



Healthy Choices: Substance Use AND Digital Safety MODULES

GRADE 6

Substance Use

Addictions and Related Behaviours Module

This module introduces learning related to substance use, its range of effects, factors that influence substance use, as well as safe and healthy substance use choices that support our health and well-being. Students can also discuss, plan, and practice refusal skills and strategies, and learn the importance of seeking advice or help, should they need it.

CURRICULUM EXPECTATIONS

Health and Physical Education

D1. Understanding Health Concepts

Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours

D1.2 - describe the range of effects associated with using cannabis, other drugs (e.g., prescription medications such as opioids; illicit opioids such as heroin; crack, cocaine, Ecstasy, crystal methamphetamine), and intoxicating substances (e.g., gas, glue)

D2. Making Healthy Choices

Personal Safety and Injury Prevention

D2.3 - apply social-emotional learning skills (e.g., self-awareness and self-management skills, including anger management; communication skills, including listening skills and assertiveness skills) to promote positive interaction and avoid or manage conflict in social situations, in person or online (e.g., classroom groups, groups of friends, sports teams, school clubs, social media sites, online games)

Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours

D2.4 - use decision-making strategies and skills and an understanding of factors influencing drug use (e.g., personal values, peer pressure, media influence, curiosity, legal restrictions, cultural, religious, and spiritual teachings) to make safe personal choices about the use of drugs such as alcohol, tobacco, and cannabis, and about activities such as vaping, including the choice to abstain

Differentiated learning: All students benefit from developmentally appropriate learning about substance use and healthy decision making. This module uses a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) approach, which includes multiple entry points and opportunities for differentiated instruction. Refer to the curriculum and supporting documents for additional considerations to support planning and delivery

LEARNING GOALS

We are learning to:

- Explore the range of effects associated with various substances, including cannabis, vapour and tobacco products, and alcohol.
- Identify factors that can influence our decisions about substance use.
- Analyze and practice decision-making skills and refusal strategies to identify those that would work best for each of us.

SUCCESS CRITERIA

Co-develop success criteria with students using the following questions:

“How will we know we are achieving our learning goals? What will it look like/sound like?”

For example:

- Name a variety of substances and list their effects.
- Demonstrate substance use decision-making skills and strategies that can support me.
- Name ways to get advice or support related to substance use, if I need it.

MATERIALS

Additional materials needed:

- a computer and projector/smartboard
- sticky notes/small squares of paper (or a digital equivalent)
- pencils/pens/markers
- paper for two anchor charts (optional)

IMPORTANT NOTES

- This lesson provides students with knowledge and skills to support making informed decisions about their health. It is not intended to convince students that substance use is good or bad. As you move through the learning, be mindful of creating a non-judgmental tone or approach. People engage with substances for many reasons (e.g., non-medical, medical, ceremonial), and students may have engaged with or are currently engaging with substances (e.g., prescription medications to support their learning, health, or well-being).
- While it is important for students to learn about the effects of substances, research shows that awareness of negative consequences alone is not an effective deterrent. That’s why teaching refusal skills—how to confidently say no in real-life situations—is an essential part of the lesson. These skills help students:
 - Recognize and resist peer pressure.
 - Practice responses they can use if offered a substance.
 - Develop personal decision-making skills before facing high pressure situations.By integrating refusal skills alongside facts, students are better equipped to make informed choices and navigate social situations where substances may be present.
- Remind students that the focus is on learning facts and reliable information rather than sharing personal stories. If there is a situation a student would like to speak about, invite them to see you after class. You can also share ideas about additional resources at the end of the module.

Minds On

Exploring the facts



PURPOSE: To support students in understanding substance use vocabulary and introduce students to the range of effects.

NOTE: the purpose of this activity is to provide key facts and information about substances, being cautious to avoid providing a level of detail that might increase comfort and familiarity with substances or encourage curiosity and use. Refer to the [Educator Guide](#) for additional information.

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Today we are going to talk about substance use and the type of substances that affect our brains and bodies. This means they can impact us mentally, physically, spiritually, and emotionally, as well as change the way we think, act, and feel. It’s important to talk about substances so we have the basic information we need to help us make safe and informed decisions for ourselves. We’re going to start by learning about six types of substances and explore their effects.”

