

# 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

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- 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. <sup>1</sup>

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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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.

<sup>1</sup> 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> .