

Lesson 1

Introduction to Project ALERT

PROJECT
ALERT



Lesson Overview

Lesson Goals

1. Set the tone and establish an open, supportive classroom environment
2. Motivate students and to convey the purposes of Project ALERT

Scope and Sequence with Pacing Guidance

1. Introduce Program (~3 min.)
2. Develop Ground Rules (~5 min.)
3. Make Reasons lists (~15 min.)
4. Compare Marijuana and Alcohol (~5 min.)
5. Show and Discuss Video: *Let's talk about Marijuana* (~15 min.)
6. Wrap-up (~3 min.)

Brief Lesson Description

Project ALERT is a series of comprehensive lessons that uses the power of practice and repetition to give students the knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy to resist peer pressure and misleading messaging in order to avoid substance use in the first place or reduce current substance use. Throughout the lessons, the words such as substance, drug, or alcohol and other drug may be used interchangeably because lessons cover a variety of drugs which by definition is any chemical substance that affects the brain or body.

This is the Project ALERT kick-off lesson. The first two activities establish the tone and set the foundation for an open and supportive classroom environment. Then, students are motivated to want to resist pressure to use substances by actively participating in small groups where they list and discuss the reasons why people do and do not use substances.

Then, group discussion will make comparisons between alcohol and marijuana to demonstrate the similarities between the reasons for use and nonuse of alcohol and marijuana. The class discussion of the lists and the video *Let's Talk About Marijuana* allows for myths to be corrected. While it is not essential that students know every reason for using or not using drugs, it is essential that any myths or misconceptions that students might have raised be corrected from the lists.

Background Knowledge: Pre-Reading

MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT ALCOHOL, MARIJUANA, AND NICOTINE

Teens might experience pressures to try drugs such as drinking alcohol, smoking or vaping nicotine, using marijuana, or trying other substances. Teens might feel like this is common among groups or just part of being a teenager. It isn't though. **Most teens actually don't use substances according to large, nationwide surveys.** Simply saying "no" to the pressures to use drugs is the easiest way to prevent drug use and prevent all of the negative consequences related to it.

MYTH: Most teens drink alcohol or use drugs.

FACT: The truth is most teens aren't drinking alcohol or using other drugs. According to nationwide data, very few teens drink alcohol or use any drugs.

MYTH: Alcohol is not a drug.

FACT: Alcohol is a drug that affects the brain. It slows down judgment, thought, and coordination. Mixing alcohol with other drugs can be extremely dangerous, in some cases deadly.

MYTH: Since marijuana is "natural," it is safer than other drugs.

FACT: Many "natural" substances also have toxic properties (like poisonous mushrooms and tobacco). While marijuana is a plant, its main psychoactive component is THC (Tetra-hydro-cannabinol), which affects brain function. Prolonged or frequent use of marijuana can adversely affect brain chemistry and body function. High-potency THC has been linked to short-term memory and coordination issues and unexpected poisonings.

MYTH: You can't get addicted to marijuana.

FACT: Increasingly, research is showing that long-term use of marijuana produces changes in the brain similar to those seen after long-term use of cocaine, heroin, and alcohol. Chronic users can experience "withdrawal" symptoms (agitation, sleep problems) after stopping heavy use suddenly, as well as "tolerance" (needing larger doses of a drug to get the same desired effects that were once produced by smaller amounts). Many experts believe marijuana is addicting.

MYTH: Using drugs or drinking alcohol makes your problems disappear.

FACT: You may feel you have escaped your problems, but when you get sober, the problems are still there.

While **Marijuana**, hemp, or cannabis is a plant, the main psychoactive component that affects the brain function is known as **THC** (Tetrahydro-cannabinol). The strength, or potency, of THC can vary drastically, and the amount of THC that affects a person's brain function varies too. THC can affect people differently depending upon many things such as amount that is consumed, how it is consumed, body size, and prior exposure.

High-potency THC is a concerning drug especially for young teens because of the harmful mental and physical effects THC can have on their bodies.

MYTH: Marijuana makes emotions of fear, anger, stress, or depression go away.