INSTRUCTION

1

Start by distributing the [note-taking template](#) (paper or digital) to be used throughout the lesson. This will support students with their learning and allow them to record facts and ideas they may wish to refer to later. Encourage students to record their thinking in the way that works best for them (e.g., sketching or drawing, using assistive technology features such as voice to text, use of home language(s), etc).

2

Begin the minds on sorting activity by dividing students into partners or small groups and provide them with a set of [interactive cards and sorting chart](#) (digital or paper copy).

3

Students will work together to match the information on the cards to the substances (alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, opioids, stimulants, inhalants) on the chart.

4

Invite students to share their answers and ensure their responses are accurate. Ask them what similarities/differences they noticed about the substances. This is an opportunity to use the information in the [Educator answer key](#) to expand students' knowledge. Post a completed chart in a shared learning space (physical or digital) for students to refer to throughout the lesson.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



Teacher Script

"We learned that some substances could have positive effects, like relieving pain or helping us feel relaxed. We also learned about some risks for our bodies and minds.

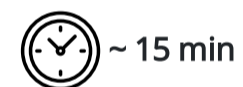
- How might the substances discussed affect our relationships?
- Of the potential impacts we learned about, what are you most concerned about? Which might have the biggest influence on your decisions?"

Note: some themes that might emerge in response to the question about relationships are increased conflict with others (e.g., disagreements with parents/guardians), withdrawing from others, losing friendships, or having to be dishonest with others.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Action

Building a shared understanding



PURPOSE: to learn more about students' pre-existing knowledge and perceptions of substance use and to dispel some common myths and misconceptions related to substance use.

1

Use the [slides](#) to facilitate an interactive 'True/False' quiz. Refer to the [Educator Discussion Guide](#) for facilitation tips.

Grade 6

SUBSTANCE USE: Addictions and Related Behaviours

2

Follow-up the learning with a discussion using the reflection questions provided.

Note: Consider providing an accessible space for every student to ask further questions. This could be facilitated using a 'parking lot' or another safe and accessible method (digital or physical), depending on the needs of your class.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



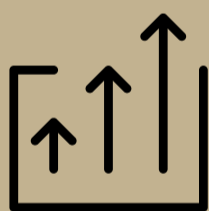
- Where do you and your peers tend to learn about substances like alcohol, cannabis, vapes and tobacco? Is it from school, friends or family, the media, or somewhere else?
- How can you decide if the information you are getting is true? What might help?

BRIGHT IDEAS



To inform your approach, you may wish to refer to the current cycle of the [Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey – Drug Use Report](#) to find background information about substance use among Ontario students in grades 7-12 (e.g., which substances students are using, changes in use across grades, trends in use over time).

DISCUSSION GUIDE



OPTIONAL EXTENSION



The following lesson from MediaSmarts provides an opportunity for students to develop a beginning understanding of their own attitudes towards drinking, as well as an understanding of the different groups (e.g., government, family, media, alcohol industry) that deliver messages about alcohol.

- [Kids, Alcohol and Advertising 1: Messages About Drinking](#)

Consolidation

Making informed choices



PURPOSE: to provide an opportunity to think about and practice substance use decision-making strategies.

PART A – Video and discussion

 ~ 10 min

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Now we are going to watch a video that shows a text conversation among students who are making decisions about vaping. During the video, we will pause and discuss the factors each student considers as well as how they communicate their decisions. Also, notice the refusal skills used by students. Refusal skills are a way to handle situations where you feel pressure to do something you don’t want to do or are unsure about.”



PART B – Using scenarios for practice

 ~ 20 min

Note: When students role play/act out refusal skills, ensure no one plays the role of trying to get someone to use substances/offering substances. Do not invite students to role-model this behaviour or use props to represent substances (e.g., rolled up paper). The focus should be on having students act out saying no to substance use in whatever way they choose as that is the skill we want students to practice and improve (not offering peers substances or using substances). Should students in your class find it challenging to generate their own refusal strategies, you may wish to offer scripted language from the anchor chart.

