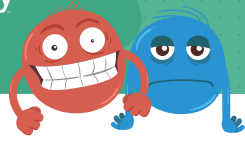


Say “YES” to a Healthy Lifestyle



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4–8

VIDEO TOPIC SERIES | EDUCATOR GUIDE

ASK, LISTEN, LEARN: BUILDING CONFIDENCE FOR RESPONSIBLE CHOICES

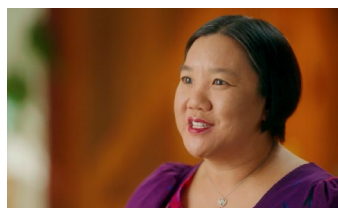
Guide Objectives

- Equip educators with strategies for introducing and reinforcing concepts related to peer pressure, goal setting, and decision-making in their classrooms.
- Illustrate how linking peer pressure, goal setting, and decision-making to brain science helps students understand how brain development influences their choices and helps them make more thoughtful decisions.
- Encourage educators to reflect on their current methods for supporting students' healthy decision-making skills and explore opportunities for improvement.
- Give students the tools needed to take action on all three topics and ultimately say “NO” to underage drinking and underage marijuana use.

About the Video Series

As middle school students are coping with their own physical and emotional changes, they are also beginning to face more complex social situations. To provide support, Responsibility.org's *Ask, Listen, Learn* program and Discovery Education offer digital resources for students that explain how alcohol and marijuana affect the developing brain and body, equip students with foundational tools to help them advocate for themselves, and stay substance-free. This three-part video series focuses on the key topics of peer pressure, goal setting, and responsible decision-making through the lens of the developing brain. Featuring insights from educators Leticia Barr and Dr. Femi Skanes, this series will help teachers empower their students with the tools they need to make informed, healthy, and responsible choices.

Meet the Subject Matter Specialists:



Leticia Barr is a former middle school computer science and engineering teacher, as well as an award-winning technology, education, and parenting blogger.



Dr. Femi Skanes is a former classroom teacher, assistant principal, and principal, as well as the founder of Leadership EDGE, LLC—which provides consulting services to improve educational outcomes for all students.

How to Use This Guide

This guide is designed to help you incorporate the ideas presented in this three-part video series into your own teaching. It also includes summaries, health and wellness connections, reflection questions, and activities to help you integrate the ideas presented in your classroom.

Click on the links below to view the accompanying resources for each video:

- [Peer Pressure Resources](#)
- [Goal Setting Resources](#)
- [Decision-Making Resources](#)

You may present all of the content, or you may pick and choose the resource(s) that best meet(s) the needs of you and your students.

Video: Peer Pressure

An Overview

Peer pressure is the influence that those around you can have on the decisions you make or how you act. The *Peer Pressure* video explains that peer pressure can happen anywhere—including in person and online. Young people are especially susceptible to peer pressure because their brains are still developing, which makes it harder for them to make informed decisions. As explained in the video, peer pressure can have both positive effects, such as motivating a friend to make safe choices, and negative effects, like pushing someone toward underage drinking. Knowing how substances like alcohol and marijuana affect the developing brain can help provide students with the “why” behind saying “NO.”

Connections to Health and Wellness:

- The adolescent brain is still growing and the part responsible for decision-making and self-control, called the prefrontal cortex, isn't fully developed yet. This means adolescents often rely on the emotional parts of their brains, like the amygdala, to make decisions. As a result, it can be harder for students to resist peer pressure and make careful, informed choices. Being aware of the science behind brain development can help pre-teens and teens feel more in control of their minds and bodies.
- In addition, knowing the facts about how alcohol and marijuana negatively affect their growing brains and bodies is important.
- With this knowledge in the back of their minds, adolescents are more equipped to think through negative peer pressure situations and have the “why” behind their reason for saying “NO.”

In the Classroom

Meaningful relationships with students are fostered through trust and open communication. It's important to provide your students with opportunities to communicate about topics that are important and relevant to them... and peer pressure is no exception! Guide your students in whole-class conversations about their experiences with and perceptions of peer pressure—including whether they've been subjected to it, their own strategies for standing up to it, and/or something about peer pressure that they wish you as their teacher knew. Help students understand that leaning on trusted adults—such as yourself—for support can be helpful if they feel overwhelmed by peer pressure. Trusted adults can advocate for the students, help them talk through decisions, and even help them create a safer environment.

Sample Activity

- Begin by helping students brainstorm different ways to say “NO” to negative peer pressure. Provide index cards and ask each student to write one refusal strategy per card. Then shuffle the cards and distribute them to small groups for discussion.
- At the end of the activity, have students select a couple refusal strategies and a few ways to be an upstander that they are most comfortable with. Inform them that the adolescent brain is hard-wired for risk-taking and that taking risks is a part of life. Explain that the prefrontal cortex, which helps with decision-making and impulse control, is still maturing. This makes it easier for students to be swayed by emotions and peer influence.

