

Lesson 4

Introduction to Pressures



PROJECT
ALERT

Lesson Overview

Lesson Goals

1. Identify different pressures to use substances to help students resist drugs
2. Motivate resistance by showing students that most teens do not use substances
3. Identify and resist marketing pressure to use substances

Scope and Sequence with Pacing Guidance

1. Introduce Lesson (~2 min.)
2. Introduce Pressures (~12 min.)
3. Discuss Prevalence of Substance Use (~10 min.)
4. Discuss Substance Marketing and Advertising (~5 min.)
5. Identify Ad Messages (~3 min.)
6. Rewrite Substance Ads (~11 min.)
7. Wrap-up (~2 min.)

Brief Lesson Description

This lesson marks a transition from building knowledge about the consequences of substance use to practicing resistance skills. However, before students can resist pressure, they must first learn how to identify it. While students certainly have experienced pressure or influence, they are not always able to articulate it. This lesson focuses on two forms of social pressure before focusing on examples of interpersonal pressures in subsequent lessons.

You will help students identify both internal and external sources of pressure. One type of pressure you will discuss with students is the pressure we put on ourselves, or internal pressure. This is the pressure we place on ourselves to live up to “social norms,” which are found in everyday life and on social media. You will use recent substance use data to address the common misperception that “all teens” are using drugs.

A second form of social pressure is the external pressure that comes from the marketing of substances. In this lesson, students are challenged to identify the message in marketing or advertisements. In small groups, students will identify the messages in substance advertisements and rewrite them to tell the truth.

Background Knowledge: Pre-Reading

Researchers have found that perceived drug use norms are powerful influences on the onset of drug use behavior. If students think everyone is doing it - vaping, using marijuana, or drinking alcohol - they will feel more pressure to use them. These perceptions often come from what students observe other doing, either directly or on social media. Exceptions to the norm, such as drug use at a party or posts on social media about drinking alcohol, often stand out and get attention, so these things tend to be viewed as more normative than they actually are.

When students overestimate how many peers are involved in drug use, they are less likely to perceive social support from their peers if they do decide to refuse offers to use drugs. This is why teaching resistance skills alone is not enough; we also need to explain to teens that many of their peers are also resisting drug use. Research has shown that establishing actual drug use norms is critical to the success of any drug prevention effort.

In this lesson, we ask students to guess the percent of students in their grade in the United States who have used vapes, cigarettes, marijuana, and alcohol in the last month. Virtually all students overestimate by a significant amount. Common guesses for 30-day prevalence of alcohol use among 8th graders are on the high side, and students are genuinely surprised to hear the actual percentage of use is quite low.

There are several teaching techniques that help this activity have a powerful impact on students:

- **Know the latest prevalence data.** To make sure you always have current prevalence rates, we provide you with data from the University of Michigan's Monitoring the Future study every year. Project ALERT uses 30-day prevalence statistics because they are a good indicator of regular use, whereas annual prevalence rates include one-time-only experimenters.
- **Demonstrate the percentages.** Many students often need help making percentages concrete. You will have the appropriate number of students stand up to represent the proportion of nonusers for different substances. The visual impact helps students understand the majority of 8th graders do not use substances and they see very few students remaining in their seats.
- **Don't argue about the data.** Because the actual prevalence statistics are usually substantially lower than the students' guesses, some students will challenge the data by saying that the kids in the surveys lied. The discussion questions outlined in this activity are designed to diffuse or prevent this challenge. But it is wise to prepare a response in case a student challenges the validity of the substance use statistics. Any response should be delivered in a matter-of-fact way. This is also a good place to practice validation:
"I know it may seem as though students lied because the numbers are so different. However..."
"That's possible, but the people who conducted the survey promised confidentiality and made sure parents and teachers would not see students' answers - so we're pretty

confident in these statistics.”

- **Impress upon students the meaning of “majority”.** The activity wraps up with the teacher respecting and recognizing students’ perceived realities. This is meant to reinforce the idea that feeling in the minority is an example of an internal pressure. Because seventh graders are concrete thinkers, for the most part, it wouldn’t hurt to remind them of the visual representation of the data by saying, “*Just think of all the students who stood up in this class to represent the percentage of kids who don’t smoke or drink. Remember, nonusers are in the majority.*”

Materials and Supplies to Prepare

- **Visual** – Ground Rules: Students (from lesson 1)
- **Visual** – Create a six-column chart with the title *Where does pressure to use substances come from?* You will reuse this chart in Lesson 9.

Where does pressure to use substances come from?

