

# GIRLS, SMOKING AND STRESS

## A Backgrounder for Facilitators of Girls' Empowerment Groups



This info sheet has been developed by researchers at the British Columbia Centre for Excellence for Women's Health (BCCEWH), in collaboration with Girls Action Foundation. It is intended to support the work of facilitators of girls' empowerment groups.

It presents current resources for facilitators on:

- What we know about girls' tobacco use, and links to stress
- Starting conversations with girls and sharing materials about smoking
- Group activities



# Girls and smoking: What we know

## PATTERNS AND TRENDS IN GIRLS' AND YOUNG WOMEN'S TOBACCO USE

- In 2010, 13% of Canadian women (12 years and older) reported being daily smokers<sup>1</sup>.
- Historically, men's smoking rates have been higher; however now a higher proportion of young women aged 18-19 smoke compared to young men (24.4% versus 22.2%, respectively)<sup>2</sup>.
- In Canada, girls are starting to smoke at a younger age compared to boys<sup>3</sup>. Tobacco use rates for the Aboriginal population over 20 years of age are more than double the Canadian average<sup>4</sup>. Smoking among Aboriginal girls in BC is higher than Aboriginal boys<sup>5</sup> and the age of smoking initiation is youngest for Aboriginal girls (age 10)<sup>6</sup>.

## SMOKING INITIATION

- Adolescent girls often report that they started smoking because of curiosity or to deal with stress. Girls may be more influenced by the tobacco use of their friends and family compared to boys, likely due to the nature of close adolescent female friendships<sup>6</sup>.
- The age of smoking initiation varies for males and females. Boys between the ages of 5 and 11 are nearly twice as likely to have initiated smoking than girls, however by the 12-14 age range the gender difference nearly disappears. By ages 15 and older, more girls are likely to initiate smoking than boys<sup>7</sup>.
- Some of the reasons that girls start to smoke include influences from family and friends' smoking behaviour, media messaging and to deal with stress<sup>8</sup>. Young women appear to be more influenced by the tobacco use of family and friends than are boys<sup>9</sup>.

## SEX SPECIFIC HEALTH IMPACTS

- Women have a higher biological susceptibility to the toxic effects of smoking than men and therefore are at a greater risk of developing chronic diseases, such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and lung cancer<sup>10,11</sup>.
- For example, women who smoke the same amount as men are more likely to develop lung diseases earlier and to have more severe cases of the disease<sup>12,13</sup>. Additionally, smoking may have detrimental effects on women's reproductive function including decreased fertility and early menopause<sup>14</sup>, and researchers have found links between smoking and both cervical cancer and breast cancer<sup>15</sup>.
- Smoking increases risk of heart disease and stroke. Heart disease is the leading cause of death for women<sup>16,17,18</sup>.

## DIVERSITY AND EQUITY INFLUENCES

There are significant differences in age of smoking initiation for some Canadian subpopulations.

- Aboriginal youth are more likely to have a younger age of smoking initiation than non-Aboriginal youth; 52% of on-reserve First Nations people who smoke started smoking between the ages of 13 and 16<sup>19</sup>. The prevalence of teenage (aged 12-19) smoking is also exceptionally

high among Inuit people, with almost half (46%) of teens initiating smoking at age 14 or younger<sup>20</sup>.

- Francophone women (aged 15+) are more likely to smoke (35%), compared to 24% of Anglophone women (24%). Of all Francophone women in Canada, Québec women had the highest smoking prevalence (38%)<sup>21</sup>.
- Smoking rates in higher socioeconomic groups are decreasing more rapidly than in any other group<sup>22</sup> but young women, women living on low income, Aboriginal girls and women, and young pregnant women/lone mothers are more likely to smoke than other women. Smoking rates are also higher among women with a history of mental illness and/or trauma and among women who use other substances<sup>15,23,24</sup>.
- Higher smoking rates among disadvantaged women may be related to higher levels of stress. Smoking rates have been found to be as high as 26% among women aged 25 to 44 years who reported the highest level of stress, but 14% among women who reported that most of their days were “not at all stressful”<sup>25</sup>. Low-income women report that smoking is an escape from the stressful realities of their lives, such as childcare, household, and work responsibilities<sup>6</sup>.
- Populations with high smoking rates may have correspondingly high levels of exposure to second hand smoke. Those groups include Aboriginal people<sup>4</sup>, youth<sup>26</sup>, low socioeconomic groups, individuals with mental illness<sup>27</sup>, and non-white minorities<sup>6</sup>.