FACT: Marijuana doesn't actually make those emotions go away. The effects of marijuana and THC can make the feeling of those emotions less or exaggerated. They are still there, and you'll have to learn how to cope with them once any effects of marijuana wear off.

MYTH: It is safe to drive after using marijuana.

FACT: Driving under the influence of marijuana is illegal. Marijuana affects important skills needed for safe driving like tracking and coordination. Thinking and reflexes also shut down making it hard to respond to sudden, unexpected events.

MYTH: Marijuana makes you more creative.

FACT: Marijuana may make a person feel more creative while high (because THC effect on the brain distorts perception), but actual performance is not better and can be worse. What seemed creative at the time doesn't always make sense afterwards.

MYTH: Marijuana makes you better at everyday tasks.

FACT: Marijuana can create an illusion of "magical thinking" but if anything, you become less competent because marijuana interferes with memory, perception, and coordination.

MYTH: Marijuana makes your problems go away.

FACT: You may feel you have escaped your problems by getting high, but when the effects of marijuana wear off, the problems are still there.

Alcohol, ethyl alcohol, or ethanol is an intoxicating ingredient found in beer, wine, and liquor that is produced by fermenting yeast, sugar and starches. Alcohol is a central nervous system depressant but affects every organ in the body. Alcohol is broken down by the liver but can only do so slowly. Therefore, it is the amount of alcohol consumed that affects a person most, not the type of alcoholic drink, causing alcohol intoxication and harmful consequences.

MYTH: A can of beer will not have as much effect as a mixed drink or a shot of liquor.

FACT: A can of beer, a glass of wine, a mixed drink, and a shot of liquor all have about the same amount of alcohol and will have about the same effect.

MYTH: Alcohol is not as dangerous as other drugs.

FACT: Alcohol can be deadly. Coma and death can occur if alcohol is consumed rapidly and in large amounts (for example, four or more drinks in less than two hours). Even one drink can affect judgment and loss of control. Auto crashes are the leading cause of death among teenagers, and of these fatalities, over one third are alcohol-related.

MYTH: Black coffee and a cold shower can sober you up quickly.

FACT: Only time sobers you. The liver needs one hour to burn up one ounce of pure alcohol (the amount contained in a can of beer, glass of wine, or mixed drink). Coffee and cold water may make a person less sleepy, but neither improves judgment or coordination.

MYTH: Drinking makes uncomfortable feelings go away (anger, shyness, loneliness, frustration).

FACT: Alcohol may cover up uncomfortable feelings for a while, but they come back when you are sober again. Drinking isn't always an escape from uncomfortable feelings. The fact is that alcohol just as often has the opposite effect and intensifies feelings with sometimes catastrophic results: sadness (poor choices, crying fits, suicide ideation) or anger (domestic violence, rage).

MYTH: Most teens drink alcohol.

FACT: Most teens do not drink alcohol. According to the Monitoring the Future national survey, only about 6% of 8th grade students consumed alcohol in the past 30 days.

MYTH: Drinking alcohol when you are young helps prevent abuse later.

FACT: Teens' brains and bodies are still developing, and alcohol use can cause learning problems or lead to adult alcoholism. People who begin drinking by age 15 are five times more likely to abuse or become dependent on alcohol than those who begin drinking after age 21.

Nicotine is the main addictive and poisonous chemical in cigarettes and e-cigarettes, and often in vapes, whether the chemical is synthetic nicotine or derived from tobacco. Nicotine causes a person to crave it and suffer withdrawal symptoms if they ignore the craving. Nicotine is a toxic substance. It raises blood pressure and spikes adrenaline, which increases heart rate and the likelihood of having a heart attack.

MYTH: Vaping is a good way to quit cigarette smoking.

FACT: Although some companies and people have promoted vaping as way to help quit smoking cigarettes, the truth is e-cigarettes or vaping have not formally been approved as quitting devices. Studies have found that many people who intended to vape to quit the nicotine habit end up continuing to use both traditional cigarettes and also vape (known as "dual use"). Quitting smoking is one of the best things you can do for your health — smoking harms nearly every organ in your body.