- Go on to explain that practicing strategies for saying “NO” to peer pressure can help students build confidence and strengthen their decision-making skills over time as they learn to calculate risks and make decisions that are best for them. In addition, practicing being an upstander—in which peer pressure is used for positive purposes—can empower students to support others, reinforce positive behaviors, and create a culture where making safe and thoughtful choices is encouraged.
- Next, describe various situations, involving peer pressure (such as you were invited to a party where you know there will be underage drinking; your friend asks you if she can copy your homework; or your classmates pressure you to skip school and go to the mall). For each scenario, challenge students to:
 1. Use their cards to select and roleplay several refusal strategies;
 2. Practice being an upstander who steps in to support their peer, encourages positive choices, and/or speaks up against the negative pressure.
- At the end of the activity, have students select a couple refusal strategies and ways to be an upstander that they felt the most comfortable using. Encourage them to jot them down in a place where they can easily refer to them when needed. Remind students that we are all different, and that what works best for one person may not be what works best for another.

Reflection Questions

- How do you create a classroom environment that encourages open and honest conversations about peer pressure?
- How can you help students understand how their brain development affects their responses to peer pressure, including why they might be more influenced by their peers during adolescence?
- What strategies do you use to help students be advocates for themselves and others?
- What strategies do you use to help students recognize and decide how they will respond to negative peer pressure?
- How do you highlight the positive aspects of peer pressure and encourage your students to support each other?
- How do you position yourself as a trusted adult for your students, and how can you help them identify other trusted adults they can turn to for support?

Related Responsibility.org Resources:

- [10 Ways to Say "NO" Infographic](#)
- [Ask, Listen, Learn: Refusal Roleplay Activity](#)
- [I Wish My Teacher Knew: The Impact of Peer Pressure Lesson](#)
- [Saying “NO” to Negative Peer Pressure Video](#)

Video: Goal Setting

An Overview

Goal setting is an important way to stay motivated and work toward growth. In the *Goal Setting* video, students learn that setting realistic goals—whether they’re academic, personal, or family-related—helps students create a clear plan and hold themselves accountable. During adolescence, the prefrontal cortex, which is the part of the brain responsible for planning and decision-making, is becoming more developed. This stage is an ideal time to establish and strengthen goal-setting skills. At the same time, engaging in risky behaviors like underage drinking or underage marijuana use can harm brain development and undermine progress toward achieving goals. The video offers the suggestion of writing down goals and sharing them with a trusted person to stay on track. It also highlights that if a goal isn’t achieved, it should not be seen as a failure but as an opportunity to reflect, readjust, and try again.

Connections to Health and Wellness

- Goal setting is closely connected to health and wellness, especially during adolescence, when the brain is undergoing rapid development. As you learned in this video, the brain “kicks into gear” between the ages of nine and 13 and begins to focus more on personal strengths and future aspirations. Key brain regions like the prefrontal cortex, which governs decision-making and planning, and the hypothalamus, which regulates motivation, play a significant role in this process. Meanwhile, the amygdala, responsible for processing emotions, can sometimes overpower the still-developing prefrontal cortex, making it harder for teens to resist risky behaviors that can be dangerous.
- Choices like underage drinking or underage marijuana use can alter the brain’s state and prevent adolescents from achieving their short- or long-term goals.
- By understanding how their decisions impact both their brains and their futures, students can be motivated to make healthier choices, stay focused on their goals, and navigate setbacks more effectively.

In the Classroom

Classroom activities that focus on goal setting empower students to take ownership of their personal growth. Setting goals and working toward them can build self-discipline, boost motivation, and help students develop skills for staying focused and resilient when faced with setbacks. Try to include discussions and activities focused on personal, family, and academic goals in your classroom. Also introduce students to SMART goals (goals that are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound) and use activities like the one mentioned below to create a structured way for students to create clear, actionable plans. As students work toward short-term and long-term goals, don’t underestimate the importance of encouraging them to assess their progress, make adjustments, and celebrate small successes along the way. By teaching goal-setting skills, you prepare students to handle challenges and make responsible choices.

Sample Activity

- Guide your class in creating SMART goals. Begin by collaborating to set a relevant goal for your whole class—whether it’s a reading goal, a class participation goal, or a goal related to making healthy decisions.

No matter what you decide, work together to establish a goal that is Specific (i.e., clear and well-defined), Measurable (i.e., possible to track progress), Achievable (i.e., possible to attain), Relevant (i.e., will help students achieve even bigger plans), and Time-bound (i.e., has a timeline of milestones or a deadline).

- Once students understand how to construct a SMART goal, challenge them to create two of their own SMART goals: one related to school and one related to their life outside of school. Before students work independently, brainstorm possible ideas together, such as those related to academic progress, participation in extra-curricular activities, social settings and peer pressure, and/or family life. It may also be helpful to work together to brainstorm actions and shorter-term goals that will help them accomplish their larger goals. Once students have written their own SMART goals, instruct them to keep them someplace they can refer to them often.
- Then designate a weekly time for students to check in on their goals, track their progress, discuss their challenges, make adjustments, and celebrate milestones met and goals achieved! Providing students with this follow-up is just as important as setting their goals, as it helps them stay accountable and motivated throughout the year.

