

# Risk Line-Up Game with Harm Reduction

## Note to Facilitators:

This activity requires that the facilitator has a basic understanding of the effects and risks of the substances listed. For more information on substances check out the Substance Use Awareness chapter of the Teen Talk Service Provider Manual or the many publications that AFM has developed on alcohol and drugs.<sup>1</sup>

## Goals:

- To show how a variety of factors affect how risky a substance is and how risk can be different for everyone at different times.
- To share harm reduction strategies if youth are deciding to use.

## Have Ready:

- Risk Line-up Cards, High Risk, and Low Risk cards
- Tape

## Instructions:

- Post the Low Risk and High Risk cards far apart from one another on a wall.
- Ask youth, **“What do we mean by “high risk” and “low risk”?”** “High risk” means there is a big chance that something bad could happen, and “low risk” means there’s a smaller chance of something bad happening.
- Hand out the Risk cards. Explain to youth that their job is to tape the cards on the wall in order from lowest to highest risk.
- Ask youth to put the cards in a line, talking with each other to determine the order of risk.

## Risk Line-up Game Debrief:

- “Sniffing gas” and “injecting crystal meth” typically end up closest to High Risk, but where youth position the other cards doesn’t really matter since the activity is a way to discuss how level of risk can be different for everyone.
- Questions to ask youth, **“Do the cards look like they are in the right order?”** Let youth know that risk can be different for everyone, and everyone may have a different looking line-up. If someone was allergic to beer, then chugging it could be risky. If someone had a lung condition then smoking everyday would be more risky for them.
- There are many factors that can influence risk such as: genetics, family history, supports, whether or not someone is in school, their family situation, the coping skills someone has developed, whether or not someone has a good doctor or health care, their peer group, and how they see themselves. Some of these things may change throughout our lifetime (like getting a good healthcare provider or developing coping skills) and others we can’t change (like our genetics).
- It is important to know ourselves and what the risks may be to each one of us in particular.

## Risks and Harm Reduction Debrief:

- Choose specific cards to highlight harm reduction strategies. At Teen Talk we ask youth, **“What could be some harms of using (insert substance here)? And, what could someone do to reduce the risks?”**
- Let youth know that we are here to share information that can help people be safer. The best way to avoid harm from using substances is not to use them at all, but that is not a choice everyone can or wants to make. If people are using, it is important to have accurate information in order to reduce the amount of harm that could happen. This is also good information for those who are currently not using because you may find yourself in a position where you can help someone else. So, the more accurate

information people have, the safer and healthier people can be.

### **Risks with using alcohol:**

- Often times the greatest risks come from the behaviours people do when they are drinking (e.g. driving, fighting, sex without a condom).
- Feeling or acting differently than usual, being uncoordinated and having slower reaction times.
- Tell youth, **“When a person drinks more than their body can handle they get what’s called alcohol poisoning.”** Signs of alcohol poisoning are vomiting, clammy skin, shallow breathing and passing out. An overdose can lead to a coma or death. Taking in amounts quickly, like chugging, puts us at a higher risk of alcohol poisoning. Taking too much of any downer (like alcohol) can result in overdose because the body slows down too much and a person’s heartbeat or breathing can stop.

### **Harm reduction with alcohol:**

- Arrange a safe way home
  - Keep your drink with you at all times
  - Don’t put things in peoples drinks
  - Know your limits
  - Drink water in between alcoholic drinks
  - Drink non-alcoholic drinks from an alcohol bottle
  - Use the buddy system
  - Know the recovery position
  - Avoid drinking or reduce use as much as possible if you think you might be pregnant.
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- Alcohol use can seriously harm a fetus and can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Because of addiction, coping/trauma, lack of information, people might use substances during a pregnancy. Rather than judge or shame someone, offer support and resources. Ask youth, **“How can we support someone who is pregnant?”** Not drink around them, do fun things with them, go

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to appointments with them, bring them food, listen and not judge them.

### **Risks with mixing and prescription drugs:**

- Mixing is the number one cause of overdose. Mixing downers can slow the heart down and cause coma or death; mixing uppers can cause convulsions and heart failure; mixing downers and uppers can mask each other's effects, people may use more and increasing the chance of overdose.

FYI: The body's default response to too much alcohol is to pass out. Because stimulants prevent this happening, you can drink even more alcohol without passing out. If further depressant drugs are added, you risk the chance of going into a coma or even dying of an overdose.<sup>2</sup>

- **Prescription Drugs:** These are harmful when they are not being used for their intended purpose or not yours in the first place, it can be more complicated to stay safe with prescription drugs than with other substances. This is because it can be hard to know what class of drugs you are taking (whether the substance is an upper, downer, or both), what dosage the pill is (pill size does not tell us the pill's strength) and how much it takes to give a desired effect versus a harmful effect.

FYI: Younger people are more likely to have their first experience with prescription drugs recreationally, with the age of first exposure decreasing and the rate of non-medical use of prescription drugs increasing.<sup>3</sup>

### **Harm reduction with mixing and prescription drugs:**

- Try not to mix
- If you are taking medication talk to your health care provider about the effects of using other substances while on medication
- Have someone with you when you're using
- Stick to substances that have a predictable effect
- Take a smaller dose
- Know and the recovery position and when to call for help

## **Additional Activities:**

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

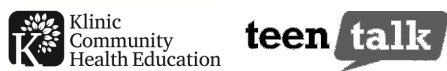
- Refusal Skills
- Problematic Use
- Abstinence Activities
- Decisional Balancing



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# LOW RISK





# HIGH RISK



# SMOKING WEED AS SOON AS YOU WAKE UP



# GETTING DRUNK EVERY WEEKEND



# RIDING YOUR BIKE NO HANDS, HIGH ON MUSHROOMS





# CHUGGING BEER



# MIXING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND ALCOHOL



# INJECTING CRYSTAL METH



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# SNIFFING GAS TO GET HIGH



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# STAYING UP ALL NIGHT DRINKING RED BULL

# Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> [www.afm.mb.ca](http://www.afm.mb.ca).

<sup>2</sup> [www.painkiller-addiction-treatment.com/really-dangerous-mix-uppers-downers/](http://www.painkiller-addiction-treatment.com/really-dangerous-mix-uppers-downers/), accessed July 28, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> [www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/2012-Prescription-Drug-Misuse-in-Canada-Summary-Report-en.pdf](http://www.ccsa.ca/Resource%20Library/2012-Prescription-Drug-Misuse-in-Canada-Summary-Report-en.pdf), accessed July 28, 2015.