MYTH: Smoking or vaping nicotine helps you think clearly.

FACT: You may believe that you are thinking more clearly, but nicotine smoked or vaped actually has no effect on the reasoning process in your brain. The initial nicotine "kick," which stimulates the central nervous system and causes a sudden release of glucose, and is followed by depression and fatigue, leading the smoker to seek more nicotine (dependence).

MYTH: Smoking or vaping nicotine calms you down and relieves stress.

FACT: Nicotine may appear to calm you down, but you're actually becoming addicted. You feel jittery & irritable when you don't have it (withdrawal), so using nicotine again makes that irritable feeling go away. If you are not addicted, cigarettes actually make you feel nervous.

MYTH: Smoking or vaping nicotine keeps you thin.

FACT: Nicotine stimulates the central nervous system, which may suppress appetite, but it doesn't change eating habits. When the effects wear off, you'll likely feel even more hungry and eat even more than you would've before.

MYTH: Vaping is safer than regular cigarettes.

FACT: E-cigarettes and vapes contain many cancer-causing and other toxic chemicals - including nicotine, formaldehyde, arsenic, aluminum, and lead. Vaping has been linked to dangerous respiratory problems. Also, teens who vape are actually more likely to end up smoking cigarettes if they try vaping first. Either way, nicotine is highly addictive and toxic substance. Research shows that teens that "vape only" are much more likely to start smoking traditional cigarettes and co-using them with e-cigarettes, thereby increasing the amount of nicotine they consume and exposing themselves to all the health risks associated with smoking traditional cigarettes. This point may need to be emphasized when some teens speak up to defend the practice of "only vaping."

Materials and Supplies to Prepare

- **Visual** – *Ground Rules: Students*, you will save this for future lessons
- **Visual** – *Ground Rules: Teacher*
- **Visual** – Titles for four chart-like visuals:
 - *Reasons Why People Might Use Nicotine*
 - *Reasons Not to Use Nicotine*
 - *Reasons Why People Might Use Marijuana*
 - *Reasons Not to Use Marijuana*You will save these lists for future lesson
- **Handout** – Sample Letter to Parent/Guardian for each student, optional
- **Materials** – Video: *Let's talk about Marijuana*

Legend

Throughout the lessons, we use the icons below to indicate what to say during the lesson, what to keep in mind as you facilitate the lesson, and what to display in the classroom throughout the lesson.

What to display	What to say	What to keep in mind
		

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce Program



Optional to write “Project ALERT” on the board or chart paper, or optional to display the first slide of Lesson 1 slides.



This is the first lesson of Project ALERT.

ALERT stands for Adolescent Learning Experiences in Resistance Training; you do not need to memorize this.

The important thing to know is that Project ALERT is about three things:

- 1. Why some people use drugs and why most people don't.**
- 2. How to recognize the pressures to use drugs.**
- 3. How to resist these pressures.**

When we use the word “drug”, we mean any chemical substance that affects the brain or body. Therefore, the words such as substance, drug, or alcohol and other drug may be used interchangeably. Some information may focus specifically on nicotine, marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drugs because these are the substances that teens are more likely to encounter.

There are eleven Project ALERT lessons which will give you the knowledge, skills, and confidence to resist peer pressure and misleading messaging in order to avoid substance use. The lessons will be fun and different; they'll teach you important facts and skills; they'll include videos, skits, and games.

You are now at an age when you are making more of your own decisions. What are some decisions that you are making now?



Example could include:

- what food to eat
- how to spend money
- what clothes to wear
- whether to take drugs



The decision whether to use substances is ultimately up to you. You need to know the health, legal, and social risks involved in using drugs, alcohol, and other substances so that your decisions can ensure a healthy, safe lifestyle.



No one can make you use drugs if you don't want to. Project ALERT will help find ways for you to say "no" if you feel pressured.

Today, we will talk about why some people use nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol, and also the reasons why most people have decided not to use these substances.

