



# Gateway Drugs

## Classroom Session Guide

### **1. Poem** (3 minutes)

*(Refer to Positively Negative laminated sheet. Two Teen Advisors read this poem. One TA reads reasons for drinking [regular print] and the other TA reads consequences [italics]. The first reader begins with the introduction.)*

**People may think drinking solves their problems but it often creates problems.** *Listen to this poem by an unknown author and see if you think it's true, too.*

### **2. EXPLAIN TEEN ADVISORS** (3 minutes)

**Hello, we're Teen Advisors** and we're glad to be here with you today! Teen Advisors are sophomores, juniors, and seniors who have committed to be positive role models and to live lives of integrity. Every one of us has signed a drug-free contract, promising to abstain from drugs, alcohol, tobacco, and inhalants for one year. We have also signed a one-year contract to abstain from any and all sexual activity. In addition, many TAs also make commitments to be sexually abstinent until marriage. There are over 500 of us in the Columbus area who are committed to being drug-free role models, and hundreds more across the nation.

**You may be wondering what Teen Advisors is all about — what is it that we actually do?** Well, first of all, we're not just some drug-free club, and we don't look down on people who do drink or do drugs. We don't think we're better than anybody else just because we sign a contract. Our mission is to influence our peers to make positive decisions with their lives. We reach out to others with love & encouragement. We don't judge or condemn people for making questionable decisions, but we do try our best to influence them to make the right ones.

**At school, Teen Advisors talk with the freshmen about things** that high school students have to deal with. Outside of school, we form a support group of teenagers who have similar standards. Three times a year, we go on the most incredible weekend retreats together. Every month during the school year, we have fun events with all the other Teen Advisors from around the city. We get to form lots of great friendships with students from all the other high schools, and we have a great time together. By standing together & supporting one another, we are able to keep our commitments, and (hopefully!) we can be an encouragement for you to make good life decisions, as well!

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### **3. INTRODUCE THE TOPIC** (3 minutes)

**The name of today's Classroom Session is "Gateway Drugs".** When we use the term "Gateway Drugs," we mean drugs that are common among teenagers (usually used before heavier drugs) and may lead to further, heavier drug use. These drugs include, alcohol, tobacco (both smoke and smoke-free), marijuana, and inhalants (such as sniffing paint and glue). Prescription pills such as Vicodin and Adderol also fall into this category now too, since many teens are using them illegally to get high, which is very dangerous. Not only are these drugs damaging to your health, but they can also get you into serious trouble with the law!

**Now that you know what we'll be talking about today, we are going to introduce ourselves to you** with our name, grade, and one reason why we're glad we're in TAs.

**We are here today because we have been freshmen before,** and because we know what it's like to face peer pressure in high school. It's easy to feel like everyone in high school is drinking or doing drugs, and to feel like you've got to do those things, too, in order to fit in. But we're here to tell you that not everyone is drinking and doing drugs – none of us are, and none of the TAs in this city are, either. We're here because we care about you, and we want you to make the best decisions for your lives!

**We're not here to look down on anyone who has experimented with drugs before.** We're not here to judge or condemn anyone for their actions or decisions. We're here to talk about this subject because we care about you, and because we want you to experience the best life possible! We want to protect you from the life-damaging consequences of drug use and to suggest some ways to avoid getting involved with that stuff in high school.

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### **4. SMALL GROUPS** (10 minutes)

**To address those life-damaging consequences, we are going to do a short activity.** Right now, we are going to split up into four small groups. Once we've split up, listen to your group's TA for instruction.

*[Split the classroom into four groups, putting at least one TA in each group. Have your group choose a student to write down information and a student to be the group's spokesperson. TA reads the four questions, and helps the group discuss and answer the questions...make sure that their final answers, which will be presented to the class, are correct and complete. When all groups are finished, have each group spokesperson present their group's information to the class one at a time. After all 4 groups have shared, read off the answers to the questions for the person who DOES NOT use drugs.]*

**As you can see, every decision we make has consequences.** By choosing to abstain from drugs, one's life is much different because there is no possibility of developing a drug addiction! And remember, these are just the most common drugs; we did not even talk about the even more harmful drugs such as crack, cocaine, LSD, PCP, or crystal meth.

