



Cannabis Use Prevention

Educator Resource Guide

2026-27

Contents

Curriculum Connections.	2
Overview	3
Ice Breaker	4
Share to Connect Game	4
Lesson Plans.	5
Interactive Activities	6
Caregiver Resources	6
Student Resources.	7
Educator Resources	7
Substance Use and Mental Health Supports .	8

Curriculum Connections

D. Healthy Living Curriculum Grades 4-8

Grade 4

- D1.4 Tobacco and vaping
- D2.3 Decisions about smoking and vaping
- D3.2 Short- and long-term effects of smoking and vaping

Grade 5

- D1.2 Short- and long-term effects
- D2.3 Refusal skills – alcohol use and other behaviours
- D3.3 Decision to drink alcohol, use cannabis; influences

Grade 6

- D1.2 Effects of cannabis, drugs
- D2.4 Strategies, safe choices, influences, alcohol, tobacco, cannabis

Grade 7

- D1.2 Mental health, substances, support
- D2.3 Body image, substance use
- D3.2 Implications of substance use, addictions, and related behaviours

Grade 8

- D1.3 Warning signs, consequences

Overview

Prevention of cannabis use is most effective when it is intentional, developmentally appropriate, and embedded within everyday learning environments. Educators are uniquely positioned to support children and youth by creating consistent, supportive spaces where students build the knowledge, skills, and protective factors that reduce substance related harms over time.

This *Cannabis Use Prevention Educator Resource Guide* is designed to complement educators' existing work by aligning with curriculum expectations and classroom practice.

Prevention is more than information

Effective prevention goes beyond providing facts about cannabis. Evidence shows that early and ongoing conversations, introduced before substance use begins and reinforced as students grow, help delay initiation and reduce risky use later in life.

In the classroom, these conversations are most effective when they focus on skill development rather than warnings or consequences. Specifically, prevention efforts help students build:

- Critical thinking skills;
- Self regulation and coping strategies;
- Decision making skills; and
- Confidence to seek help from trusted adults.

Why early, school-based prevention matters

Data for Huron and Perth reinforce the importance of starting prevention early. COMPASS survey results from participating high schools show that cannabis use increases steadily with age, from 8 per cent of Grade 9 students reporting past 30 day use to 25 per cent by Grade 12. Overall, 16 per cent of students reported using cannabis in the past 30 days.

These patterns highlight that attitudes, coping strategies, and norms related to substance use are often established before students reach high school. COMPASS data also show links between cannabis use, mental health concerns, and declines in academic achievement, underscoring the vulnerability of youth and young adults during periods of rapid brain and social development.

Together, these realities point to the importance of universal, school based prevention that:

- Begins early;
- Is reinforced often; and
- Reflects local community context.

Elementary classrooms play a critical role in laying the foundation for later health and well-being by helping students develop the skills, relationships, and sense of belonging that protect against substance related harms as they grow.

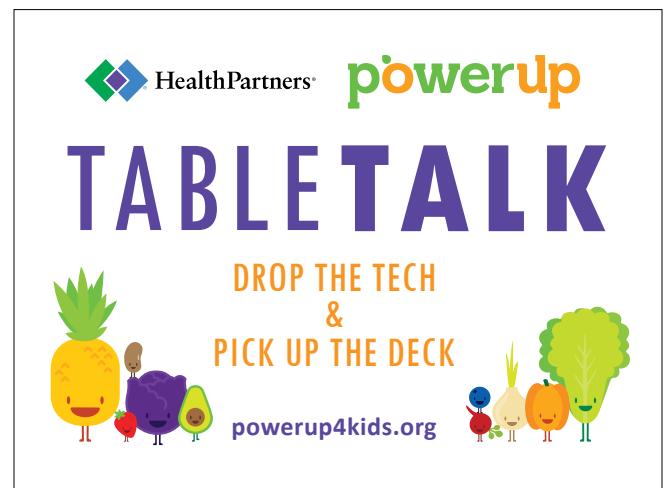
1. Centre for Addiction and Mental Health. (n.d.). [Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians and Caregivers Need to Know](#)
2. Health Canada. (2022). [Canada's lower-risk cannabis use guidelines](#). Government of Canada.
3. Leatherdale, S. T., Patte, K. A., Qian, W., and the COMPASS Research Team. (2024). COMPASS school health profile: 2023–2024 Huron Perth Public Health school aggregate report. University of Waterloo and Brock University.
4. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2023). [Promoting mental health and wellbeing for children and youth: Protective factors](#). Government of Canada.
5. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2021). [Preventing substance-related harms among Canadian youth through action within school communities](#).

Ice Breaker

Share to Connect Game

Table Talk Cards

Get students ready for sharing their opinions with these [Table Talk cards](#). Print the document double sided and cut along the lines to create your deck of Table Talk cards. Hand out the cards. Ask students to stand up and find a partner or small group. Use the cards to play *Quiz, Quiz, Trade*. Students take turns asking and answering the question on each other's card, then they trade cards, go find a new partner, and repeat.



Lesson Plans

[OPHEA Grade Specific Activities and Curriculum Connections \(Grades 5-8\)](#)

Lesson plans, activities, and discussion guides aligned with Ontario Health and Physical Education curriculum.

