

Risk Line-Up Game with Harm Reduction

Goals:

- *To show how a variety of factors affect how risky using a substance is and how risk is different for everyone at different times.*
- *To share harm reduction tools (how to stay safer) if youth decide 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 probing questions first (i.e. what they think a risk is). Risk can be explained very simply as “the chance of something bad happening, or someone getting hurt.
- Ask youth, “What do we mean by ‘high risk’ and ‘low risk’? At Teen Talk we explain “high risk” as there being a big chance that something bad could happen, and low risk as being a smaller chance of something bad happening.
- Hand out the Risk cards, explain to youth that their job is to tape the cards up in order from lowest level of risk to highest.
- Ask students to then put the cards in a line, talking amongst themselves to determine the order of risk.
- If you want to involve more people, holding the LOW RISK/HIGH RISK cards can be a job, or you can ask cardholders to grab a partner who will move them to their spot along the continuum.

Note: Where they position the cards does not really matter since the point of the activity is to discuss that a variety of factors determine the level of risk.

Risk Line-Up Debrief:

- Questions to ask youth, “Do these look like they are in the right order to you?”, “Do you think anything needs to move?”, “What factors make one substance more risky than another?”
- Risks are different for everyone, and everyone in this room may have a different looking line-up. For example: if alcoholism is in a person’s family, this might make getting wasted every weekend pretty risky. If someone was allergic to beer, then chugging it could be risky. If someone was using meth but did not have a good support system, access to medical care, or other fulfilling parts of their life, that could be very risky.
- We can see that there are many factors that can influence risk, such as: genetics, family history, supports, the type of job someone has, whether or not they are in school, 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 cannot change (like our genetics).
- It is important to know ourselves and what the risks may be to each one of us in particular.

Ways to Reduce Risk Debrief:

- 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. Teen Talk would say that it is important for everyone to have accurate information in order to lessen the amount of harm that could happen to themselves or others.
- For each of the Risk cards ask youth “If someone was to... how could they be safer?”

Using alcohol:

Risks: Alcohol poisoning (an overdose of alcohol which can result in vomiting, passing out, and sometimes brain damage and death), substances slipped into a drink (which could result in sexual assault or theft), impaired driving, doing things you wouldn't do sober, and alcohol can be used as a way to coerce someone into having sex.

Harm reduction: Arranging a safe way home (knowing the bus route, having a secret cab fare stash, having a designated driver), keep your drink with you at all times, know your limits (if 12 beers gets you falling down drunk, consider bringing only 6), drink water in between alcoholic drinks, drink other stuff from an alcohol bottle, buddy system, know the recovery position, etc.

Using illegal drugs:

Risks: Overdosing (taking too much of a drug which can result in hospitalization or death), may have to deal with cops (get charged or fined), harder to know what is in the substance, may be riskier to buy, and doing things you would not do while sober.

Harm reduction: Try to buy from people you know (better chance of getting what you paid for and you can ask questions), ask how much you should take but then start with a lower dose to see how your body responds (e.g. ecstasy), use a “buddy system” (one person designated to stay sober and watch for warning signs), drink water.

Mixing substances:

Risks: Mixing is the number one cause of overdose¹¹ and can cause unknown reactions. One drug can interfere with how the body distributes, breaks down, or gets rid of another drug,¹³ making it almost impossible to predict the effects. Combining drugs can lead to amplified harmful effects. Ex. Mixing heroin and alcohol (both downers) can slow the heart right down into a coma.

While the risks of this example are not the same as mixing alcohol and heroin, another example of risks associated with mixing substances could be those who smoke spliffs (mixing weed and tobacco) Spliffs cause more harm than if they were just smoking weed or tobacco because people usually inhale deeper and hold the smoke in their lungs longer than smoking a cigarette alone.

Harm reduction: Try not to mix, if you are taking medication talk to your health care provider about the effects of using other substances while on meds.

Injecting drugs:

Risks: HIV, Hep C, vein damage, and can be easier to overdose because your body cannot reject it by vomiting (same with smoking)

Harm reduction: rotate injection sites, use only small amounts, use new needles every time, do not share any equipment (including water), get new needles from Street Connections (if living in Winnipeg), clean needles with bleach or boil needles between uses - better than nothing, but it is not guaranteed to kill the Hep C virus.

Note: HIV/Hep C can be transmitted through straws for snorting cocaine – each person use their own straw)

Substance use and sex:

- Questions to ask youth: “Do drugs and alcohol affect whether people choose to have sex or not?” Yes, and it can also affect how safe the sex is. We often make different decisions under the influence of drugs and alcohol than we would when sober. It is not uncommon for people to think they would have done things differently if they were sober.
- “If someone thinks that sex might be a possibility in a situation where people are not sober, what are ways they could be safer?” They could carry condoms, talk about boundaries when you are sober, use a buddy system check in with each other.
- Let youth know that legally people are not recognized as able to say yes to sex when they are under the influence of drugs or alcohol. If someone got another person drunk or high so they would have sex, that is sexual assault and they can be charged.
- “What do you think the number one date rape drug in Canada is?” (youth may say “Roofies” or “GHB”) The answer is alcohol.
- FYI date rape (rape committed during or after a date, by someone known by the victim) – accounts for 69% of reported rape in Canada.¹²

Short List of Harm Reduction:

Use new needles	don't mix substances
Only buy from people you know	know the bus route home
Have a cab fare stash	don't leave your drink
Drink water between alcoholic	drinks only drink what you brought
Eat before using	carry condoms
Buddy system	know the recovery position
Party with people you trust	start with a small dose
Let others know where you are	know who you will call if you need help
Do a variety of activities	
Learn about the effects of substances	
Practice saying no (see Abstinence Activities and Refusal Skills Activity)	

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
ILLEGAL
DRUGS**

**SNIFFING GAS
TO GET HIGH**

STAYING UP ALL
NIGHT DRINKING
RED BULL