

# Setting the Stage: Supporting Conversations and Decision-making on Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours

## Purpose of this Guide

The purpose of this guide is to provide educators with capacity enhancing tools to support students in developing the knowledge and skills needed to make informed decisions to support their health and well-being when it comes to the topic of substance use, addictions, and related behaviours.

Educators play an important role in providing relevant, age-appropriate learning experiences for students, informing parent(s)/caregiver(s) about their child's learning, and promoting a school-wide approach to this topic area.

This supplementary guide may be used as a companion to the webinar "Setting the Stage: Pre-teaching Considerations for Grade 6 Educators Regarding Substance Use and Addictions" and the module "Healthy Choices: Substance Use and Digital Safety Modules for Grade 6, Module 1: Addictions and Related Behaviours". The guide can help educators have informed conversations about this topic area with students, and is aligned with the [Ontario Health and Physical Education \(2019\) Grade 6 curriculum](#).

---

## Getting Started

### >>> Preparing to teach about substance use health with elementary students

- **Take time to do some personal thinking and reflection.** Rather than assuming the educator is the gatekeeper of all the knowledge, think of the educator as a collaborator who meets students at their age and their stage of learning.
- **Reflect on your own sensitivities and biases.** Consider how they may influence your instruction, assessment, and evaluation approaches.
- **Use a student-centred and culturally relevant and responsive approach.** Reflect on the program planning to strengthen how you might support every student.
- Reference Materials:
  - [Getting Started with Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy](#)
  - [Getting to Know Yourself](#)
  - [Collaborative Approaches](#)



## >>> Understanding the Learner

- **Know the learner.** Being able to understand students' reactions will:
  - help guide you in the facilitation of the conversation
  - help you to be conscious of what students understand about substance use, addictions, and related behaviours
  - help you respond to questions and concerns about substance use, addictions, and related behaviours
- **Take the time to get to know students and the identities they hold.** Consider the experiences of students in the conversation and the entry point to their understanding of substance use, addictions, and related behaviours.
- **Start with what they know, and what they think they know.** Identify their misconceptions and unpack them together to enhance their knowledge in this topic area. Teach students how to make informed, safe choices, as well as strategies to meet the objectives of the conversation.
- **Co-create a welcoming space for every student.** This allows students to engage in respectful and inclusive conversations where they feel comfortable sharing if they choose to.
- Reference Materials:
  - [Getting Started with Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy](#)
  - [Getting to Know Your Students](#)
  - [The Students Commission of Canada: The Four Pillars](#)
  - [Identity-affirming school mental health: a frame for reflection and action](#)

## >>> Instructional Approaches & Teaching Strategies

- The [Ontario Health and Physical Education \(2019\)](#) curriculum helps students develop an understanding of what they need in order to make a commitment to lifelong healthy, active living and develop the capacity to live satisfying, productive lives. Take the time to identify the [Grade 6 curriculum expectations](#) that will help students make informed, safe choices, as well as strategies to reduce the harm with substance use, addictions, and related behaviours.
- Teach students how to research and find accurate information from credible sources.
- Teach students how to make informed, safe choices, as well as strategies to reduce harm.
- Reference Materials:
  - [H&PE Elementary Resources, Grade 6](#)
  - [Cannabis Education Resources](#)
  - [Vaping Education Resources](#)



## >>> Resources to Extend Learning

The following resources could help you to identify and address concerns related to student mental health or substance use:

- [ONE-CALL Desk Reference - School Mental Health Ontario](#)
  - This resource helps school staff notice, identify, and respond to potential mental health concerns early, to achieve better outcomes for students.
- [Supporting Minds Strategies at a Glance - School Mental Health Ontario](#)
  - Knowledge of common mental health concerns and classroom strategies can help educators foster a mentally healthy classroom for every student. This guide provides at-a-glance information to help educators provide targeted support.

The following resources could be shared with students to access when supporting themselves, a friend, or a loved one with their mental health and/or substance use:

- [My Circle of Support – Student Help-Seeking Resource](#)
  - Many students would like to speak to someone about their mental health, yet they don't always know the supports available or how to start the conversation. The My Circle of Support resource is designed to build student familiarity and confidence with help-seeking.
- [Kids Help Phone](#)
  - Kids Help Phone is Canada's only 24/7 e-mental health service offering free, multilingual, and confidential support to help all young people Feel Out Loud.
- [ConnexOntario | Mental Health & Addiction Treatment Services](#)
  - ConnexOntario is a confidential phone, chat, texting, and email service that helps people in Ontario who need support and information about mental health, gambling, and addiction services available in their community.
- [One Stop Talk](#)
  - This is a free, confidential service that helps children and youth get immediate mental health support with a registered therapist.

## >>> Putting Learning into Action

This guide is designed to help educators feel confident and supported when leading meaningful discussions about substance use, addictions, and related behaviours, and decision-making. By fostering understanding, encouraging reflection, and promoting informed decision-making, educators can create the conditions for students to make safe, healthy choices.