[Lung Health “Talking about...” series lesson plans \(Grade 7+\)](#)

The Talking About Series is an educational resource addressing cannabis, tobacco, vaping, and waterpipes. The series includes a set of activity guides, one for each topic, to help facilitate critical discussion with young people in a fun and informative manner.

[Health Canada – Pursue Your Passion \(Grades 7–8\)](#)

Cannabis education focused on brain development, mental health risks, legality, peer pressure, and healthy alternatives to substance use.

[Niagara Region Teaching Tools \(Grades 5-8\)](#)

Cannabis lessons focused on definitions, risks, legality and refusal skills. See “Substance Use, Addictions and Related Behaviours”.

Reminder: many of the community resources at the end of each lesson are specific to Niagara Region. Please see pages 6 to 8 for resources and supports.

- [Grade 5 Cannabis Teaching Tool](#)
- [Grade 6 Cannabis Teaching Tool](#)
- [Grade 7 Cannabis Teaching Tool](#)
- [Grade 8 Cannabis Teaching Tool](#)

[SMHO Healthy Choices: Substance Use and Digital Safety \(Grade 6\)](#)

Two curriculum-aligned modules from the Ministry of Education help students make informed, safe decisions about substance use and navigating digital environments.

Each module includes ready-to-use lesson plans, educator guides, and parent communication tools, supporting mental health and well-being through evidence-informed strategies.

Access to these modules is via the Ministry's Virtual Learning Environment (VLE).

Interactive Activities

[Operation Truth](#) | **Not an Experiment (Grades 7-8)**

A comprehensive, educator-ready set of cannabis and vaping prevention resources that includes a facilitation guide, discussion prompts, an answer key, and an interactive activity. Together, these tools support developmentally appropriate, discussion based lessons that build critical thinking and reinforce prevention messages in everyday classroom practice.

- [Teacher Facilitation Guide](#)
- [Discussion Guide](#)
- [Answer Key](#)
- [Operation Truth Activity](#)

[Refusal Skills Educator Resource](#) | **Not an Experiment (Grades 7-8)**

Focuses on building students' confidence and practical skills to resist peer pressure related to cannabis and other substances. This resource helps educators teach assertive communication, decision making, and help seeking skills that support healthy choices over time.

Caregiver Resources

[Cannabis: What Parents/Guardians and Caregivers Need to Know](#) | **School Mental Health Ontario**

This resource provides clear, practical information to help caregivers understand cannabis, its potential impacts on youth, and the caregiver role in prevention. It emphasizes age appropriate conversations, setting expectations, and supporting children and youth as they grow.

[Talking Cannabis with Teens – Cannabis Talk Kit](#) | **Substance Canada**

This booklet offers conversation starters, tips, and activities to help caregivers talk with teens about cannabis in a calm, non judgmental way. It focuses on building trust, supporting decision making skills, and keeping communication open as teens navigate peer pressure and changing environments.

Student Resources

[8 Things to Know About Cannabis Legalization and Youth in Ontario](#) |

YouthREX

This factsheet provides a concise overview of how cannabis legalization affects youth in Ontario, including key risks, laws, and prevention considerations.

[Cannabis: Important Things to Know](#) | **Kids Help Phone**

This webpage offers youth friendly, evidence based information about cannabis, including effects, risks, and ways to get help. It also highlights supports available through Kids Help Phone, making it a trusted resource for both young people and the adults who support them.

Educator Resources

[A History of Cannabis in Canada](#) | **YouthREX**

Shares a timeline of the history of cannabis use and legalization in a Canadian context.

[Cannabis use resources](#) | **COMPASS System: University of Waterloo**

Includes a multitude of resources from across Canada with a focus on cannabis education for youth.

[Cannabis: What Educators Need to Know](#) | **School Mental Health Ontario**

This resource provides educators with tips for having informed conversations with students about cannabis.

[Understanding Substance Use: Educator's Guide](#) | **Canadian Centre for Substance Use and Addiction**

Designed for education professionals (e.g., teachers, guidance counsellors, coaches, social workers) working with youth from grades 6–12 to gain knowledge, tools and resources on substance use, stigma, cannabis vaping, alcohol and impaired driving.

[Youth Specific Effects of Early Cannabis Use](#) | **University of Waterloo (1 min, 48 sec)**

A video discussing the effects of cannabis on youth brains and behaviour, along with potential consequences of cannabis use.

Substance Use and Mental Health Supports

[Canadian Mental Health Association Huron Perth](#) | [1-888-261-9350](#)

[Huron-Perth Centre for Children and Youth](#)

- Clinton | [519-482-3931](#)
- Listowel | [519-291-1088](#)
- Stratford | [519-273-3373](#)

[Huron Perth Helpline and Crisis Response Team](#) | [1-888-829-7484](#)

[Kids Help Phone](#) | [1-800-668-6868](#)

[LGBT Youthline](#) | call [1-888-687-9688](#) or text 647-694-4275

[Suicide Crisis Helpline](#) | [9-8-8](#)

In an emergency, dial [9-1-1](#)

Your school:

[Avon Maitland District School Board](#)

[Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board](#)

The school boards have school-based services available through a range of partnerships with community agencies. Contact your school principal to access services.

[Mental Health and Well-Being](#) | [Huron Perth Public Health](#)



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