2. Develop Ground Rules



Display Visual: *Ground Rules: Students*



We'll be talking about smoking, vaping, drinking, and the use of other drugs in Project ALERT. It's important to have some special ground rules so that we all can feel more comfortable talking about substance use.

What rules could we make that would help us all feel comfortable during Project ALERT?

Record students' answers on the visual.



Elicit:

- No put downs (respect)
- Everyone try to participate (participation)
- No personal identification of sensitive information; "Someone I know..." (confidentiality/privacy)

Prompts, if necessary:

- **How would you feel if you said something personal about drugs and it got around school?**
- **How would you feel if other students laughed at your ideas?**



Display visual: *Ground Rules: Teacher*

These are the rules that I will follow during Project ALERT:



1. **Respect:** I will listen carefully to what you have to say and treat all responses with respect.
2. **Inclusion:** I will encourage all students to participate in the program's activities.
3. **Confidentiality:** I will keep things I hear in class private, unless... (go over district policy on reporting here)

Is anything missing from this list?

3. Make Reasons Lists



Now we are going to do an activity in small groups in which you will write some reasons why some people might use nicotine or marijuana and some reasons why most people do not use these substances.

I'm going to divide the class into four groups. Each group will get a sheet of paper and be assigned one category to make one of the following lists:

- Group 1: Reasons why people might use nicotine
- Group 2: Reasons not to use nicotine
- Group 3: Reasons why people might use marijuana
- Group 4: Reasons not to use marijuana

Each group should list at least five reasons on their sheet.

Each group will appoint a Recorder who will write down the group's responses, and each group will appoint a Reporter who will read aloud the group's responses to the class.

You'll have five minutes to work together to complete your lists.

Break students into groups, distribute a sheet to the groups' chosen Recorder, and assign a category to each group.



While students work in small groups circulate to help groups as needed.



Time is up. We will hear from the first Reporter and display the lists. Let's begin with the Reporter of Group 1: Reasons why people might use nicotine.

Reporter presents reasons why people might use nicotine.

Add "Peer Pressure" onto the list of reasons why, if it has not already been mentioned.



Optional to ask the class for additional ideas.

Typical student responses for nicotine use include:

- Friends do it, Peer Pressure
- Cool, sophisticated
- Rebellion
- Parents smoke
- Dependence, Addiction
- Cope with emotions
- Curiosity

- Nervous

Correct any myths, misconceptions, or wrong information. If the lists contain any of the myths below, circle and correct them, acknowledging the kernel of truth (that many people believe it or that some aspect of it is true).

Do NOT discuss myths not mentioned by students.

Nicotine Myths

Myth: They help you think clearly.

Myth: They calm you down.

Myth: They keep you thin.

Myth: It's easy to quit later.

Myth: Vaping is safer than regular cigarettes.

Myth: Vaping is a good way to quit smoking.

If students suggest or defend the practice of only vaping:
Research shows that teens that “vape only” are much more likely to start smoking traditional cigarettes and co-using them with e-cigarettes, thereby increasing the amount of nicotine they consume and exposing themselves to all the health risks associated with smoking traditional cigarettes.



Now let's hear from Group 2's reporter on the reasons why not to use nicotine.

Reporter presents reasons why not to use nicotine.



Typical student responses for why not to use nicotine include:

- Hurts your health (lung cancer, lung disease, heart attacks, heart disease)
- Do worse in sports
- Breath, clothes, and hair smell bad
- Addicting
- Trouble with family, at school
- Harms others
- Yellow teeth
- Illegal for teens to purchase



Now let's hear from Group 3's reporter on the reasons why people might use marijuana.

Reporter presents reasons why people might use marijuana.



Add “Peer Pressure” onto the list of reasons why if it has not already been mentioned.

Typical student responses for marijuana use include:

- Friends do it, Peer Pressure
- Cool, sophisticated
- Rebellion
- Parents use it
- Escape problems, responsibility
- Cope with emotions (insecure, angry)
- Dependence, Addiction
- Curiosity
- Medical prescription

Marijuana Myths

Myth: It takes away anxiety, anger, depression, problems.