TEACHER SCRIPT



“There were some examples of refusal strategies shared in the video, and you may know many more. Practicing what you will say and do when you want to say no can help build your confidence and ability to action the choices that work for you. Remember, you can talk to a trusted adult if you are ever offered a substance and need help with what to do. ”

INSTRUCTION

1

Start by distributing the [note-taking template](#) (paper or digital) to be used throughout the lesson. This will support students with their learning and allow them to record facts and ideas they may wish to refer to later. Encourage students to record their thinking in the way that works best for them (e.g., sketching or drawing, using assistive technology features such as voice to text, use of home language(s), etc.).

TIP



Many students will have existing strategies or will have noticed some in the video. Options you might

also share include:

-
- leaving/walking away
- delaying (e.g., saying, “I’ll think about it”)
- making a joke
- making an excuse (e.g., saying “I have to be home soon.”)
- changing the subject/suggesting another activity

Remind students another option is planning and avoiding a situation, when possible, where they know there may be substance use that might make them uncomfortable.

2

Divide the class into partners or small groups and provide them with the [scenario cards](#). Each group will select a scenario and then take turns responding to the guiding questions and trying out a refusal strategy. Remind students there is no best or ideal strategy. What fits may differ for each student.

TIP



Note: As needed, facilitate supportive groupings/partnerships for Multi-Language Learners and students who access special education supports and services to help them access and engage in the task. Leave space and opportunity for students to lead this process. Encourage them to share what they know. This will help you understand what students see as important, what information is familiar, and where there may be gaps in their learning.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

In your scenario...

- What might make someone want to try, or not try the substance?
 - What might prevent someone from trying it (e.g., range of effects, other consequences)?
 - If someone chose not to try it, what could they say or do?
 - What if they needed help?
-

3

Groups repeat the process, as time allows.

TIP



Note: Repetition and practice of refusal skills are helpful for every student and may be particularly so for some Multi-Language Learners and students accessing special education supports and services. It may also help to provide specific feedback about effective refusal skills during the activity and offer



opportunities for students to discuss how they might notice and support a peer who is having difficulty managing peer pressure (which may include reaching out to a trusted adult).



4

Bring the class back together for a debrief of the activity ([Discussion Guide](#)).

TIP



The Scenario Discussion Guide provides key information to inform your conversation. You may wish to go through each of the three guiding questions again.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- How can friends or peer pressure affect your decisions?
- What helps you make choices that feel right for you, even if others disagree?
- Who could help you if you feel unsure or pressured, and how could you help others?

5

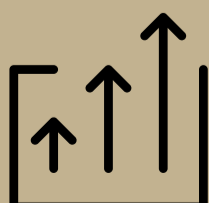
Prompt students to record any key learnings or reflections on their [note-taking template](#) that was distributed at the start of the lesson. Encourage students to reflect on the help-seeking information in the bottom box and fill in the name of a trusted adult. Ask students to think about where they will keep this page of information so that they have it if they need it.

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Remember, there are many types of substances, each with a range of effects. Substance use becomes an issue when those effects start to cause harm. That might show up as changes in how you do at school, trouble getting along with others, not feeling as well as usual, or feeling unable to cut down or stop, even when you want to. If that ever happens, it’s time to talk to a parent, guardian, or another adult you trust for more support. If you know someone else who needs help, such as a friend, it’s important to reach out for help for them, too, even if you just need advice about what to do.”

DISCUSSION GUIDE



OPTIONAL EXTENSION



Invite students to plan a way to share their learning (e.g., school announcement, poster, assembly presentation, item in a school newsletter or social media post). Ask



students to keep in mind that strategies that only focus on scaring or alarming others into behaving a certain way aren't effective, so a more proactive approach is more helpful.

Cross Curriculum Connection - language, persuasive writing, or oral communication

- **What** is something students learned that they think could be helpful to other people?
- **Who** would they like to share this learning with (e.g., parents/guardians, other students)?
- **How** would they like to share it?

TRY IT!



Consider reflecting on your own learning throughout this lesson. Is there anything you'd like to share with someone else? We don't often talk about substance use. You can help even more people talk about it!

WRAP-UP

KEY LEARNING



- Substances can affect us mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically. Some substances can be more harmful than others. It's important to know the facts about a substance so we can make informed and healthy choices.
- Our personal choices about substance use can impact our health and well-being.
- Knowing and practicing refusal skills can help us feel confident and stay true to our substance use decisions.
- There are people in our school and community who can help if we have a concern about substance use.

