

# LIFE SKILLS SNAPSHOTS

FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE  
PREVENTION

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# SNAPSHOTS FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE PREVENTION

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# INTRODUCTION

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Overcoming Obstacles is the most comprehensive resource for life skills education, providing you with the tools to teach your students communication skills, decision making, goal setting, and much more. While Overcoming Obstacles is most often taught in advisory periods, before- and after-school programs, or as a stand-alone class, we understand that not all educators can find the time to teach our lessons in their entirety. That is why we developed these snapshots—brief, engaging, literacy-focused lessons that can be infused easily into core content subjects like art, English, math, science, and social studies or taught as part of a health class or in-school suspension.

The following *Snapshots for Substance Abuse Prevention* help you engage your students in critical thought—they will explore whom and what they value and the type of person they want to become, how substance abuse can be a gateway to places they wouldn't want to go, and how to resist drugs by developing skills like coping. Some of the material in this handbook may be emotionally difficult for your students, and it will be up to you to decide whether or not the content is appropriate for the class.

Through life skills education, young people can avoid falling into the trap of substance abuse and addiction. By teaching your students the skills they need to overcome personal hardships, set long-term goals, and work toward a healthy lifestyle, they will become engaged in their education, graduate, and go on to college and rewarding careers.

Please contact us at [info@overcomingobstacles.org](mailto:info@overcomingobstacles.org) if you would like assistance with the implementation of *Snapshots for Substance Abuse Prevention*.

# Snapshots | **WHAT DO YOU VALUE?**

## UNNECESSARY HURDLES

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10 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider what they want out of life and how substance abuse can hold them back.

Have each student create a list of at least two to three things they would like to do over the course of their life and then ask student volunteers to share their list with the class. Discuss how substance abuse can prevent them from accomplishing their goals.

## DON'T BECOME A STATISTIC

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15 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the death toll of substance abuse and consider the risks that are involved.

Have students research statistics relating to death counts for both illegal and controlled substances\* (*such as prescription drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes*). Using the information they gather, students will then create substance abuse prevention posters and display them in the school.

*\*The World Health Organization suggests there were at least 190,000 deaths worldwide due to illegal drug use in 2015, compared with 3.3 million due to alcohol use and 6 million due to tobacco use.*

## A SLIPPERY SLOPE

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20 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider people and things they value—and what happens to these—as a result of addiction.

Provide each student with 14 squares of paper and explain that on each square, students should identify one of the following (*each person or thing should be written on a separate square*):

- Three of their favorite activities/things to do
- Five important people in their lives
- Three goals they have for the future or things they want to accomplish
- Three of their favorite possessions

## A SLIPPERY SLOPE (CONTINUED)

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Tell the students to keep the squares in separate stacks on their desks and that they should have four stacks: activities, people, goals, and possessions. Explain to the students that you are going to read a story to them. After you complete each part of the story, they will be asked to decide which of their cards should be discarded. They will have only 10-15 seconds to make the decision, and all decisions are final. Discarded squares must be crumpled or torn up. Read the following story aloud to the students:

1. While at a party, your friends pressure you into trying drugs. After a lot of back and forth, you end up giving in and decide to try them just this one time. However, “just this one time” becomes two times, two times becomes three, and so on. As addiction begins to take over your life, you are forced to give up one of the things you like to do.
2. Because of the addiction and how constant use has increased your tolerance to the drug, you end up taking more and more until, eventually, you are hospitalized for a short time after an overdose. On top of that, your career begins to suffer from your newly developed addiction, and it becomes clear that you will not be able to accomplish everything you wanted to accomplish in your life. You lose two of the goals you set for yourself.
3. Because of your time away from work and most of your money going toward supporting your drug addiction, you are short of cash and have to sell one of your possessions to get your next fix.
4. You are hospitalized again after another overdose. Your doctor requires you to give up another activity. The medical bills keep coming, and you must give up another possession to pay them.
5. You are exhausted from the cycle of addiction (*withdrawal and use*) and trying to work. You find that being a functioning addict is incredibly difficult. You lose another goal and must also give up an activity. Also, two important people disappear from your life because they can’t stand watching you deteriorate before their eyes.
6. You overdose a third time and are sent to the hospital. You lose contact with two more important people as you start begging those around you for money to pay your medical bills.
7. Your doctor found two rehab facilities that specialize in addiction. One is far away from where you currently live, resulting in you losing contact with your last remaining person. The other is close by, but it is more expensive so you would need to sell your last remaining possession to afford treatment. Do you choose to move and lose contact with your last remaining person or stay and sell your last possession?
8. You are starting your life over again with only this person or possession.

## A SLIPPERY SLOPE (CONTINUED)

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Now, ask students to think about and evaluate the decisions they made in “A Slippery Slope” by asking:

- How did you feel about the decisions you made? Why?
- Which were the hardest decisions for you to make?
- Was anyone surprised by the squares he or she had left at the end? Do these remaining squares reflect what’s really important to you?