**Thanks for your participation!** You all can return to your seats.

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### **5. GATHER QUESTIONS** (3-4 minutes)

**Right now, we want to give you the opportunity to write down questions** you have on the topic of "Gateway Drugs." Some of us are going to pass out 3x5 cards to you. Please be honest & genuine with your questions, and feel free to ask ANYTHING. They will be totally ANONYMOUS, so DO NOT put your names on these cards. Write down at least one question you have, and turn your card back in. We are going to give you 3-4 minutes to think and to write. Here are a few suggestions to get your mind going... *(Guide the freshmen in brainstorming by giving them LOTS of suggestions to think about! Keep listing more & more suggestions for them as they write...but give them quiet time to think too!)*

*(Once all 3x5 cards have been returned, give them to the TA Adult Listener in the room.)*

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## 6. SHARING (9 minutes)

In a few minutes, we are going to answer the questions about the Gateway Drugs that you all wrote down for us on the note cards. But first, each Teen Advisor is going to answer the important question of why he or she has personally decided to remain drug-free.

*(The TA Adult Listener will review the class's 3x5 cards and return them to you during this "Sharing" segment.)*

*(The TAs may choose to share on one of the following topics: a loved one's battle [remember, no names], a personal battle, reasons for choosing not to drink, smoke, or do drugs [health reasons, financial reasons, education reasons, responsibility, addiction/dependency, desire to have a good, healthy family, etc...], things you've done to help you keep your commitment, story of saying "No!" to drugs, story of how someone encouraged you for saying "No!" to drugs, how it has or hasn't been difficult to take this stand, etc... It is important that you not use this sharing time to "preach"-- they hear plenty of that. **The point of this is to communicate to the freshmen that you know what it's like to hurt or struggle in this area** )*

*(Remember: This sharing should not come across as cute or funny little "drunk" or "high" stories. The point of this sharing time is to encourage students not to get involved with drugs, or to stop using drugs of any kind. These are just guidelines for you. You all have your own unique experiences and that's what the students want to hear! **KEEP it short, sweet, and to the point!!!**)*

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## 7. QUESTION & ANSWER (10 minutes)

Right now, each TA is holding 2-3 questions mostly from this class about the Gateway Drugs – these are the questions that you all anonymously wrote down for us on 3x5 note cards. The TAs will randomly read a question, and then discuss their answers to your questions. 2-3 TAs will be commenting on each question, discussion-style. We aren't experts, so our answers may not be perfect, but what we want to share with you is our best advice from our experience.

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## 8. CLOSING (3 minutes)

**It's important to realize that other drugs, such as crack, heroine, ecstasy and acid are bad too, actually worse** than the ones we've discussed. Those that we covered today are just the most common.

**A lot of times people do drugs just to seem cool or to fit in, or even to deal with problems.** However, we've seen today that drugs and alcohol lead to even more problems! **Remember, not everyone is drinking & doing drugs.** None of us are, and there are hundreds of other students across this city who have made the same commitment not to drink or do drugs.

**We want to encourage you to make the same commitment that we have made.** Think of all the benefits of making such a decision! Even if you have tried drugs, alcohol or tobacco even if you are currently doing these things now - you can make a the decision today to stop. We have some laminated, pocket-sized, drug-free contracts for you which is just like the one that we have signed. Some of us will pass them out to you. This contract is yours to keep. We can promise you that your quality of life will be better if you commit to stay away from drugs & alcohol. **There are several ways to help you keep this commitment too.** One is to surround yourselves with friends who care about you and will help support you in this decision...Teen Advisors is a great place to find those friends, though not the only place. Reminding yourself of all the harmful effects of drugs (physical, mental, and legal) when feeling pressured is also a good idea. **We also have a handout for you with more facts on drugs and ways to abstain!**

**As TAs, we are here for you,** not only during these Classroom Sessions, but throughout the year. If you ever need someone to talk to, we are here! Feel free to stop us in the hall or grab one of us after school.

**You all have been great listeners! (Thank the teacher, too...he or she gave up a tremendous amount of class time).** Thanks for letting us spend this time with you today!

