

Teaching Harm Reduction regarding Substance Use - Tips for Educators by Youth

Tool

Resource: Vaping Education Resources

Grade(s): 4 5 6 7 8

Division(s): Intermediate

Teach Harm Reduction

- Recognize that all substances have positive and negative effects and that individuals use substances for many reasons.
- Recognize the Continuum of Substance Use. Some circumstances may lead to dependence, but not always.
- Teaching harm reduction helps individuals have more control over their lives and take protective and proactive steps for their health (Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, 2022).

Harm Reduction Includes Abstinence, but Abstinence Doesn't Include Harm Reduction

- Harm reduction focuses on safety and well-being as a priority with abstinence being a potential goal, but not the only acceptable option.
- Students need to know! Teach youth how to make informed, safe choices, and strategies to reduce the harm with something that could be potentially harmful.

- The message, “Don’t do it,” is implied, and most students don’t resonate with it.

Connect Harm Reduction to Other Safe Practices

- Help students understand harm reduction by connecting it to other daily practices that help reduce injury and increase safety, like seatbelts, helmets, and learning first aid.
- Help students be safe in situations involving substance use. Teach simple first aid like recognizing signs of overdose and strategies for staying safe when socializing with friends.

Start Early

- Talk about harm reduction early, long before youth may need to apply it. Give them lots of information about safety and substance use.
- If students don’t learn the facts about substance use from educators, they are learning it from sources that may not provide them with accurate information.

Give Us All the Information We Need

- Don’t worry that providing too much education might lead to substance use. No matter how much students are taught about consequences, they may still do it.
- To be safe and well informed, it’s important to be educated with all the facts about substance use. Teach students how to research and find accurate information from credible sources.

References

Canadian Drug Policy Coalition, *Harm Reduction*, 2022. Extracted from: <https://drugpolicy.ca/our-work/issues/harm-reduction/#:~:text=Harm%20Reduction%20is%20a%20comprehensive,live%20safer%20and%20healthier%20lives>