## BURNING BRIDGES

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the impact substance abuse can have on their loved ones.

Discuss with your students how it is often the case that those who develop serious addictions often end up alienating those who matter most to them (*for example, their significant other, friends, family*). Have students consider the relationships most important to them and write about how substance abuse could affect those relationships.

## POSSESSION

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider addiction from a materialistic perspective.

Begin by asking your students if there is anything they are currently saving money to buy (*for example, game consoles, bikes, purses*) and have student volunteers share their plans. Then, explain to students that substance abuse is not only harmful but can also be very expensive and make it unlikely that they can buy their desired items while supporting their addiction. Then, tell students that it is even likely they will have to sell the things that they already own to maintain an addiction. Have students consider pawning all their possessions in order to buy something that is bad for them, then have them write for five minutes detailing their thoughts on the subject and all that they stand to lose.

# Snapshots | GATEWAYS

## SELF-SABOTAGE

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the dropout risks associated with substance abuse.

Have students research statistics related to substance abuse and school dropout rates,\* and then use the information they gather to write a short essay on why substance abuse can lead to someone dropping out of school.

*\*According to [www.justthinktwice.gov](http://www.justthinktwice.gov), one third of high school dropouts indicated substance abuse was an important contributor to their decision.*

## PUSHING AWAY THE ONES YOU LOVE

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the impact that substance abuse can have on close friends and family.

Tell students that substance abuse can have serious effects on those you love. When a friend or family member abuses substances, you can't count on them to do what they say they will do. They may forget or get distracted because their focus is on getting and taking drugs. They might lie or steal money to buy drugs. They might get fired from their jobs. They might not come home at night. They may do bad things they would never do if they weren't using drugs. Have students write for 10 minutes about how substance abuse can lead to alienation of both friends and family.

## THE BRAIN GAME

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the impact substance abuse can have on academic performance.

Have students research the ways that substance abuse and addiction can affect memory and the way the brain functions.\* Using the information they gather, students should then write a short essay detailing how substance abuse could negatively affect academic performance.

*\*According to [www.justthinktwice.gov](http://www.justthinktwice.gov), teenage substance abuse often leads to lower grades, a higher rate of absence from school, and dropout. Heavy marijuana use can lead to an IQ drop of as much as eight points.*

## A BAD HABIT IS TOUGH TO BREAK

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will come to realize that it's easier to avoid negative behavior than to break the habit once it begins.

Ask students if they have ever had any “bad habits” (*for example, biting their nails, twirling their hair, popping gum*). Ask volunteers to share stories about how difficult it was to break those bad habits. Now ask them to imagine what it would be like to break the habit of smoking cigarettes, which have chemicals like nicotine that make people physically dependent on them.

## UNFORESEEN SIDE EFFECTS

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the risk pharmaceutical drugs can pose as a gateway to addiction.

Start the discussion by telling your class that many individuals who end up addicted to illegal substances often started by abusing legal pharmaceutical drugs, like painkillers. Some pharmaceuticals pose the risk of serving as a gateway to addiction. Task students with researching the relationship between pharmaceuticals and addiction\* and then compile their findings into a short essay.

*\*According to the American Society of Addiction Medicine, four out of five new heroin users began by abusing prescription painkillers.*

## THE VERY AIR WE BREATHE

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the ways smoking can affect an individual as well as the impact secondhand smoke can have.

Ask students if they have ever been somewhere where another person was eating a food that smelled really strong, or if they have ever been to a movie where someone was texting on their phone. Tell them that these are actions people do that affect everyone around them without their consent. Then, discuss how secondhand smoke can affect those around the smoker by contaminating the air. Have students research information and statistics regarding the dangers of secondhand smoke\* and then create posters illustrating the ways smoking can harm others. Post the art in your classroom and around school.

*\*According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or at work increase their risk of developing heart disease by 25–30% and lung disease by 20–30%.*

## A CRUTCH NONETHELESS

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the risks that marijuana poses and how it can result in complacency.

While marijuana may not pose the same threats as harder drugs, it poses a risk nonetheless. In an episode of a popular television show (*South Park*), one of the characters tells his son, “Marijuana can make you fine with being bored.” Ask students why this is a bad thing. Then, share the rest of the quote, “It’s when you’re bored that you should be learning some new skill or discovering some new science or being creative. If you smoke pot, you may grow up to find out that you aren’t good at anything.” Have your students write for five minutes on whether they agree or disagree with the quote, and then discuss as a class the things that marijuana can hold someone back from accomplishing.

## JUST BECAUSE IT’S LEGAL...

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the risks associated with alcohol abuse.