Reflection Questions

- Does your classroom culture support students in setting and sharing their personal, academic, and family-related goals? How could you focus on this more?
- How can you incorporate planning and organizational skills into your conversations about goal setting?
- How can you help your students understand how goal setting can support their success and reduce the likelihood of negative outcomes?
- How can you help students understand how their brain development can affect their goal-setting and decision-making skills?
- How do you—or how could you—celebrate student success when they achieve their goals?
- How can you ensure that students see goal setting as a skill they can use not just in school but throughout their lives to overcome challenges and achieve personal growth?

Related Responsibility.org Resources

- [Alcohol & Your Developing Hypothalamus Lesson Plan](#)
- [How Alcohol Affects Your Developing Brain Video](#)
- [How Marijuana Affects Your Developing Brain Video](#)

Video: Decision-Making

An Overview

The *Decision-Making* video emphasizes the importance of teaching students to make thoughtful decisions. It explains that the brain’s prefrontal cortex helps us to make safe and responsible choices. It goes on to explain that because adolescents naturally also want to take risks, they need support in recognizing when to pause and think through their actions. This video highlights strategies for helping students make deliberate decisions, such as encouraging students to say, “I need a moment,” “Let me think,” or “Can I get back to you?” when they need more time to process their choices. It also addresses the impact of risky behaviors like underage drinking and underage marijuana use, which impair decision-making, memory, and overall brain function. To help students build strong decision-making skills, the video suggests guiding students through practices like weighing pros and cons, consulting trusted adults, and empowering them to say “NO” when something doesn’t feel right. These strategies can prepare students to approach choices thoughtfully and responsibly.

Connections to Health and Wellness:

- Decision-making is closely tied to health and wellness, especially during adolescence when the brain is still developing. Key regions of the brain play crucial roles in this process. In pre-teens and teenagers, the prefrontal cortex, the brain's center for planning and decision-making, is still maturing. Because it isn't fully developed, it doesn't yet balance the emotion-driven amygdala, which can make it harder for them to consider the consequences of their actions.
- Substances like alcohol and marijuana further interfere with the developing brain's ability to make good decisions. Alcohol affects nearly every part of the brain, including those parts responsible for memory, motor control, and decision making. It also acts as a central nervous system depressant, slowing the brain's ability to send messages throughout the body, and impairing overall functioning. Underage marijuana use also affects the brain as a whole, by disrupting clear thinking and making it more difficult to make responsible choices.
- By understanding how their brain development and choices are linked, students can learn to recognize the importance of avoiding dangerous behaviors and make decisions that support their overall wellness.

In the Classroom

Classroom activities that focus on decision-making help students develop critical thinking skills and confidence in navigating real-life challenges. Teach students about the developing brain’s role in decision-making—including how the prefrontal cortex helps them think through choices and how the amygdala processes emotions, as well as how risky behaviors like underage drinking or underage marijuana use can interfere with these processes. Introduce classroom activities where students pause to reflect on hypothetical situations and discuss the pros and cons of different scenarios. Encourage role-playing activities where students can practice saying “NO” to peer pressure, seek advice from a trusted adult, or otherwise make responsible choices. These hands-on exercises make decision-making strategies more relatable and practical and prepare them for a time when the hypothetical situation may become a reality. In addition, regular and open discussions about the consequences of decisions can help students see the connection between their actions and their goals.

Sample Activity

- Guide your students in investigating *all* of the different decisions they make, as well as the strategies they can use to make some of these decisions! Begin by asking students to help you brainstorm big and small decisions they make over the course of a day—from what to wear and what to eat for breakfast to whether to raise their hand in class, what to do on Friday night, and how to respond to peer pressure. Be sure that tricky decisions are documented in addition to simpler ones. Then continue to work together to sort these decisions into two categories: *Split-Second Decisions* (made instantly without much thought) and *Responsible/Thoughtful Decisions* (which involve considering options carefully to make the best choice).
- Remind students that the brain’s amygdala responds very quickly to emotional situations, but that it might not always lead to making the best decisions. The brain’s prefrontal cortex is in charge of helping them think through things and make smart choices—but this part of their brain does not fully develop until later. Therefore, it is important for students to have strategies in place to help them step back and think through their decisions.
- Share some of the decision-making strategies presented in the video, such as saying “Let me think” or “Can I get back to you?”; making a mental or physical checklist of the pros and cons; talking with a trusted adult; and remembering that it is okay to say “NO” if it doesn’t feel right. Then divide students into groups. Select several Responsible/Thoughtful Decisions from the list you brainstormed together and encourage groups to apply different decision-making strategies as they act out making choices in each one!

Reflection Questions

- Have you created a classroom environment that encourages students to pause and reflect before making decisions? How could you continue to build this?
- How can you help students understand the role of the prefrontal cortex, amygdala, and other brain regions in making decisions and managing emotions?
- Do you openly discuss topics like the dangers of underage drinking or underage marijuana use in a way that resonates with your students?
- How can you equip students with strategies to make more thoughtful decisions?
- How can you help students feel empowered to make decisions that align with their goals and values?

Related Responsibility.org Resources

- [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions Student Activity](#)
- [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions Video](#)
- [Parent Resources: Making Healthy Choices](#)
- [Making Healthy Choices Video](#)