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### **Facts & Information about GATEWAY DRUGS**

- Drugs take over a person's life slowly & subtly. Initially, the user does the drug for physical gratification (to achieve a "high" feeling), but often the "high" feeling rapidly plummets into horrible feelings such as despair, paranoia, anxiety, and depression. To escape these new bad feelings, the user does the drug again. As the user becomes addicted, he/she becomes physically & psychological dependent on the drug. The downward spiral for the addict is almost inescapable: they use the drug to escape the bad withdrawal feelings, only to experience those feelings again once the temporary "high" wears off. Eventually, addicts only continue to use in order to avoid the pain of withdrawal symptoms.
- Scientifically, anyone can become addicted to most drugs, not just those people who were abused as children or grew up with alcoholic parents. The dependency is chemical and no amount of resolve can prevent it.
- Even a picture of a drug or drug instrument can trigger a "very strong" desire for someone in recovery.
- Drugs can become a negative substitute for normal human behaviors, such as eating.
- Most people don't find their first experience with drugs pleasant. It is often physically uncomfortable and even painful.
- Most teens think you can't become addicted to a drug just by trying it once, but everyone who is hooked today began with just one try.

### **Alcohol:**

- Alcohol-related automobile accidents are the leading cause of death among Americans age 15-24.
- Drinking on an empty stomach is particularly risky because there is no food to absorb the alcohol.
- Advertising makes alcohol look like it'll make you happy, feel good, and have good sex drive. It may give you a buzz for a while, but then you will feel worse, and it has been proven that males have reduced sex drive and function.
- Methanol, found in home-brewed substances, can cause blindness.
- 12 ounces beer = 4 ounces of wine = 1 ounce hard liquor in alcohol concentration.
- There is a difference between drinking one beer a day and 7 in one night...7 in one night is MUCH more dangerous.
- Even moderate drinking by pregnant women can result in birth defects.
- The negative effects of alcohol are stronger in women than in men.
- Women who drink heavily are at a statistically higher risk of domestic and sexual abuse.
- Mixing alcohol with other drugs (even medical drugs) can be very dangerous...even causing death in some cases.
- Studies on the impact of moderate alcohol intake for heart health are still developing...scientists and doctors have not fully concluded that moderate alcohol intake will be completely beneficial to health.
- Adolescents develop tolerance more quickly and do not get as sleepy which often leads them to drink more, which adds to the negative effects (tolerance is only a loss of buzz, not a loss of negative effects).

### **Tobacco**

- 1 out of 3 smokers will eventually die from a tobacco-related disease. That means that tobacco products will eventually kill a third of the people who use them.
- Nicotine can be even more dangerous when combined with other drugs that increase heart rate and/or blood pressure...it can result in sudden death if taken with cocaine.
- Nearly all addicted smokers started smoking as adolescents.
- Though not all nicotine in a cigarette is inhaled by a smoker, there is enough in just one cigarette to kill a child or make an adult quite sick.
- Nicotine is physically addicting, but the act of smoking, along with its various accompanying activities, is also psychologically addicting. Not only is one addicted to the nicotine, but he/she can be addicted to the act of lighting up or smoking..
- Dizziness and nausea occur during the beginning stages of smoking.
- Secondhand smoke, as well sidestream smoke (the smoke actually burning off of the cigarette, is dangerous as well...one study suggests that "as many as fifty thousand people die each year in the United States as a result of heart attacks related to second-hand smoke exposure" (*Buzzed* 181).
- There is no evidence that smokeless tobacco increases athletic ability.
- For infants of mothers who smoke during pregnancy, the infants can experience nicotine withdrawals because the nicotine would pass from the blood to the fetus before birth. There are also other risks involved, including possible mental hindrances, higher chance of nicotine addiction, and even a higher chance of death if the baby is surrounded by second-hand smoke.

### **Marijuana:**

- Marijuana is not regulated by the government, so when someone buys marijuana, they have no way of knowing what is really in it! It could be part marijuana, and part paper from a garbage can!
- Mixing of marijuana and cocaine can effect the heart in severe ways.
- There are different types of pot...some kinds cause headaches, some cause a high, and some cause a panic state.
- THC stays in the body: it can be absorbed by and stored in human fat...it can be found up to 3 weeks after intake.
- Even though the high wears off, Marijuana has effects that can last for *days*.
- Marijuana even has harmful effects when it is eaten rather than smoked.
- Many people do not even recognize the high during their first experiences with marijuana.
- Marijuana smoke is inhaled deeper and held longer than tobacco smoke.
- More tar is inhaled and remains in the lungs from marijuana smoke than from tobacco smoke.
- Marijuana is **specifically** dangerous for adolescents in long term learning and memory. It may also lead to deficiencies in other psychological realms (may cause delusions and schizophrenic characteristics).