Start a discussion about alcohol abuse with your students by asking them, “What makes illegal drugs dangerous?” Then ask, “What about legal drugs?” Tell your class that perhaps one of the most socially acceptable drug addictions is alcoholism. Even though alcohol is legal, it is just as dangerous as many illegal substances and that an alcoholic withdrawing from alcohol use is more at risk of death than a heroin addict withdrawing from heroin use. Have students write short essay responses detailing why they think the risks of alcohol are often downplayed and why legality doesn’t necessarily mean something is safe. Discuss responses as a class.

## CUT SHORT

20 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider famous lives cut short by substance abuse.

Have each student select a well-known person whose life was cut short by addiction (*Chris Farley, Jimi Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Amy Winehouse, or another celebrity*). Next, have your students research and gather information, giving one- to two-minute presentations about their person’s life and death.

# Snapshots | **SUBSTITUTES**

## THERE'S NO SHAME IN ASKING FOR HELP

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10 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will be encouraged to avoid substance abuse and to ask for help if they need it.

Discuss with your students how it is better to prevent problems proactively rather than resolve them retroactively. Explain that this is especially true with substance abuse, given that it rewires the way your brain functions (*once someone becomes an addict, he or she is always an addict*). Suggest that if they fear they may have an addiction or are being pressured into trying drugs, the best course of action is to ask for help from a trustworthy family member or adult. As a class, discuss what someone should do if he or she feels at risk.

## HIGH ON LIFE

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10 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the reasons people resort to substance abuse and identify healthier means of fulfilling the same desires.

Discuss with students what reasons people generally use to justify substance abuse (*for example, looking for an escape, chasing good feelings, coping with stress, coping with emotions*), and then point out to students that there are other, healthier ways to escape from negativity/stress and generate positive feelings. (*Exercise induces a natural high, laughing releases endorphins in the brain, a healthy diet can lead to feeling better in general, and having a healthy social life can help one escape from negativity as well.*) Have students write about the reasons people abuse substances and the healthier alternatives one can use to fulfill the same desires.

## GLASS HALF FULL

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10 MINUTES

**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider how positivity can affect their life and will identify things that make them feel positive.

Start the activity by informing students that our surroundings have a direct impact on the way we feel and even the way we perceive the world around us (*for example, having a messy room can often lead to stress and feelings of unhappiness*). Seeing things through a “glass half full” perspective is important when one considers that it is much easier to notice the negative things in life than the positive. Encourage students to select 10 things that make them feel positive (*for example, people, places, music, movies, books, quotes, memories*). Suggest they post their completed list somewhere they can see it each day to help them stay positive.

## REACHING OUT

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider ways and methods of coping with feelings of loneliness.

Inform students that loneliness is a problem that can deepen and possibly lead to substance abuse. People are inherently social creatures, and whether we like it or not, we need one another. Start a class discussion about loneliness. Ask students what they would tell someone who is lonely and wants advice on what to do. Write responses on the board.

## HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider stress from family and how best to cope with it.

Share with your students that when it comes to family issues, it is often very personal to those involved, and sometimes it may feel like you have no one with whom you can talk. While counseling and talk therapy is a viable option, journaling can also prove effective. Task your students with considering the ways that an individual can handle family stress without using drugs or alcohol to escape. Have them write as if they are advising a friend who is stressed over a family issue. Once students have written out their responses, have them write about how they would apply their advice within their own family.

## NO PRESSURE

10 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider the stress that grades—and school at large—can evoke, and how best to cope with it.

Ask students why someone who is intelligent may not be great at taking tests (*for example, panics under pressure, second-guesses, has a learning disability*). Explain that receiving a low grade is not the end of the world but that it is still important they try their best in school. Have students first list the things they find stressful about school, grades, and tests. Then, discuss as a class healthy ways to overcome academic distress (*for example, studying well before an upcoming test, asking their teacher for help, putting together a group study session*).

## NO, THANK YOU

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will practice resisting peer pressure without alienating their friends.

Ask students to raise their hands if they think saying no to drugs or alcohol could make them lose friends. Then ask if they can think of different ways of saying no (*for example, “No, you’re a loser, and I don’t want to be like you!” or “No, get away from me!” or “No, thank you, but that’s not for me”*). Ask them which way could be the best way and why. (*The third “No” because you’re not being critical of your friend or alienating them.*) Then, have students role-play in pairs saying no in a tactful way and suggesting alternative activities. Conclude by discussing how if someone persists, then he or she is probably not a friend worth having.

## GLIMMER OF HOPE

15 MINUTES

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**OBJECTIVE:** Students will consider how AA/NA programs work and then discuss ideas related to avoiding addiction in the first place.

Discuss with your students the AA (*Alcoholics Anonymous*) and NA (*Narcotics Anonymous*) programs. Tell them that these programs invite people to gather and share their experiences with addiction, support each other, and work through a set of steps to help them with their recovery. The process is ongoing and never ends once someone has developed an addiction. Arrange the class so everyone is sitting in a circle; replicate the style of an AA/NA meeting, only instead of sharing stories regarding substance abuse, students will offer thoughts on how best to avoid addiction.