Myth: It makes you creative, a better dancer, talker.

Myth: It is a plant so it must be safe.



Now let’s hear from Group 4’s reporter on the reasons why not to use marijuana.

Reporter presents reasons why not to use marijuana.



Typical student responses for why not to use marijuana include:

- Hurts your health
- Do worse in sports
- Can’t think clearly
- Lose control of actions or thoughts
- Can’t drive safely
- May cause dependence or addiction
- Paranoid
- Problems remain
- Trouble with family, at school
- Illegal for teens

4. Compare Marijuana and Alcohol



Looking at the list of reasons why people use marijuana, which reasons might also be true for alcohol?

Checkmark all of the reasons.



Point to the list of reasons not to use marijuana.

Ask: **Which reasons for not using marijuana are also true alcohol?**

Checkmark all of the reasons.

What do you notice about alcohol and marijuana?

Right, people don't drink alcohol and don't use marijuana for a lot of the same reasons.



Reinforce the idea that both alcohol and marijuana are substances that impair brain and body function and are habit-forming.



Save the *Reasons Why People Use Marijuana* visual for a future lesson.

5. Show and Discuss Video: Let's talk about Marijuana



Now we'll see a video in which older teens talk about reasons why people might use marijuana and why they do not. Listen carefully to hear if the older teens describe any reasons that we didn't put onto our lists.



Show the video: *Let's talk about Marijuana*



After showing the video, you will lead the class in a discussion about the reasons described by the older teens and tie your students' reasons lists.

Discussion goals:

1. Compare marijuana and alcohol so students will see that these substances often are used for the same reasons.
2. Clarify and reinforce reasons not to use marijuana and alcohol by showing the negative effects are similar.

Top Five Reasons Lists from Video: Let's Talk about Marijuana
Why might people start to use marijuana?

- Friends do it, peer pressure, peer acceptance
- Cool, influencers, famous stars, social media pressure
- Cope with emotions, like depression, stress, or anxiety, (including anxiety in social situations)
- Curiosity
- Rebellion

Why might people choose NOT to use marijuana?

- Harms brain, distorts perception, harms your lungs, harms reproductive health, hurts your health, screws up your body
- Can't think clearly, can't concentrate, no train of thought, makes you anxious or panicked, makes you feel sick or dizzy
- Problems remain (doesn't solve problems)
- Dependency or addiction, could start to depend on it for temporary effect, could lead to more drug and other drug use
- It's illegal (for kids everywhere, you don't always know what's in it, and also THC-edibles are hard to determine strength)



What are some of the reasons those teens gave for why people might start using marijuana?

After each reason, refer to it on the students' marijuana list or write the new reason on the students' list. For each new reason that gets added to the list, ask: **Is this also true for drinking alcohol?**

What are some of the reasons those teens gave for NOT using marijuana?

After each reason, refer to it on the relevant students' list or write the new reason on the list. For each new reason added to the list, ask: **Is this also true for drinking alcohol?**



You have done a good job listing the reasons why people use nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol and the reasons not to – and showing how similar many of these reasons are.

6. Wrap-up Lesson



Today, we had our first Project ALERT lesson. We set ground rules for safe and confidential conversations about substance use. We thought about the reasons why someone might use nicotine, marijuana, or alcohol and realized the reasons are similar or the same. We also learned that there are similar reasons to resist both substances. Remember the decision whether to use substances or not is ultimately up to you.



During Project ALERT, we'll be talking more about reasons not to use substances. We'll also be learning skills that will help you resist the pressures to use them.

Project ALERT is going to help us learn why we ultimately want to say "no" and will help us practice saying "no" to a variety of substances in a variety of situations.

In the next lesson, we'll talk about what really happens when someone smokes or vapes nicotine or marijuana.



Provide positive reinforcement for students' knowledge, participation, and attention during this lesson.



Save the following visuals for future lessons:

- *Ground Rules: Students*
- *Reasons Why People Use Marijuana*