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- **Visual** – Create a chart with the title *Drug Use Estimates* with the table below:


Substance Use Estimates: Past Month
(Percentage of 8th graders in the United States)

Percentage	% that did	% that did not
Used nicotine vape or e-cig		
Smoked cigarettes		
Used marijuana		
Used alcohol		

- **Materials** – Digital files of ads for vapes, cigarettes, alcohol, and marijuana

Legend

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 say	What to keep in mind	What to display
		

Lesson Plan

1. Introduce Lesson



Display visual created in Lesson 1: *Student Ground Rules*.



Today, we are going to talk about the types of pressures to use substances. We'll also talk about some ways to resist pressures to use substances.

2. Introduce Substance Use Pressures



Display visual *Where does pressure to use substances come from?*



In our first Project ALERT lesson, we talked about reasons why some people use substances. One of the reasons many of you mentioned was “because friends do.”

In the first column, I'm going to write friends and peers, which are others in your grade or school who might be friends.

Write Friends and Peers in the first or farthest left column.

Where else do pressures come from?



Elicit:

- Adults/family
- Ads, including billboards, magazines, and TV
- Social media, including influencers, ad, and friends
- Influencers
- Community
- Yourself

*Yourself should be placed in the farthest right column.

If students respond that “school” is a source of pressure to use, probe for who in the school applies pressure to use substances, and then determine if it is a person in one of the existing categories, such as friends.



Now, what might each of these sources say to pressure substance use?

Let's come up with at least one pressure sentence for each source.

Write suggested sentence(s) below the respective source.



Examples could include:

- Friends and peers
 - Come on. It won't hurt you to try.
 - I got these drugs just for us.
 - All the kids are drinking.
 - The popular kids vape.
 - Your best friend offers you a beer/seltzer.
- Adults/Family
 - We forbid you to smoke marijuana. (rebellion)
 - When parents use drugs (smoke, drink), teens may feel it's okay to do it, too. (parental modeling)
 - Do you want a sip?
- Ads, including billboards, magazines, and TV
 - Drinking will make you look attractive or popular.
 - Vaping is cool.
 - Smoking makes you tougher, macho, empowered, independent.
- Social media and Influencers
 - People you look up are seen vaping on social media (musicians, movie stars, etc.)
 - Friends and peers are posting about drinking alcohol
- Yourself
 - I'll feel out of it if I don't vape.
 - I'm bored. Maybe I'll get drunk.



Many of us put pressure on ourselves to use substances because we think everyone else is using them. We think everyone else is vaping nicotine or using marijuana or drinking alcohol, or maybe even using a combination of substances. Let's find out just how many young people actually use these substances.

Reinforce student engagement in the activity and praise their contributions.



Save the completed visual *Where Do Pressures to Use Substances Come From?* for use in Lesson 9.

3. Discuss Prevalence of Substance Use



Display visual *Substance Use Estimates*



There is a national survey named *Monitoring the Future* that asks 8th, 10th, and 12th graders about their substance use. It asks them if they

have ever used specific substances, like nicotine vapes, flavored vapes, marijuana, alcohol, and other drugs.

For each substance in this table, I would like to hear guesses from at least four students on the percentage of 8th graders in the U.S. reporting use of these substances in the last month.

Who would like to give the first guess for the percentage of 8th graders that have used nicotine e-cigarettes or vapes in the last month?

Write four student answers in the appropriate box for this question and the three following ones.

Next question. What percentage of 8th graders do you think have smoked cigarettes in the last month?

Next. What percentage of 8th graders do you think have used marijuana in the last month?

And finally. What percentage of 8th graders do you think have used alcohol in the last month?



Here's what 8th graders reported on the survey in 2022 about their substance use in the last month:

- 9% used nicotine vape or e-cigarettes, or 9 of 100 youth
- 1% smoked cigarettes, or 1 of 100 youth
- 5% used marijuana, or 5 of 100 youth
- 6% used alcohol, or 6 of 100 youth

Write the percentages in the table as you say them aloud to students.

Let's put these percentages of actual use into context. For each substance, I'm going to ask a few students to remain seated. They will represent the number of students who used a substance in the last month. Everyone else will stand; you represent the non-users.

As note, if I ask you to remain seated it has nothing to do with your personal use or views of substances. I just want to represent the difference in the proportion of 8th grade substance users and non-users.

The following section uses 30 as an average class size, but this can be adjusted.

Let's start with using nicotine: 27 out of 30 stand (3 sit)

Represent the proportion for each substance.

Next, cigarettes: 29 out of 30 stand (1 sits).