Supportive transition

The [Supportive Transitions Tip Sheet](#) offers a list of easy-to-use activities to help students transition to whatever is next in their day. You may also find these activities helpful at other moments during the day when students are moving from one activity to another.

Assessment - Formative (Optional)

Three options are provided to support students with reflecting on and self-assessing their stage of learning. Choose the one(s) that best meets the needs of students and helps inform your next steps.

- [Likert Scale](#)
- [3-2-1](#)
- [Exit Card](#)

Parent/Guardian communication (Optional)

Use the brief communication to share and continue the learning following student participation in the module or download a more [comprehensive communication](#) that includes conversation starters and relevant resources for parents/guardians. The template can be edited (e.g., should you wish to send it out prior to the lesson instead of after).

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are excited about our learning and wanted to make sure you heard about it, too! In alignment with the [Health and Physical Education curriculum](#), we participated in a module about substance use, addiction, and related behaviours from the Ministry of Education. We learned about substances, how they can affect us, and factors that can influence our substance use decisions. We also discussed strategies we can use to

say 'no' to substances we don't want to use and where to find help, should we need it.

Teacher Notes

Present

Ontario



Educator discussion guide

- You may also wish to highlight in the discussion that some substances only affect the person using them, while others can impact those nearby. For example, substances that are smoked or vaped can produce second-hand smoke and vapour, which others may inhale. Because of these risks, there are additional rules and laws that restrict where these substances can be used. For example, vaping and smoking are not allowed in or around playgrounds or schools.
- While the purpose of this activity is to present balanced information and not to scare students, it is important that students understand any of the substances discussed can potentially lead to **adverse health impacts and addiction (substance use disorder)**, depending on how they are used.

Vapes are mentioned in the activity as a delivery method for cannabis and nicotine. If students are less familiar with vapes/vaping, share some of the following information:

- Vaping is not a substance. Vaping is a way of consuming substances by puffing (breathing in and out) on a battery-operated device, often called an e-cigarette (also known as an e-hookah, mod, or vape pen). Vaping devices come in many shapes and sizes. A typical vaping device includes:
 - a battery
 - a heating element
 - a tank or a pod (pre-filled container) for the vaping liquid or "e-juice"
- When vaping liquid is heated, it creates a vapour that can be inhaled through the mouth into the lungs and may result in respiratory issues. Vaping liquid typically contains nicotine or cannabis. In Ontario, it is illegal to sell or supply vapour products to anyone under the age of 19.

Refer to the Appendix: Background Information for Educators on Substance Use, in the Educator Guide for visuals and additional background information, if needed.

Mental Health and Mental Illness Educator Discussion Guide

Mental health and mental illness are concepts that can vary across individuals and cultures. In the Western culture, mental health is often understood through the lens of the individual. Helping techniques involve exploring ways a person can build a range of strategies for maintaining wellness and for coping with stress and challenge.

Did you know?

Indigenous communities share similarities in cultural ways on understanding mental health, such as holistic approaches and community connections. It is also important to acknowledge the unique differences among communities that are rooted in distinct cultural practices, languages and traditions.

It is essential to recognize that each culture has unique ways of knowing and being, and understanding mental health and mental illness, that may differ from mainstream Western approaches to mental health.

Educators can help to create a more culturally responsive learning environment by recognizing that not all cultures may use the same terminology or approach to mental health. For example, Indigenous understandings of mental health are often more holistic and rooted in culture and community. In many African cultures, traditional healing practices takes a holistic approach to mental health that involve spiritual rituals, ceremonies, dancing, drumming and storytelling. In traditional Chinese medicine, a holistic approach is taken that views mental health and mental illness in relation to the balance of energy or "Qi" in the body. These are three examples of many.

First Nations Mental Wellness Continuum Framework (Health Canada & Assembly of First Nations, 2014) defines mental health and well-being as a balance of the mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional. This balance is in place when we have:

- purpose in our daily lives
- hope for the future
- a sense of belonging and connectedness within our families, to community, and to culture
- a sense of meaning and an understanding of how our lives and those of our families and communities are part of creation and a rich history

Educator Discussion Guide

This interactive quiz can be facilitated in a few ways (e.g., agree/disagree line, raising hands individually, working in small groups). Choose the method that works best for students.

