

Navigating Health and Wellness Through Empowered Choices

GRADES 9–10

60 MINUTES

Lesson Overview

This lesson explores the factors influencing substance use decisions, including stress, mental health, family, peers and school. Students reflect on their stressors, explore coping strategies and investigate short- and long-term impacts of substance use. Students develop practical approaches to managing stress and making healthier decisions through research, discussion and creative problem-solving.

Essential Questions

- How does stress influence decision-making?
- What strategies can help me manage stress and make healthier decisions?
- How do substance use and misuse impact individuals, relationships and communities?

Student Learning Goals

- I can analyze how stress and emotional factors influence decision-making.
- I can identify at least two strategies for managing stress and improving well-being.
- I can name the short- and long-term impacts of substance use on mental and physical health and relationships.

Related Standards

Health Standards

HS. WHP. 5. Identify at least two strategies to promote health and wellness for individuals, families, and communities.

HS.SUB.7. Analyze reasons why individuals use or do not use alcohol, marijuana/cannabis, tobacco, and other drugs, including the influence of family, peers, school, community, culture, and social norms on personal values, beliefs, and behaviors.

HS.SUB.8. Identify potential barriers to making healthy decisions regarding substance use and identify personal strategies and community support to overcome those barriers

Transformative SEL Standards

Standard 1. Self -Awareness and Identity. Identify and reflect upon one's thoughts, emotions, behaviors, intersectional identity, and capabilities across situations and environments.

Standard 2: Self- Management and Agency
.Use management strategies to build personal and collective agency that lead to achieving goals and aspirations.

Lesson Materials

- Slide deck with facilitator notes
- Navigating Health & Wellness handout
- Materials for charting student responses (whiteboard or digital)

Lesson Plan

Preparation

This lesson supports students in navigating choices and focuses on health and wellness. Students can use digital or printed materials for this lesson.

This lesson allows students to explore stress and its effect on decision-making. Students reflect individually and collaborate to identify coping strategies and resources that impact well-being. Establish norms and expectations to support students safely engaging in these conversations and activities. Before the lesson, revisit the norms and expectations to ground the conversation and ensure a safe space for all students, including a reminder about confidentiality. Remind students they are not required to share anything if they do not want to.

Print out the Navigating Health & Wellness handout.

This lesson may take 60–90 minutes and can be broken up into multiple lessons depending on your context.

Learning Sequence

Share the essential questions and learning goals with students. Remind students there is no singular correct answer.

Activity 1. Activating Schema: Reflection | 10 Minutes

In this warm-up, students reflect on what they feel is stressful and what they do when they are stressed.

1. Let students know that we all encounter stress, and different things cause stress for each of us. Ask them to reflect on all the things that stress them out and give students 5 minutes to respond to the following prompt:
 - What do you find stressful?
2. Ask students to share some of the things they find stressful (Slide 4). Capture responses on a whiteboard, chart paper, sticky notes or other digital resource.

3. Ask students to think about how they respond to stress (Slide 5) and add ideas to their list. Allow students to capture how they cope with stress or feelings and emotions during stressful events or situations.
4. Ask students to share some of the ways they respond to stress.

Activity 2. Identify Stress Types and Impacts | 10 Minutes

1. Transition students from thinking about their own experiences toward exploring types of stress and factors that impact stress.
2. Share Slides 6–8 and review key information about stress:
 - What is stress?
 - Internal and external stressors
 - Positive stress (eustress) and negative stress (distress)
3. Ask students for additional examples of eustress or distress. Capture their responses on a whiteboard, chart paper, sticky notes or other digital resource.
4. Direct students to the Navigating Health & Wellness handout.
5. Pair students and have them answer the following question (Slide 9):
 - How does stress impact someone's ability to make decisions?
6. Give students 5 minutes to talk and write their reflections on the worksheet.
7. Invite pairs to share their reflections with the class. As students share, capture their responses on a whiteboard, chart paper, sticky notes or other digital resource.