## PHYSICAL INACTIVITY AND TOBACCO CONNECTION

- There is a significant association between inactivity and smoking initiation for young women<sup>28,29</sup>.  
Girls and young women who are physically active or involved in sports are less likely to use tobacco<sup>30</sup>.
- Low self-esteem and weight concerns are strong predictors of smoking initiation in young women<sup>31,32</sup>, factors which are also associated with inactivity<sup>33,34</sup>. Studies demonstrate that self-esteem impacts specific factors such as confidence, perceived control and anxiety, which in turn influence participation in physical activity and smoking initiation<sup>35</sup>.



# Smoking, stress and anxiety

- Young women with low self-esteem and who are struggling academically are more likely to take up smoking<sup>36</sup>. The use of smoking to bolster self-confidence among young women may come from the widespread belief that tobacco can help calm nerves, control moods and alleviate stress.
- Stress continues to be a motivator in continuing to smoke, especially among disadvantaged girls<sup>9</sup>.
- The different social contexts of girls, characterized by an increased tendency to conform in friendship groups and higher levels of anxiety and insecurity about friendships, may facilitate the initiation of smoking<sup>37</sup>.

## TRAUMA CONNECTION

- Women survivors of childhood sexual abuse are 3.8 times more likely to be current smokers<sup>38</sup>.
- The smoking rates for women with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) range from 39.2%<sup>39</sup> and 40%-45%<sup>40</sup>, to 53.6% for women with trauma related to sexual assault<sup>40</sup>, and 58% for severely battered women<sup>42</sup>.

**THERE'S AN ELEPHANT  
IN THE ROOM.**

We like to pretend that smoking isn't as big a deal as other things. But it really is.

Learn more about quitting smoking.



Rates of smoking for men and women with mental health issues, substance use concerns, and experience of violence are higher than in the general population. There are many ways service providers can support quitting smoking. Learn more at [www.coltsking.org](http://www.coltsking.org).

## CONCERNS ABOUT WEIGHT AND APPEARANCE

- Girls are more likely than boys to perceive that smoking will help in controlling their weight and their negative moods. Clear associations have been made between smoking and anxieties about body weight and shape among adolescent women<sup>43</sup>.
- Fear of weight gain is also a barrier for many women to stop smoking<sup>6</sup>, as women encounter tobacco marketing which brand cigarettes as a means to achieve cultural ideals of thinness<sup>44</sup>.
- Smoking may be a way in which some adolescent girls express their resistance to the "good girl" feminine identity. In 2011, when Kate Moss creates controversy by puffing away on the Louis Vuitton catwalk and Lady Gaga breaks the law by lighting up on stage, cigarettes have clearly lost none of their transgressive appeal<sup>45</sup>.
- In a study of women with binge eating disorder, those with a co-occurring mood disorders had a lifetime smoking prevalence of 53.8%, those with co-occurring anxiety disorders 76.9%, and those with co-occurring substance use disorder had rates of 94.2%<sup>46</sup>.
- Female students with problem weight control practices are more likely than other female students to engage in risky behaviours such as tobacco and alcohol use<sup>47</sup>.

# Web-based material for facilitators

## BACKGROUNDERS ON GENDER AND SMOKING

- **Women and Tobacco Info Pack** (<https://www.ptcc-cfc.on.ca/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=104553>) promotes understanding of how smoking affects women's health and the importance of approaching the issue of women's smoking in a gender-specific manner.
- **Active and Free: Young women, physical activity and tobacco** (<http://www.caaws.ca/activeandfree/e/index.cfm>) a practical tool to support your work towards encouraging a healthy lifestyle for young women by keeping them physically active and tobacco-free... for life.
- **10 Facts on Gender and Tobacco** ([http://www.who.int/gender/documents/10facts\\_gender\\_tobacco\\_en.pdf](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/10facts_gender_tobacco_en.pdf)) This fact file by the World Health Organizations focuses on the harm that tobacco marketing and smoke do to women.
- **Women and Tobacco: Essential Facts** ([http://global.tobaccofreekids.org/files/pdfs/en/WT\\_essential\\_facts\\_en.pdf](http://global.tobaccofreekids.org/files/pdfs/en/WT_essential_facts_en.pdf)) This 2 page handout by the US Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids outlines tobacco use among women, tobacco industry activity, health harms, dangers of exposure to second-hand smoke, and key messages.
- **Background on Women & Girls and Tobacco** (<http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0137.pdf>) This 3 page info sheet by the US Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids outlines the tobacco industry targeting of women and girls and consequences: an epidemic of addiction, disease and death.
- **Our Health Versus Their Profits: The Lure of Smoking Continues for Girls** (<http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org/book/companion.asp?id=3&compID=33>) article from Our Bodies, Ourselves reflects on the progress not made when it comes to women, girls, and smoking.
- **Coalescing on Women and Substance Use: Linking Research, Policy and Practice** (<http://www.coalescing-vc.org/>) This site has a section on [Women-Centred Tobacco Treatment](#) and the publication [Girl-Centred Approaches to Prevention, Harm Reduction and Treatment](#).