### **Prescription Pills:**

- When combined with other sedative drugs such as alcohol (and possibly even medical drugs such as decongestants, etc...), death can occur.
- Death can occur during an overdose.
- Just because they are used for medical purposes doesn't mean they are always safe. Prescription pills should only be taken as prescribed by a doctor to treat an illness; any other use is UNSAFE and ILLEGAL!
- Sleeping pills such as Ambien should not be taken longer than 7-10 days, and only as prescribed by a doctor.
- Prescription pills can become addictive, and users can undergo withdrawals.

### **Inhalants:**

- Inhalants (huffing, Freon, coolants, paints, glues, gases, etc...) are the most toxic type of drug, causing many deaths.
- In one study, one-fifth of deaths from inhalants were first time users.
- Just because some inhalants are used for valid medical reasons, they are not safe. Their misuse can lead to severe medical problems, including death.

### **Legal Issues**

- Even just being with someone in possession of drugs when they are caught can get one legally involved.
- Even possession of a drug can "automatically be considered 'intent to distribute.'"
- In foreign countries, you are subject to their laws, and the penalty for drugs can even be as severe as death.
- Under nearly any circumstance, it is considered legal for police to conduct a drug search.
- Sometimes drugs possession can be taken so seriously, that students can be kicked out of school for simply giving another student a pain killer.
- You never know when law enforcement will "crack down," and when they do, it is usually heavy and serious.

**Drugs such as crack, cocaine, heroine, acid, LSD, ecstasy, etc... are harmful too, usually more harmful than these mentioned!**

### **Frequently Asked Questions about GATEWAY DRUGS**

1. How do you know drugs are bad if you've never even tried them?
2. Should I go to a party if I know that alcohol is going to be involved?
3. My Dad is an alcoholic and I don't know what to do about it. What would you do if you were me?
4. Do you think it's okay to be friends with people who drink?
5. What's the harm in just experimenting with drugs a little?
6. All my friends chew tobacco and I'm afraid they'll think I'm a loser if I don't chew, too. What should I do?
7. It seems like, in high school, the only way to be popular is to drink. Is that true?
8. How do I help a friend who's in over their head in partying & drugs?

Info taken from: Cynthia, Kuhn, PhD, Scott Swartzwelder, PhD, and Wilkie Wilson, PhD. Buzzed: The Straight Facts About the Most Used and Abused Drugs fro Alcohol to Ecstasy. 3rd. ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008.

[Reader One] People may think drinking solves their problems but it often creates problems.

[Reader Two] Listen to this poem by an unknown author and see if you think it's true, too.

## **POEM: Positively Negative**

We drank for joy	<i>and became miserable</i>
We drank for sociability	<i>and became argumentative</i>
We drank for sophistication	<i>and became obnoxious</i>
We drank for friendship	<i>and became enemies</i>
We took pills to help us sleep	<i>and awakened exhausted</i>
We shot up to gain strength	<i>and it made us weaker</i>
We smoked for exhilaration	<i>and ended up depressed</i>
We took pills for "medical reasons"	<i>and acquired health problems</i>
We shot up to help us calm down	<i>and ended up with the shakes</i>
We took a hit to gain more confidence	<i>and became afraid</i>
We drank to make conversation flow more easily	<i>and the words came slurred &amp; incoherent</i>
We got high to diminish our problems	<i>and saw them multiply</i>
We huffed to feel heavenly	<i>and ended up feeling like hell</i>
We drank to forget	<i>and ended up being haunted</i>
We drank for freedom	<i>and ended up becoming slaves</i>
We smoked to cope with life	<i>and ended up inviting death.</i>

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### Small Group #1 — ALCOHOL

- 1. Life expectancy.** 55 years
- 2. What physical problems are developed with alcohol use?** Shrinking of brain and impaired mental functioning (especially in women). Impaired reaction time and motor coordination. Disabilities in children born from mothers who drink. Decreased sexual drive and functioning in men. Adolescents develop tolerance more quickly and do not get as sleepy which often leads them to drink more, which adds to the negative effects (tolerance is only a loss of buzz, not a loss of negative effects).
- 3. What other difficulties will one face due to alcohol use?** Weakening of medicines positive effects. Impaired judgment. Impaired learning and memory (especially in children and adolescents). Dependence on alcohol, increased chance of children becoming alcoholics (especially in men). Women are more quickly impaired than men, both mentally and physically. Severe consequences (even death) when mixed with other illegal and medical drugs.
- 4. How much money will an alcoholic spend on alcohol throughout life?** \$135,600. And it could cost you A LOT more: alcohol could cause you to lose your driver's license, friends, college opportunities, spouse, kids, jobs...