Question 1: True or false – You have to be 19 years old to use alcohol because it’s safe to use at that age.

Student Facing Debriefing Slide	Educator Discussion Guide
<p>False</p> <p>Just because alcohol is legal when you turn 19 doesn’t mean it is safe or healthy. There are guidelines to follow because it affects our brains and bodies. Under the age of 25, drinking alcohol or using other substances can be riskier as the brain isn’t finished developing yet.</p>	<p>Many substances are legal.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some are legal all the time (e.g., caffeine). • Some are legal if you’re above a certain age (e.g., in Ontario you currently must be 19 years of age or older to purchase alcohol, cannabis, or vapes and vaping supplies). • Some are legal if they are prescribed to you by a doctor and used as directed (e.g., prescription pain medicine). <p>Just because something is legal does not mean it is safe or healthy. No matter what age you are, there can still be risks, and those risks can be especially high under the age of 25 because the brain isn’t finished developing yet. That’s why, even when substances are legal, there are still laws for how and where they are used so they don’t cause harm (e.g., the Smoke-Free Ontario Act 2017, made all enclosed public places and workplaces like restaurants, bars, and offices, and outdoor spaces like school grounds, playgrounds, and sports fields 100% smoke free).</p> <p>No matter how old you are, if you get a legal substance from someone who isn’t supposed to give it to you (e.g., you get prescription medicine from a friend, not a doctor), or you find a substance (e.g., a vape on the ground in a park) there are even more risks as you have no idea where it came from or what is in it.</p>

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Just because you are old enough to use a substance doesn’t mean that it is healthy or safe. It’s important to remember that even legal substances can harm our health. And if you ever find a vape or another substance, you can’t be sure what’s in it. Sometimes different substances get mixed together and you can’t even tell. This can make them much stronger than you expect, which is very unsafe.”

Question 2: True or false - Most teenagers in Ontario vape.

Student Facing Debriefing Slide	Educator Discussion Guide
<p>False</p> <p>Sometimes social media, marketing or seeing someone vape can make it seem like everyone is doing it, but most teens do not vape. Many teens decide not to vape for a variety of reasons.</p>	<p>This question provides an opportunity for students to consider the factors that influence decisions about vaping and can apply to other substances as well. Take some time to discuss the reasons why someone may or may not choose to use substances—it will support students when responding to the scenarios presented in the consolidation.</p> <p>There are a variety of additional reasons why people may choose to not use substances, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reliable facts and information • health concerns • personal or family values or guidelines • to follow and respect laws/avoid getting in trouble • cultural and religious beliefs • relationships with family, friends, teachers, Elders, and other trusted adults • peer pressure • future goals • saving money • keeping mind clear and focused/doing well at school/in sports • to be a role model for younger siblings or family members <p>Note: refer to the current cycle of the Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey (OSDUHS) for current rates of vaping among Ontario students in grades 7-12.</p>

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Sometimes it can seem like vaping is common, but research shows that most Ontario students in grades 7-12 don’t vape. Students are also using fewer substances than they used to, and more students are choosing not to use any substances at all.”

Question 3: True or false - Just because my friend tried a vape doesn’t mean it’s safe for me.

Student Facing Debriefing Slide	Educator Discussion Guide
<p>True</p> <p>Everyone reacts to substances differently. The effects can depend on things like:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • our health, age, and size • what substance is used • how often it is used • how much is used • how we are feeling in our body and mind • our environment • the way our brains and bodies work 	<p>The effects a person may experience will vary, depending on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • genetics • medical history (including family history), health, age, and size • whether we have certain pre-existing health conditions • what substance is used • how often it is used • how much is used • how it is used/taken

- our environment (e.g., people, location, circumstances)
- whether we've taken any other substances

Note: Students may have heard that vaping is safer than smoking cigarettes. Because vaping is still relatively new, researchers are still learning about its long-term health effects. The short-term effects include: mouth or throat irritation, cough, shortness of breath, and nausea. Vaping nicotine or cannabis can also affect brain development, cause addiction, impact learning, and worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety.