Look around, nearly all are non-users.

Next, using marijuana: 28 out of 30 stand (2 sit), and

Finally, using alcohol: 28 out of 30 stand (2 sit).

Nonusers are the majority.



Use the number of students in the class to concretely portray percentages as you write student responses. For example, 3 students out of 30 students represents 10 percent.

For quick reference:

- Nicotine Vaping: 28 out of 30 stand (2 sit)
- Cigarettes: 29 out of 30 stand (1 sits)
- Marijuana: 29 out of 30 stand (1 sits)
- Alcohol: 28 out of 30 stand (2 sit)



Most of us estimated that more students use drugs than actually do. But not as many students vape, smoke cigarettes, use marijuana, and drink as we thought.

If the estimates approximate the actual percentage, reinforce students' knowledge that "not everyone's doing it"

Can you think of any reasons why we might have guessed too high?



Prompts if necessary:

- Do the vapers (drinkers, smokers, marijuana users) hang out together? Are they more obvious?
- Do the vapers have a certain place at or near school where they get together?
- Do nonsmokers hang out in the same way? Are they less obvious?
- Do people who drink at parties talk about it?
- Do nondrinkers talk about not drinking?



It might feel like you are the only one not vaping, drinking, or using other drugs, but it's not true. Just think of all the students who stood up in this class to represent the percentage of kids who don't smoke or drink. Remember, nonusers are in the majority. However, it may seem like everyone is a user because we repeatedly see the same people using substances or talking about it.

It's less obvious who isn't using drugs. They have other, better things to talk about than what drug they used. Also, some people exaggerate about their use; they say that they've tried a substance, but they have not.

Nationally, most people your age do not use drugs and it's the same here at school.

4. Discuss Marketing and Advertising of Substances



Refer to visual *Where does pressure to use substances come from?*



Let's focus on the pressure you receive from the advertising and marketing of substances. We see it on billboards, in commercials, in magazines, and on social media. Advertising and marketing use many strategies - obvious and subtle – to send us messages about their product.

We're going to learn how to identify the messages companies are sending and how to resist those messages.



Display ads for two different substances. For example, one vape and one alcohol.



How much do you think it costs to run an ad in a print magazine?

How much do you think it costs to run an ad during a sports broadcast, like the Super Bowl?

How much do you think alcohol and tobacco companies spend on marketing to people including teens each year?

What percentage of teens use social media, like TikTok or Instagram, and see ads on social daily?



After students respond with guesses, you can tell them the statistics.

How much do you think it costs to run an ad like this in a print magazine?

A single-page ad in one issue of *Time Magazine* can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.

How much do you think it costs to run an ad during a sports broadcast, like the Super Bowl?

In 2022, a 30-second television commercial during the Super Bowl costs around \$6.5 million.

How much do you think alcohol and tobacco companies spend on marketing to people including teens each year?

According to global data, the alcohol industry spending on ads and marketing was \$6.7 billion dollars in 2020 and will rise to \$7.7 billion dollars in 2023. And Digital advertising of alcohol is set to account for 30% of alcohol advertising spending in 2023.

The tobacco industry spending on ads and marketing tobacco products in the U.S. is \$8.6 billion per year, or \$23 million each day.

What percentage of teenagers use social media, like TikTok or Instagram or Snapchat, and see ads on social daily?

About 9 out of 10 teens use social media daily.



Why would a company spend so much on one ad?

What do the advertisers get if they are successful at persuading us to try their product?



After students respond with guesses, you can tell them the ad strategies.

- Ads are very powerful. Advertisers use many sophisticated techniques to get us to use drugs. It's not easy to resist these messages. They make substance use look very appealing.
- Vaping ads often state or imply a "safer alternative to regular cigarettes" while glamorizing rebellious attitude. However, the devices contain addictive nicotine and harmful chemicals. Vaping typically does not keep teens from smoking cigarettes – it does the exact opposite.
- Alcohol ads link drinking with happy times, being attractive, and being rich. But alcohol doesn't make you popular or rich.
- Cigarette ads link smoking with norms or stereotypes. They suggest that smoking helps you be popular, happy, and attractive.
- Ads for marijuana suggest freedom of choice, individuality, independence, and defiance. They often use images and state claims implying health benefits that are misleading and lack scientific findings.
- Ads on social media may show influencers using substances. They may show an influencer endorsing substances simply to get a paycheck – the person may not even use the substance themselves.
- Ads do not convey the risks and consequences of substance use.