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### Small Group #2 — TOBACCO

- 1. Life expectancy.** 65 years
- 2. What physical problems are developed with tobacco use?** Physical addiction to nicotine (resulting in angry feelings, intense craving, and irritability during withdrawal). Severe heart and blood risks (such as heart disease). Thinner skin (may lead to more wrinkles and aged features). Yellow teeth and bad breath. Excessive coughing. Risks for lung disease and lung cancer. Heightened risk of mouth and esophagus cancers, gum disease, and dental cavities. Devastating effects on offspring of smokers (even to the extent of childhood cancer).
- 3. What other difficulties will one face due to tobacco use?** May possibly lead to depression in adolescents. Psychological addiction. Giving off second hand smoke to loved ones (second hand smoke can lead to heart and lung disease). Clean hair and clothes will always smell like smoke.
- 4. How much money will an addicted smoker spend on cigarettes in a lifetime?** \$398,600. In marriage, smoking could also "cost" you the respiratory health of your spouse and kids.

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## Small Group #3 — MARIJUANA

- 1. Life expectancy:** varies by frequency & length of use, and by other circumstances (such as driving while high and other highly dangerous behaviors, such as committing drug-related crimes)
- 2. What physical problems are associated with marijuana?** In heavy doses, panic and hallucinogenic-type experiences. Headaches. Impaired coordination and physical movements. Impaired motor skills. May lower immune system capabilities. Impaired lung functioning. Reduced sexual ability in males, and reduced reproductive probabilities in both genders. Breast development in males.
- 3. What other difficulties might one face do to marijuana use?** Legal concerns (running from cops, criminal record). Marijuana can stay in your body and may affect your body for up to a week...it can be detected up to three weeks later...this can lead to an inability to get hired for a job due to employers requiring drug tests. Stress from previously discussed difficulties. SPECIFICALLY dangerous for adolescents in long term learning, memory, and other psychological realms (delusions and schizophrenic characteristics).
- 4. How much money would a once-a-month marijuana smoker spend on the drug in a lifetime?** \$78,200. Not to mention you could also lose jobs, friends, family — even years of your life if you go to prison.

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## Small Group #4 — PRESCRIPTION DRUGS & INHALANTS

- 1. Life expectancy:** Unknown – abuse of these substances is too recent a trend to have developed long-term analysis of life-long use. However, as you can tell from #2 and #3 below, the outlook for frequent users is not good...
- 2. What physical problems might one develop due to using these drugs?** Suppressed breathing. Loss of consciousness. Loss of muscular coordination and some reflexes. Vertigo. Headache. Dizziness. Disorientation. Nausea and vomiting. Heart palpitations. Lack of oxygen. Weakness. Loss of feeling. Over expanding of lungs. Seizures. Coma. Life-threatening potential for overdose and death.
- 3. What other difficulties might one face?** Depression. Slurring of speech. Learning and memory difficulties. Attention and concentration problems. Amnesia. Nightmares. Sleepwalking. Hallucinations. Withdrawal (including insomnia, anxiety, psychosis, high heart rate, high blood pressure). Accidents. Ringing in the ears. Double vision. Cardiac circulation problems. Central nervous system damage. Brain toxicity and brain damage.
- 4. How much money would a frequent user spend on these substances in a lifetime?** \$101,700. These substances also frequently cost their users some of the most important relationships in their lives with loved ones & friends, and down the road, spouses and children.

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## DRUG-FREE Facts — don't assign a small group to this one; just have a TA share these facts after the other 4 groups share theirs

- 1. Life expectancy.** 77 years.
- 2. What physical problems will a drug-free person develop throughout life?** Only those related to lifestyle, heredity, diet, exercise, and natural illness development.
- 3. What other drug-related difficulties will a drug-free person have to face in life?** Only those related to the selfish & careless decisions of others, such as second-hand smoke, drunk-driving, drug-related crime, etc...
- 4. How much money will a drug-free person spend on drugs throughout life?** \$0. Also, by not spending any money on drugs, you will be able to SAVE a ton of money for other better stuff you and your family will want and need! Being drug-free will also help you “save” your family relationships, college & career opportunities, and your future marriage & parenthood.