## SMOKING CESSATION RESOURCES

- **Smokefree Women Tools to Help You Quit** (<http://women.smokefree.gov/tools.aspx>) including How much will you save?
- **Smokefree Smartphone App** (<http://smokefree.gov/apps/>) Track your cravings and moods, monitor your progress, identify your smoking triggers, and upload personalized "pick me ups" and reminders to use during challenging times to help you successfully become and stay smokefree.
- **I'm a Star! My Plan for Coping with Cravings Is** ([http://www.aware.on.ca/sites/default/files/DEEDS\\_Cards.pdf](http://www.aware.on.ca/sites/default/files/DEEDS_Cards.pdf)) (handout) Girls can fill in their plan for coping with cravings.
- **Your Body Will Forgive You** ([http://expectingtoquit.ca/resources/liz/documents/Your\\_body\\_will\\_forgive\\_you\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://expectingtoquit.ca/resources/liz/documents/Your_body_will_forgive_you_-_English.pdf)) (handout) Can be helpful for smokers to see the immediate physical health benefits of quitting.
- **My World Without Smoking** ([http://expectingtoquit.ca/resources/liz/documents/My\\_World\\_Without\\_Smoking\\_-\\_English.pdf](http://expectingtoquit.ca/resources/liz/documents/My_World_Without_Smoking_-_English.pdf)) (handout) This is a guide to visualization as a tool in the quitting smoking process.
- **Positive and Negatives of Smoking** (<http://expectingtoquit.ca/resources/noa/positives-negatives.htm>) (handout) This handout helps girls with weighing the benefits and costs of smoking.
- **Liberation! Helping Women Quit Smoking: A Brief Tobacco Intervention Guide** (<http://www.coalescing-vc.org/virtualLearning/section4/documents/Liberation-HelpingWomenQuitSmoking.pdf>) supports providers in diverse contexts to start a conversation with women about their smoking and the possibility of quitting.
- **Aboriginal Tobacco Program** (<http://www.tobaccowise.com/>) (website hosted by the Aboriginal Tobacco Program of Cancer Care Ontario). Provides "tobacco wise" messages for Aboriginal youth to use tobacco in a sacred way. See "[Know the Difference](#)" poster (<http://www.tobaccowise.com/common/pages/UserFile.aspx?fileId=46132>)

# Starting a conversation about tobacco use with girls using video clips

## [Active & Free: Young Women, Physical Activity & Tobacco](#)

([http://caaws.ca/activeandfree/e/motivate\\_me.cfm](http://caaws.ca/activeandfree/e/motivate_me.cfm))

**Author:** CAAWS

**Description:** As part of CAAWS' Active & Free program, the Take 5! Media Challenge was designed to encourage girls and young women to share their thoughts about how they are keeping smoke-free through video, audio or poster submissions.

**Length:** varies

## [Expecting to Quit](#)

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QRb8wA2iHs>)

**Author:** Expecting to Quit

**Description:** Every woman has her own reasons for smoking. Every woman can find her own way of quitting and staying smoke-free in her own time.

**Length:** varies

## [Girl Smoking](#)

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1QRb8wA2iHs>)

**Author:** Tobacco Smokes You UnfilteredTV.com

**Description:** What if you could see the damage cigarettes are doing to your body...?

**Length:** 0:31

## [Skunk Girl - The First Anti-Smoking Fashion Brand in the World](#)

([http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBIOL\\_tGIsY](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cBIOL_tGIsY))

**Author:** The Cancer Society of Finland

**Description:** The Cancer Society of Finland created an anti-smoking fashion brand. Designer clothes, cosmetics and success followed.

