

# Risk Line-Up Game with Harm Reduction

**Recommended Age: 14+**

## 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.

## 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, see 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>i</sup>

## Have Ready

- Risk Line-Up cards, Higher Risk and Lower Risk cards.
- Tape.

## Instructions

- Post the Lower Risk and Higher Risk cards far apart from one another on a wall.
- Ask youth, **“What do we mean by ‘higher risk’ and ‘lower risk’?”** ‘Higher risk’ means there is a big chance that something bad could happen, and ‘lower 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 on a continuum.
- 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 Higher Risk, but where youth position the cards doesn’t really matter, since the activity is a way to discuss how level of risk can be different for everyone.
- 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 line-up. If someone was allergic to beer, then chugging it could be risky (or drinking it at all). If someone had a lung condition, then smoking every day would be riskier for them.
- There are many factors that can influence risk, such as: genetics, family history, supports, whether someone is in school, their family situation, the coping skills someone has developed, whether someone has a good doctor or healthcare, their friend 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.

## Risks and Harm Reduction Debrief

- 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 to be safer and 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. The more accurate information people have, the safer and healthier people can be.
- Choose specific cards to highlight harm reduction strategies. At Teen Talk, we ask youth, **“What could be some harms of using (insert substance here)? What could someone do to reduce the risks?”**

## Risks with using alcohol:

- The greatest risks often come from people's behaviours when they are drinking (e.g., driving, fighting, sex without protection, etc.).
- 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 people's 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.
- Don't ask another person to have sex or make out while drinking, because they are in a more vulnerable state. It's not okay to take advantage of people when they are drunk or high, and consent legally doesn't count when people are drunk or high.
- Avoid drinking or reduce use as much as possible if you think you might be pregnant. FYI: Alcohol use can harm a fetus and can cause Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD). Because of addiction, coping/trauma, or 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 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 one's effects, so people may use more, increasing the chance of overdose. FYI: The body's default response to too much alcohol is to pass out. Because stimulants prevent this from 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>ii</sup>
- **Prescription Drugs:** These are harmful when they are not being used for their intended purpose or are 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: Research suggests youth view prescription drugs as 'safer' than illegal drugs.<sup>iii</sup>

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

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

### **Additional Activities**

Ideally, this activity can be followed by:

- Refusal Skills Brainstorm

- Problematic Use Brainstorm
- Abstinence Activities Scenario Cards & Brainstorm
- Decisional Balancing Reflection

# LOWER RISK



# HIGHER RISK





**SMOKING  
WEED AS  
SOON AS YOU  
WAKE UP**



# **GETTING WASTED EVERY WEEKEND**



**RIDING YOUR  
BIKE NO  
HANDS,  
HIGH ON  
MUSHROOMS**



# CHUGGING BEER





# **MIXING PRESCRIPTION DRUGS AND ALCOHOL**



# **INJECTING CRYSTAL METH**



# **SNIFFING GAS TO GET HIGH**



# **STAYING UP ALL NIGHT DRINKING ENERGY DRINKS**





---

<sup>i</sup>Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. (n.d.). *Addictions Foundation of Manitoba*. Addictions Foundation of Manitoba. <https://afm.mb.ca/>

<sup>ii</sup>European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction. (2009). Polydrug use: Patterns and responses. In *European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction* (pp. 20). Retrieved from [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/534/EMCDDA\\_SI09\\_polydrug\\_use\\_187893.pdf](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/534/EMCDDA_SI09_polydrug_use_187893.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup>National Advisory Committee on Prescription Drug Misuse. (2013). First do no harm: Responding to Canada's prescription drug crisis. In *Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction* (pp. 1–76). <https://www.ccsa.ca/sites/default/files/2019-04/Canada-Strategy-Prescription-Drug-Misuse-Report-en.pdf>