

# Alcohol and the Developing Brain



Discovery  
EDUCATION



GRADE  
RANGE  
**5-7**

## BEHAVIOR ACTIVITY

# INFORMED STUDENTS MAKE BETTER, HEALTHIER DECISIONS

### Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Analyze the influence of their peers on health behaviors
- Evaluate the causes and effects of peer pressure in their lives
- Develop a plan to help them deal with alcohol-related peer pressure in the future

### Overview

The *Ask, Listen, Learn* underage drinking prevention program teaches kids what the brain does, what alcohol does to it, and what underage drinking does to them! In addition, the program teaches communication and decision-making skills to help kids say no to underage drinking. In this activity, students reflect on the impact of peer pressure on their daily lives. They consider the different types of peer pressure that they have witnessed and/or experienced, as well as the ways in which this pressure influences their own behavior. They then identify different people and resources to whom they can turn in the face of peer pressure and they develop a personal plan for tackling alcohol-related peer pressure in the future.

### Timing

45–60 minutes

### Materials Needed

- Device with the ability to project, one for the teacher
- *Handout: Free Write*, one per student
- *Video: [How Alcohol Affects Your Developing Brain](#)*
- *Video: [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions](#)*
- *Handout: Peer Pressure Plan*, one per student

### Procedure

1. **Warm-Up Activity:** Distribute one **Free Write** handout to each student. Review the directions, and then give students about 5–10 minutes to write independently.

2. Divide the class into groups of 4 or 5 students and instruct each group to discuss the italicized questions provided on the Free Write handout. Encourage students to use their free write response as a starting point for the discussion, but reassure them that they do not have to share exactly what they have written if they do not feel comfortable doing so.
3. Bring the class back together and create a Cause/Effect T-chart on the board. Under *Cause*, write “Examples of peer pressure” and under *Effect* write “What happens as a result of this pressure.”
4. Begin to fill in the chart by writing and discussing the following example:
  - a. Cause: Pressure to tease a classmate.
  - b. Effect: A) You give in, the peer who pressured you is happy, your classmate feels bullied, and you feel guilty, or B) You say no, the peer who pressured you is unhappy, your classmate feels more comfortable, and you know you did the right thing.
5. Next, write the following *Cause* on the board: “Pressure to try to alcohol.” Explain that you are going to show an *Ask, Listen, Learn* video called [How Alcohol Affects Your Developing Brain](#). As they watch, students should listen for alcohol’s effects on underage drinkers.
6. Invite students to share some of the effects that they learned and record their answers in the *Effect* column.
7. Once the effects of saying “yes” to alcohol have been recorded, ask students to consider the effects of saying “no.” Then lead the class in a quick discussion around which response (“yes” or “no”) would lead to more serious and dangerous consequences.
8. From there, encourage students to think about additional types of peer pressure (e.g. online and offline experiences; pressure to dress or look a certain way; pressure to eat or exercise a certain way; pressure to cheat or skip school, as well as at least one example of positive peer pressure). Before you move on, make sure a variety of peer pressure examples and outcomes are included on the chart.
9. Show the *Ask, Listen, Learn* video: [Informed Students Make Better, Healthier Decisions](#). Challenge students to consider the strategies shared by Nathan Adrian, then look at the peer pressure list they created and identify different resources that they could turn to for help and support. For instance, if they were being pressured to bully a classmate or try alcohol, who might they go to for advice?

Record students’ ideas on the board next to each example of peer pressure. As students share a resource idea, probe them to also share how/why this resource could provide support. Possible resources include: School counselors, family members, friends they can trust, the school nurse, teachers, and coaches. Be sure to remind students that you are always available should they need someone to talk to!
10. Distribute one **Peer Pressure Plan** handout to each student. Explain that now that they have discussed how their peers can influence their behaviors, as well as how those they trust in their community can serve as their support network, it is time to come up with a plan to help them deal with peer pressure. While this plan focuses on peer pressure related to alcohol, make sure students understand that this plan is meant to serve as a toolbox: It will give them ideas and strategies they can draw from when they experience all different kinds of peer pressure in the future.

11. Read through the handout's steps together as a class, answer any questions, and then encourage students to get to work. While this is designed to be an independent reflection activity, some students may benefit from discussing ideas with a partner.

12. **Wrap Up:** Brainstorm as a class where students can put this plan so that it stays safe but is easily accessible. Before students tuck it away, ask them to do their best to refer to this plan in the weeks ahead, and explain that you will eventually come back together to discuss its results.

*Tip:* It may be helpful to make copies of the students' Peer Pressure Plan before they put it away, so they can still easily review their plan in the future if the original is misplaced.

## Optional Extension

- Once a couple weeks have passed, ask students to reflect on whether they have referred to their Peer Pressure Plan and/or have used any of its strategies. Is there anything on the plan that they would like to edit? Students can think about what they could add or remove to make it as useful as possible.

**Continue the Conversation:** The *Ask, Listen, Learn* program provides a variety of resources to help you continue the conversation around alcohol and underage drinking throughout the school year. To learn more about how educators and families can help students make healthy decisions and say no to underage drinking, visit [AskListenLearn.org](http://AskListenLearn.org).

## National Middle School Standards

### National Health Standards

- 2.8.3 Describe how peers influence healthy and unhealthy behaviors.
- 2.8.4 Analyze how the school and community can affect personal health practices and behaviors.
- 5.8.7 Analyze the outcomes of a health-related decision.

### Common Core English Language Arts Standards

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.1 Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

## Free Write

**Directions:** Write down what comes to mind when you think of **peer pressure**. If you are unsure where to begin, questions are provided below to jumpstart your thinking.

*When was the last time you experienced peer pressure? Are you easily persuaded by others? Why can it be difficult to stand up to your friends or peers? When is peer pressure negative? Can peer pressure be positive?*

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### Peer Pressure Plan

**Step 1:** Imagine a situation in which you are being pressured to try alcohol. Describe what this situation could be like in 2–3 sentences.

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**Step 2:** What question(s) could you ask yourself in this situation to make sure you act in a way that is true to who you are and not just who others want you to be?

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**Step 3:** How can you say “no” if this situation occurs? You may choose a statement that explains why you do not want to drink or you may choose an excuse that will get you out of the situation. Brainstorm at least 2–3 different responses.

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**Step 4:** Think about someone you trust (a friend, adult, or other resource), and then complete the following sentences:

My \_\_\_\_\_ is someone I can trust when I need to talk about peer pressure.

They encourage me by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Step 5:** Now that you have identified a confidant (a person in whom you can confide), make a goal to go to that person and talk about this activity. It is important to have someone on your side who you speak with honestly.

For more information about the effects of underage drinking on the developing brain and body, visit: [AskListenLearn.org](http://AskListenLearn.org).