Activity 3. Explore Reasons for Substance Use and Misuse | 5 Minutes

1. Move students to thinking about how stress and other emotions can impact decisions around substance use. Provide time for the whole class to brainstorm and explore possible reasons why someone may use or misuse substances.
2. Review reasons that someone may use substances (Slide 10).
3. Ask students to share other reasons that someone may use substances. Their responses may include
 - Cultural or societal influences
 - Enjoyment
 - Performance enhancement (sports or academic performance)
 - Addiction or dependence

Activity 4. Investigate Substance Misuse Impacts | 30 Minutes

Transition students from thinking about why people make decisions into an investigation of some of the impacts of substances on teenagers. Students will gather information about a substance on a slide or poster to be shared with classmates.

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Depending on your class context, you can randomly assign or determine student groups beforehand. You might also have students work in different parts of the room to encourage movement.
2. Invite each group to select a substance to research. Choose a substance from the [Drug Policy Alliance](#) or the [National Institute on Drug Abuse](#) (cocaine, fentanyl, heroin, marijuana, methamphetamine, xylazine, LSD, psilocybin mushrooms, MDMA, nicotine, prescription opioids, prescription stimulants, synthetic cannabinoids, or synthetic cathinones). You may want to tie this to previous learning using the [CRAAP test](#) to review the websites (see 9–10 Lesson Plan: Messaging, Media and Substance Use).
3. Ask each group to create a slide or poster on their substance (Slide 11). Each slide or poster should answer the following questions:
 - What are the short- and long-term physical impacts of the substance?
 - What are the short- and long-term mental impacts of the substance?
 - What are the short- and long-term impacts of the substance on personal relationships?
4. Make slides or posters visible to the class. Ask students to read at least two other presentations.
5. Discuss the common presentation themes and takeaways (Slide 12). List the summary characteristics and facts that physical, mental and personal impacts substances have. Capture student reflections on the whiteboard, chart paper, sticky notes or other digital resource.

Activity 5. Bringing It All Together | 10 Minutes

Explore reasons for substance use and the potential impacts substances can have on mental, physical and emotional well-being. Students will focus on strategies to manage stress and make healthier decisions.

1. Review coping and decision-making strategies (Slide 13).
2. Explain the activity using the mind-mapping directions from the Navigating Health & Wellness handout (page 3).
3. Ask students to map their stressors (Slide 14). For each stressor, students create two branches in the following categories: short-term coping strategies (playing video games, talking to a friend or taking a break) and long-term coping strategies (exercising regularly, developing time management skills or seeking therapy).
4. Give students 5 minutes to write down at least one short-term and one long-term strategy for each stressor they listed. Encourage them to use the Navigating Health & Wellness handout.
5. Direct students to think-pair-share with a peer to discuss their strategies and ideas (Slide 15). Ask them to consider the following questions:
 - Are there additional strategies you could add to your own map?

- Why might we sometimes choose a short-term strategy over a long-term strategy?
- How can understanding the reasons help us make more intentional choices?
- What barriers can get in the way of using these strategies? How could you mitigate those barriers?

Activity 7. Wrap-up | 5 Minutes

1. Review the key takeaways (Slide 16).
2. Provide students with the opportunity to complete exit tickets. Collect exit tickets.

Formative Assessment Opportunities

Listen For

Listen for students' ideas for navigating substance use to see how they are connecting stress coping mechanisms and substance use.

Exit Ticket

- What are different types of stress?
- Rate your ability to apply healthy coping strategies to stressful situations.
 1. I can apply healthy coping strategies to most situations.
 2. I can apply healthy coping strategies to some situations.
 3. I can apply healthy coping strategies to a few situations.
 4. I struggle to apply healthy coping strategies.
- Name two things you learned about a specific substance you or your classmates researched.

Additional Resources

The following resources provide additional information for helping teenagers cope with stress.

[The Scientific Power of Meditation](#): Explains how meditation affects your body

[Mindfulness for Middle and High School Students](#): Introduces mindfulness to students

[Mindfulness: Youth Voices](#): Shares teenagers' experiences with practicing mindfulness

[Nemours Teens Health](#): Defines stress and shares how to deal with stress

[Guided Meditation](#): Shares meditation and mindfulness techniques for teens.

[FutureMe.org](#): Allows students to write a letter to their future selves, capturing their learning, reflections and remembering

[Positive Action](#): Empowers students with how-to guides to enhance effective decision-making skills

[Safety First, from Stanford Medicine's REACH Lab](#): Provides comprehensive, harm-reduction-based drug intervention curriculum