

Our Futures – Year 8

Alcohol: Lesson 5

Refusal skills

In some situations, or with some people, it can be hard to resist the pressure to drink alcohol. Many adolescents find it particularly difficult to say “no”, as they are susceptible to social pressure and haven’t had much practise saying “no”. For these reasons, it is important to learn and practise skills to refuse alcohol.

Skill 1

Being assertive

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1. State your answer.
2. Give your reason.
3. Be understanding. Show you understood the other person’s position.

E.g., Frank says to George, “Go on have another drink, you weak or something?”. Using the above three steps, George could reply:

1. State your answer: “No thanks”
2. Give your reason: “I don’t feel like any”
3. Be understanding: “It may look like I’m weak, but I’m having a great time”

Being assertive is particularly powerful as it shows the other person that their point of view has been considered, but the answer is still “no”. This is achieved by incorporating the answer in Step 3 – be understanding –, which demonstrates an understanding of the person’s position. There will still be the odd person who will keep trying to exert pressure, but most people will stop when they receive an assertive response.

Couple assertive language with assertive body language to convey the same message:

- Use a clear firm voice - speak clearly and deliberately
- Keep eye contact

- Have a facial expression that says what they mean
- Face the person with their body so that they are not hiding

Skill 2

Make an excuse

As the title implies this involves the person making an excuse. For example:

- “No thanks, my parents are picking me up soon”
- “My new girlfriend hates drinking”
- “My brother’s best friend is here, he’ll tell my parents”
- “I’ve got to go soon”
- “I can’t drink, I’m on antibiotics”
- “No thanks, I’ve got a big day tomorrow”

Skill 3

Delay tactics

This involves putting the person off until later and trying to avoid the situation.

- “I’ll just have a soft drink first”
- “Catch me next round”
- “I just need to catch up with Sam, back in a minute”

Skill 4

Broken record

This involves continually saying “no” in the politest way possible. E.g.,

Jim: Go on have a drink.

Andrew: No thanks, thanks anyway.

Jim: What’s wrong with you?

Andrew: I’m right. No thanks.

Jim: But you’re normally a party animal.

Andrew: Not tonight. No thanks.

Jim: Go on.

Andrew: No thanks.

Skill 5

Walk away

This involves the person **politely** leaving the situation, by saying something like “I’ll just go to the bathroom” or “I just need to call someone” etc.

Skill 6

Avoid the situation

If the person does not think they will be able to resist the pressure to have alcohol, then it may be best to avoid that situation or group of people altogether. They need to realise if they do go into the situation and concede to just have “one drink” to appease people, then it will be harder to say “no” to the next as their inhibitions will have decreased from the effects of the alcohol.

How can the drinking of alcohol be minimised?

Some people may plan to drink alcohol in some situations. Here are several tips that can be used to help avoid excessive consumption of alcohol.

- Planning exactly how many drinks to have and sticking to a maximum of 4 drinks on a single occasion, thereby reducing the risk of alcohol-related injury arising from that occasion.
- Considering what activities may still need to happen that day or the next day when planning the limit. For example, boating and alcohol should not be combined.
- Considering who will be at the drinking venue and whether it is appropriate to drink.
- Having a non-alcoholic drink before drinking alcohol, so that alcohol is not gulped to quench thirst.
- Eating food before drinking alcohol. Food in the stomach slows down the rate that alcohol can be absorbed into the bloodstream.
- Drinking alcohol slowly and putting the glass down between drinks (but only if you are confident that someone will not put something in your drink).
- Never drinking to get drunk, as this is when things can go wrong.
- Counting the drinks as they are consumed to avoid exceeding the set limit.
- Spacing alcoholic drinks with juice, water or soft drink.
- Not eating salty food as this can increase thirst and lead to more alcohol being consumed.
- In poorly ventilated venues, drinking lots of water and soft drink to avoid consuming alcohol to quench thirst or relieve dehydration.
- Not drinking or sharing straight from the alcohol bottle as it makes it hard to keep track of how much alcohol has been consumed.
- Drinking low-alcohol alternatives.

How can teenagers keep friends who are drinking alcohol safe?

- Encourage them to look out for friends. If their friends are drinking too much alcohol, they need to consider moving them away from the alcohol, moving the alcohol or discouraging them from drinking. However, it is important to reinforce to your child that they should leave the other person alone if they are aggressive, as their own safety should always be a priority.
- Encourage them to never pressure friends to drink alcohol. They would be devastated if something happened to their friend if they had encouraged them to drink.
- There may also be times they may be concerned about someone who is having a bad reaction to alcohol. In the next lesson we will discuss the signs to be concerned about, what they can do and who to contact.

Useful Resources

This reference list is designed to include references that are easy to access and read. They are provided as additional resources for your interest.

For information and statistics on alcohol use among Australian students:

Australian Government Department of Health (2018). Australian secondary school student' use of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs in 2017

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/secondary-school-students-use-of-tobacco-alcohol-and-other-drugs-in-2017>

For information and statistics on alcohol use in Australia:

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020). 2019 National Drug Strategy Household Survey report.

<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/illegal-use-of-drugs/national-drug-strategy-household-survey-2019/contents/table-of-contents>

For general information about alcohol:

Alcohol and Drug Foundation. Alcohol Fact Sheet.

<https://cdn.adf.org.au/media/documents/Alcohol-Fact-Sheet-FINAL.pdf>

For general information about alcohol tailored to Parents/Teachers:

Positive Choices. Alcohol: Detailed Resource (for Parents/Teachers).

<https://positivechoices.org.au/documents/ArhqqWfklz/alcohol-detailed-resource-for-parentsteachers/>

For information about drugs and alcohol, how teachers can help their students avoid alcohol-related harms and school-based alcohol education programs:

Positive Choices. Drug and Alcohol Education: Teacher Booklet.

<https://positivechoices.org.au/teachers/drug-education-teacher-booklet>

Alcohol Drug Information Service (webchat and helpline):

<https://yourroom.health.nsw.gov.au/getting-help/Pages/adis.aspx>

For information about the risks associated with mixing alcoholic beverages with energy drinks:

Marczinski, C. A., & Fillmore, M. T. (2014). Energy Drinks Mixed with Alcohol: What are the Risks? *Nutrition Reviews*, 72(0 1), 98-107.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4190582/>

Pennay, A., Lubman, D., & Miller, P. (2011). Combining energy drinks and alcohol - a recipe for trouble? *Australian Family Physician*, 40(3), 104-107.

<https://www.racgp.org.au/download/documents/AFP/2011/March/201103pennay.pdf>