

Substance Use is a Girls' Issue!

Empowering approaches to health promotion challenge gender stereotypes, encourage critical thinking, teach new skills, and provide girls with the knowledge and resources they need to make healthy changes in their lives. Facilitators of girls' programs can create safe spaces to discuss how substance use is connected to family, culture, mental wellness, healthy relationships, and more! Start a conversation:

MENTAL WELLNESS

How does alcohol and other substance use affect our mood? What are some other ways we can learn to cope with stress and difficult things in our life?

PERSONAL VALUES

Help girls reflect: When do I use alcohol and other substances? When I'm stressed? Tired? Sad? How do I know my limit? Do I feel comfortable telling friends that I might not feel like drinking or using?

WEIGHT CONCERNS

Have you ever exercised all day or not eaten before going out drinking because you were worried about calories? Do you want to quit smoking but are worried about gaining weight? How can we learn more about these concerns?

SEXUAL ASSAULT

How can we keep ourselves and our friends safer when drinking? Drinking heavily in some situations can make some girls more vulnerable to having an unwanted sexual encounter. This is NEVER your fault.

HEALTH KNOWLEDGE

What do you already know about the health effects of drinking and other substance use? How does drinking affect women differently (e.g., higher risk of breast cancer, alcohol use in pregnancy)? How can we balance what we *know* with what we *do*?

HELPING FRIENDS

Before going out, can we help each other figure out our limits and stick to them? Have you ever been in a situation where a friend passed out or was in trouble? What can we do to help in these circumstances?

IN THE MEDIA

How is substance use portrayed in the media? Are there different expectations for women compared to men? How are girls who drink shown versus girls who don't drink? Which drugs are acceptable and which aren't?

Facilitator's Tip: Prevention vs. Harm Reduction

It's important to consider the age, cultural backgrounds, and the realities of girls' experiences when talking about substance use. For girls who are not using alcohol or other substances, activities might focus on exploring personal values about substance use or practicing refusal skills. For girls who are already using substances, a harm reduction approach may help keep girls engaged in programming and make positive steps towards change (e.g., cutting back or quitting substance use, staying safe while drinking).

Download the *Take Care* curriculum guide and other resources on empowering approaches to health promotion for girls



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