**Length:** 3:50

## [Look Younger, Longer](#)

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RWLnrzJAgs>)

**Author:** [www.quit.org.uk](http://www.quit.org.uk)

**Description:** Smoking ages you by up to 19 years.

**Length:** 1:15

## WEB-RESOURCES TO SHARE WITH GIRLS

CAAWS Active & Free: Young Women, Physical Activity & Tobacco Tools (available in French or English online: <http://caaws-activeandfree.ca/>)

- Cost Calculator This calculator by CAAWS supports motivation to quit based on the costs of smoking.
- Tips for resisting peer pressure CAAWS provides 4 tips for resisting peer pressure: Be Cool, Use Humour, Turn the Tables, and Be Honest.
- Healthy Living Pledge Online form by CAAWS where girls can fill out individually and print with their personal goals and rewards.

[How to Chill: A Girl's Guide to Surviving Stress](http://howtochill.ca/) (<http://howtochill.ca/>) is an interactive website for teen girls with tips on how to deal with stress. Created by the Child Development Institute based on research with 50 girls in Toronto to determine what makes them stressed, what does it feel like and what to do to cope with it.

[Tobacco Body](http://tobaccobody.fi/) (<http://tobaccobody.fi/>) Tobacco Body is a tool designed for teachers to show how tobacco negatively changes bodies. Details the serious physical health impacts of smoking – not necessarily empowering.

# Activities

## TOBACCO ADVERTISING ACTIVITY

Videos can serve as consciousness-raisers and springboards for discussion in girls' empowerment groups. An understanding of how the advertising media are used to manipulate interests and behavior can be powerful in helping girls resist taking up smoking, or serve as motivation for quitting.

### Objective(s) & Context

1. To give girls an awareness of smoking as a global issue and an understanding of the ways in which tobacco industry targets girls and young women.
2. To support critical analysis of advertisements.
3. To give girls the creative opportunity to design their own prevention campaign.

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Group Size:** 6+

**Age Group:** 13+

**Format(s) & Techniques(s):** Film/video screening, group discussion, small group creative project, group sharing and discussion.

### Options for Materials:

- [Redefining Liberation](#) video tackles the issue of how advertising affects women's body image, health and self esteem. The video analyzes the tactics of the tobacco, fashion, and alcohol industries and the resulting impact on women's health (30 minutes).
- [Deadly Persuasion: The Advertising of Alcohol & Tobacco](#) Dr. Jean Killbourne exposes the manipulative, gendered marketing strategies and tactics used by the tobacco and alcohol industries (53 minutes).
- [Pack of Lies: The Advertising of Tobacco](#) Dr Jean Kilbourne exposes the tobacco industry's seductive advertising geared to women. The film underscores how tobacco advertising exploits the cultural obsession with thinness (35 minutes).
- Utilize lesson plans developed by [Media Awareness Network](#). For example [Gender and Tobacco- Lesson Plan](#) (Level: Grades 7-9) explores gender-related influences on smoking. They discuss the numbers of male and female smokers in Canada and around the world, and the strategies used by tobacco companies to reach them. Involves analyzing tobacco ads from magazines.

### Preparation:

Choose visual and handout resources.

## WORKSHOP

### Part 1: Screening

Show film, videos or clips

### Part 2: Lead a group discussion

Discussion Questions:

- What issues speak to you?
- If you were making a campaign what approach would you take? Why?

See discussion questions in [Gender and Tobacco- Lesson Plan](#) (Level: Grades 7-9)

### Part 3: Activity

Break girls up into small groups and ask them to create their own campaign poster, advertisement, video, skit, and/or other art format using what they think would speak to girls. Explain that it does not have to be tobacco specific.

Or ask girls to create their own counter advertisement or exposure piece about the tobacco industry.

### Part 4: Sharing

Have girls share their campaigns with each other, discuss and ask questions. Debrief: Ask girls what they thought of this activity.

