
Episode Five Debriefing: Teacher Guide



ACTIVITY 2 CHANGING A LIFE

Why does a person abuse drugs? Why does he or she become addicted? In this activity, the students will discuss the different environmental, behavioral, social, and genetic factors that influence whether a person becomes addicted to drugs.

Background

There is no single reason why a person becomes a drug addict. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, there are a variety of genetic, behavioral, social, and environmental factors that influence the likelihood of getting this disease. For many years, scientists, physicians, and health care workers have been investigating addiction. Some findings indicate that people with stronger coping skills have a lower risk of addiction, while people who have a family history of addiction have a higher risk for the disease. Even age can affect whether a person becomes addicted. The younger a person is when drug abuse starts, the more likely it is that he or she will become addicted. But again, there is no set equation. Family history plus youth does not always equal an addict. However, it is important to be aware of the disease's risk factors in order to reduce the chances of becoming addicted.

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Learning Objectives

The student will:

- Review a personal account of drug addiction.
- Discuss the reasons for and effects of drug addiction.
- Identify ways to reduce the risk of addiction.

Materials

- *Changing a Life Student Activity Sheets*
- paper
- pen or pencil

Procedure

1. Prior to class, make copies of the *Changing a Life Student Activity Sheet*.
2. Ask students to explain why they think someone begins to use drugs.
3. Discuss with students some risk factors for addiction as described in the background section of this lesson. Write these factors on the board.
4. Divide the class into groups.
5. Ask the students to read *A Story of Addiction* on the student activity sheet.
6. Ask the students in each group to imagine, if they were the main character of the story, how they could have prevented addiction from occurring. Ask them to rewrite the story to include their ideas. Suggest that the students keep in mind all the reasons for addiction that are on the board.
7. After the groups have finished, discuss the different stories.

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Extension Activities

- *Science*: Investigate genetic factors that influence risk of addiction.
- *Science*: Research why pain sufferers who use opiate analgesics are at a low risk for addiction.
- *Language Arts*: Interview a physician or mental health care worker involved in treating persons with substance abuse problems.
- *History*: Research the history of drug treatment.

Standards

National Science Education Standards, Grades 5-8

- Science Content Standard F: All students should develop understanding of personal health.
- Science Content Standard F: All students should develop understanding of risks and benefits.

Books

- Gordon, H.W. and Glantz, M.D. (Eds.). 1996. Individual Differences in the Biobehavioral Etiology of Drug Abuse. Rockville, MD: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Drug Abuse.
- *Bulgakov, M.* 1995. Morphine: A Country Doctor's Notebook. London The Harvill Press.

Web Sites

- Partnership for a Drug-Free America
<http://www.drugfreeamerica.org/>
- National Institute on Drug Abuse
<http://www.drugabuse.gov/>
- Don't Risk Using Get Smart
<http://www.druguse.com/>

Episode Five Debriefing: Student Activity Sheet



CHANGING A LIFE

Why does a person abuse drugs? Why does he or she become addicted? In Episode Five of the Reconstructors web adventure, you were introduced to Tamara, a young person who struggled with opiate addiction. Now read Brandon's story and help change his life for the better.

Materials

- pencil
- *Changing a Life Student Activity Sheet*

Procedure

1. Discuss the reasons why some people begin to use drugs.
2. Split up into groups.
3. Read *A Story of Addiction*.
4. As a group, try to think of ways to help Brandon avoid addiction. Next, rewrite the story to include these ideas.
5. Discuss your story with the class.

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CHANGING A LIFE

A Story of Addiction

I love baseball and French fries and girls who talk to me. I love my parents and my little sister and my best friend Dennis. I love the movie “Spiderman” and the Houston Astros and my car. What I don’t love is drugs.

I started doing drugs when I got depressed. I hurt myself during a baseball game, and they benched me. I was the star, the MVP, and I wasn’t playing. I was mad and depressed. Some guy told me to take a hit of heroin. He said it’d help take the edge off; just a couple of puffs of heroin and everything would be okay. I knew he was wrong. I knew he was lying. I knew that he said it wouldn’t hurt so I would buy some from him, and he could use the money for his own drugs. But I didn’t listen to myself. You know, people look a lot like vegetables when they’re on drugs. They look and act like a limp, lifeless, piece of spinach lying on the floor. I looked like spinach and smelled like vomit. I didn’t bathe when I was smoking heroin, and sometimes it made me throw up all over myself.

I was messed up. Everyone tried to get me off drugs, but I was stupid and didn’t listen to them. “You look like you’re dead,” they’d say. “What’s wrong with you? You don’t do anything anymore but smoke that junk. You’re killing yourself,” my friends would say. My parents kept trying to figure out why I was acting so strange, but I shut them out. I knew that I should quit, but I couldn’t stop. My brain hurt, it really hurt. Every day with drugs was a nightmare, but I didn’t know what to do. I was skinny, and my skin was a really strange, pale green color. I was confused. I wanted my friends to slap me and force me to stop. But I hid. Hid from my friends, hid from my family, hid from the mirrors. I didn’t want to look at myself. I wasn’t cool. I wasn’t myself. I don’t know who I was.

I hit bottom after the New Year. I really wanted to go to spring training, and I decided to get myself off drugs. No one plays first base like me, and I wasn’t going to give it up without a fight. But I didn’t ask for help, and quitting drugs isn’t easy. I was sick and felt like crap. My body was so used to the heroin that it wouldn’t function without it. I chickened out and went back to smoking heroin. I got so high that I thought I was going to die. My heart was beating so hard that it felt like it was going to burst out of my chest. I couldn’t breathe, and I was choking on my own saliva. I passed out and somehow ended up in the hospital. When I woke up I was sweating like a pig. Someone had tied me to the bed, and I couldn’t move. I started screaming and kicking but it only caused burns on my wrist and ankles. So I lay there alone, again wishing I had never taken drugs.

I’ve been in rehab for about two weeks now. Two long weeks. It’s hard; it’s the hardest thing I have ever done, but I want my life back. The choice is simple: live without drugs, or die with them. I keep thinking of all the things I did wrong, like all of the people that I hurt and all of the mistakes that I made. I know that there were some ways I could have prevented my addiction. What would you have done in my place?