problems, coma, or even death.

Another major problem is that it is impossible to know exactly what chemicals were used to produce these drugs, which are often made in makeshift laboratories.

**Teaching Message 7: It is illegal to use, possess, buy, or sell recreational drugs.**

It is against the law to use, to possess, to buy, or to sell most of the recreational drugs including marijuana, cocaine. People who commit the crime will go to jail and get fined and often have their lives ruined.