Companies invest a considerable amount of money in their messaging. If their messaging is effective, people spend more money on the product and their revenue or earning increases. The more effective the messaging the more money they make.

5. Identify Messages in Advertisements



Refer to ads displayed in the prior activity; optional to include a marijuana ad to complement the vape and alcohol ad.



Let's look at each of these ads and figure out what the company is trying to tell us about the product, or how the product might influence our lives.

I'll start by telling you what I see in this ad and what the visuals are communicating to me.

Talk about what the setting or context of the ad communicates from your perspective.

If appropriate:

Now, let's look at the slogan or text used in the ad and examine what it's telling me, and how that relates to the visual messaging.

Taken together, this ad is telling me...

Summarize the ad message.

Is it accurate that using this product or incorporating it in my life will do this?

Let's look at the remaining ads together.

Discuss what the image and text are communicating about the product and its potential influence in life.



Elicit how the message communicated by the ad contradicts the short- and long-term consequences of substance use.



We should also talk about influencers and celebrities because they partner with companies to endorse products. The influencer or celebrity receives payment for posting a photo or video with the product, talking about how the product has changed their life, or why they like the product. The company uses the popularity of the celebrity or influencer to market the product.

Can you think of any examples of celebrities or influencers marketing substances like vapes, cigarettes, marijuana, alcohol, or other substances?

Sometimes celebrities and influencers are owners of companies that sell substances. Can you think of any?

When they are promoting or endorsing their own product, they make even more money if you purchase those products.

Companies hope that by associating their product with a popular or influential person you will be more willing to purchase it. They suggest that you can achieve their level of popularity if you use the product. Companies hope you will try a particular substance or brand because a celebrity is associated with it. They also try to make you think those substances are safe to use because someone you know and possibly respect endorse it.

But, particularly for substances like nicotine, marijuana, and alcohol, will using them make you a celebrity or influencer? Or make you money?

And will you be protected for the consequences of use just because a celebrity or influencer endorses the product?

The other thing about social media ads and content is the more you engage with something – click on it, view it – the more you will see in the future. So, if you click on an ad for vapes or marijuana products, you'll see a lot more content about those substances almost immediately. It's trying to sell you the product and normalize use; you see so much of it that you forget about the consequences. This is true for ads in apps that you use, too. Seeing more of the content will trick you into thinking more people are using substances actually are; it tries to shift thinking that use is normal.

6. Rewrite Substance Advertisements



Now that we've established the myths or disconnect between what ad messages communicate about substances and truth, let's launch a marketing campaign that tells the truth about substance use.

Refer to ads used in the prior activity.

How could we rewrite one of these ads to tell the truth?

Write new text on or near the ad for student reference.



Elicit responses related to:

- Consequences of substance use
- Addiction



Now we are going to rewrite ads in small groups. Here are the directions for the activity:

I will break you into groups. Each group will receive an ad. As a group, you will think about what the ad is communicating and

what the counter or factual message should be in the ad. You'll come to consensus about what your new add should look like and say.

Select someone to serve as the Designer for the ad. This person will be responsible for drawing any new images and writing any new text. You'll have _____ minutes to redesign your add.

When time is up, each group or a representative from the group will present the original ad and the revised ad.

Your group will need the following supplies: paper and writing utensil(s).

Groups will be the following...



Circulate as students are working in groups; encourage every group member to participate.

Assist with ad interpretation or generating as needed.



Let's present our redesigns. Which group would like to present first?

Each group will present their ad; reinforce ads that are accurate and deter substance use.

7. Wrap-up Lesson



Today we have discussed the different sources of pressure – external and internal – to use substances. We also talked about how companies use a variety of techniques and billions of dollars to market their product in magazines, on billboards, and on social media try to convince us our lives will be positively enhanced if we use their substance – vape, cigarette, alcohol, or marijuana. That's not true.

They also try to convince us that substance use is more prevalent than it is. Everyone is vaping, and particularly this brand of vape. That's not true. Today we learned we learned that substance use among people your age is quite low; much lower than we estimated.

Endorsements and partnerships with influencers and celebrities also try to convince us that we can be like them if we use the same products, or that we can be more popular by using the substances associated with them. That's also not true.

Ads try to convince what we know to be true is not. Companies invest billions of dollars on marketing campaigns to convince us to use

substances that we know are not good for us. They aren't worried about our health and wellbeing; they are worried about how much money they make. You know the consequences of substance use in the short- and long-term.

In the next lesson, we'll learn about how to resist pressures from our friends and peers.



Save the completed visual *Where Do Pressures to Use Substances Come From?* for use in Lesson 9.