TEACHER SCRIPT



“Substances have varying social, mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical effects. Everyone reacts to them differently. Even when someone we know tries a substance, it’s not a guarantee that the same substance will affect us the same way. Some substances can harm us even if we only use them once. The effects can be different each time a substance is used, too.”

Question 4: True or False - Using alcohol or other addictive drugs is a choice. You can choose to stop using them at any time.

Student Facing Debriefing Slide	Educator Discussion Guide
<p>False</p> <p>Substance use can cause chemical changes in the brain and body, which make it hard to stop.</p> <p>This is called addiction.</p>	<p>When addiction happens, the changes can also affect our self-control and ability to make decisions. They can also make us really want the substance. The feeling can be very strong and difficult to control. That’s why sometimes people continue using a substance even though it’s causing trouble in their lives. There can be other reasons someone develops an addiction, too, like genetics, what is going on in their lives, building a daily routine around using a substance, and so on.</p> <p>Sometimes there can be messages that addiction is someone’s fault. That’s because of stigma. Stigma is negative attitudes or ideas about certain things, people, or groups that can lead to unfair judgment. No one would choose to have an addiction, just like no one would choose to have any other type of illness, but stigma can sometimes prevent people from seeking help, if they need it.</p>

TEACHER SCRIPT



“No one would choose to have an addiction, just like no one would choose to have any other type of illness. The information we’re learning today can help address stigma about substance use and addiction, which can help people seek support, if they need it.”

What might make someone

want to try the substance, if anything?

Encourage students to share their ideas. Additional examples of reasons why people might not choose to use substances can be found in Action - Educator Discussion guide – question 2 of the quiz.

If someone chose not to use the substance, how could they share their decision? What could they say or do?

You may wish to review the questions used in the video to support students with decision making.

- What decision needs to be made?
- What factors can help inform the decision?
- What values or guidelines are important to think about in your family, culture, and community?
- What will you decide? Who could help you, if you needed it?
- What will you say or do to share your decision?

Note: planning and avoiding making decisions can be a strategy, too (e.g., not going to a party where you think there might be pressure to use substances).

In addition to the list of refusal strategies generated by students, you may wish to share strategies such as:

- saying, “No, thanks”
- adopting a broken-record approach and continuing to say no
- say it’s not for you
- explaining the reason for saying no, such as, “If my mom smells that on me I’ll be grounded for life ” or “My health is really important to me.”
- making up an excuse, such as, “My parents want me home soon.”
- convincing the other person not to do it
- walking away
- using a delay tactic, such as saying, “I’ll think about it”
- making a joke and changing the subject
- suggesting a different activity
- asking questions to get more information or share information

Note: as part of the discussion, engage students in a conversation about how to support or stand up for someone else who has said no to something.

What could they do if they needed help?

Sometimes, even when we know information about substances and have refusal skills and strategies, we still need help. Students might need help for many reasons:

- They have questions or need more information about substances.
- Their refusal skills and strategies aren’t working, and they need advice.
- Substances are starting to have harmful effects on their lives.
- Substances are starting to have harmful effects on someone they care about.

The following may be signs substance use is starting to have harmful effects:

- Not being able to keep up with responsibilities at school or home.
- Giving up activities that used to be important or enjoyable.
- Changes in mood (e.g., feeling more irritable, anxious, or down than usual).
- Changing friends.
- Having difficulties with family members, friends, and peers.

No matter what substance students might be concerned about, the first step is reaching out to a trusted adult in their personal lives, school, or community. They can also call or text a help line, like [Kids Help Phone](#). This is an opportunity to help students identify school and community resources that support mental health problems and those relating to substance use. Consider posting information in your classroom and school in a variety of ways (e.g., on the back of bathroom stall doors or electronically on a website or shared class platform so students can access them privately).

Note: Addiction is among the most stigmatized of all health conditions. It’s important to talk about substance use in ways that reduce stigma and decrease barriers to

seeking help. Additional information on supporting students is available in the Educator Guide.

Teacher Notes

Present

Optional student resource: [My Circle of Support – Student Help-Seeking Resource](#)