

# “Why Youth Use? / Don’t Use Substances?”

## Brainstorm

### Goals:

- To brainstorm the reasons why teens may or may not be using substances.
- To link youth to local resources where they can get help.

### Have Ready:

- Flipchart papers with “Why do teens use substances?” and “Why don’t teens use substances?” written at the top
- Markers

### Instructions:

- This exercise can be done in small groups and or as a large group brainstorm where you write their responses on a flipchart or white board.

### Activity Introduction:

In this activity we are going to ask ourselves what are the reasons youth may have for using or not using substances. But first, **“what exactly are “substances”?** A substance is anything that we put into our bodies that isn’t food that changes how we feel, think, or how our body acts. **“What are some legal ones?”** Coffee, tobacco, over the counter medications such as Tylenol, prescription drugs (intended to be taken by the person they are prescribed to in the recommended dosage), and alcohol (if over 18). **“Illegal ones?”** Pot, ecstasy, cocaine, and meth.

This is not an activity about whether it is right or wrong to use certain substances or a time where we share stories about drug use. We are not

assuming anyone is using substances or not, and we are not judging anyone for whatever choices they make.

- Hand out the flipcharts and ask youth to write down their ideas. Give the groups about 5 or 10 minutes to work on their flipcharts (see sample flipcharts below).

## Sample Flipcharts:

### Why do teens use?

- Chill-out/relax
- Deal with stress
- Addiction
- Media influences
- Curious
- **Mental health issues**
- Trauma
- Fun/like it
- Be social
- **Peer Pressure**
- Family is using
- **Help cope/forget problems**

### Why don't teens use?

- Past experience
- Values
- Substance use by friends or family
- Fear of overdosing
- Worry about addiction
- Don't like hangovers
- **Are driving**
- **Are pregnant**
- Focus on sports/academics
- **Future goals**
- Worry about getting in trouble
- Don't want to make impaired decisions/look foolish or stupid
- Worry about being vulnerable/assault

## Debrief:

- Go over the flipcharts with the group; add the bolded responses if not already added by youth.
- Debrief mental health issues, trauma, to cope with problems, or addiction, by acknowledging that this is a reality for some youth,

and talking about appropriate resources (i.e., talking about it with someone they trust and asking for help from a guidance counsellor, teacher, addictions worker, Elder, family member, or other trusted adult.)

- Debrief peer pressure by talking about refusal skills (i.e. things youth can say in a party situation to refuse alcohol or drugs like, I'm driving; I have to babysit later; I have a big game/test tomorrow; somebody has to watch out for the rest of you, etc.).
- Debrief pregnancy by talking about refusal skills and abstinence activities.
- Looking at the lists we can see that there are many reasons youth have for using or not using substances.
- For some youth substance use is for fun or to experiment, having said that we can also see that some youth are using to cope or deal with problems or trauma.

## **Additional Activities:**

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Risk Line-Up Game with Harm Reduction
- Refusal Skills
- Abstinence Activities