**Tips:** Have local tobacco cessation and health resources on hand. You might also want to have other activism resources on hand to share from organizations such as [Media Watch](#)

# Activities

## AN INTERACTIVE GUIDE TO DESTROYING YOUR BODY WITH CIGARETTES ACTIVITY

### Objective(s) & Context

1. To show how tobacco changes our bodies and explore the health impacts of smoking for women, particularly lesser known effects such as moustache growing substances.
2. To dispel popular myths about smoking for girls such as, smoking calms you down, quitting smoking makes you gain weight or smoking makes you thin.

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

**Group Size:** 6 - 30

**Age Group:** 13+

**Format(s) & Techniques(s):** large group, information sharing and group discussion

### Materials:

- Choose a health impacts handout from the resources for facilitators section
- Internet access with laptop, LCD projector and screen, or iPad

### Facilitation Tips

This information is meant to compliment other activities. These warnings alone may not have any impact on girls' health behaviour and/or decision-making. This info may be helpful to share in conjunction with healthy living, healthy coping activities.

### Preparation

Review [Tobacco Body website \(http://tobaccobody.fi/\)](http://tobaccobody.fi/) and reference resources on health impacts included in this package.

## WORKSHOP

### Part 1: Sharing information

1. Introduce topic, objectives of this activity and website Tobacco Body.
2. Have participants brainstorm stereotypes and/ or comparisons between health of smokers and non-smokers, specifically women.
3. Take participants on tour of website. Select female body and review list topics. Invite girls to choose a topic to start and first ask what they know or think about this topic. Then click on the topic and ask for a volunteer to explore the page to compare the differences between smokers and non-smokers.

### Part 2: Discussion

Lead a group discussion, asking girls to share what they think of the information, what stood out the most, what surprised them, etc.

Discussion Questions:

- Did anything surprise you?
- What stood out the most?
- Did this dispel any myths?
- What concerns you the most?
- Why is it despite these things girls still smoke you think?
- Do you know where to seek help if you want to quit smoking?

### Art Activity Idea

Ask girls to reflect on the information and create posters, poetry or art on what the health impacts mean to them and/or the message they wish to send to girls regarding these health messages/warnings.

**Tips:** Have local tobacco cessation for teens and health resources on hand.

# Activities

## MY HEALTH, MY LIFE ACTIVITY

### Objective(s) & Context

1. Discuss what is “health”
2. Explore health from a holistic standpoint
3. Explore issues related to depression and young women

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes (depends on the size of the group)

**Group Size:** 5-30

**Age Group:** 5-15

**Format(s) & Techniques(s):** large group, information sharing and group discussion

### Materials

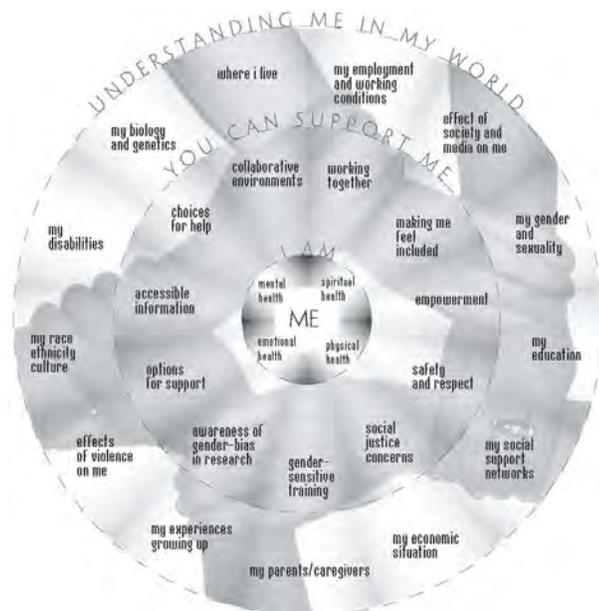
- [My Health, My Health Framework](#) handout for each participant
- Internet access, laptop, iPad, LCD projector and screen (optional)

### Facilitation Tips

Leading the Activity: Steps to Take

### Preparation

1. Make a copy of the [My Health, My Life Framework](#) for each participant.
2. Set-up laptop, internet connection, LDC projector and screen for video. Cue image of [My Health, My Life Framework](#).



## WORKSHOP

### Part 1: Sharing information

Introduce the topic: determinants of health for girls’ and young women.

Define ‘determinants of health’: the factors and conditions that affect health. Explain how these factors overlap and intersect to create unique situations for each individual.

As a group or in small groups, ask girls to brainstorm some examples of determinants of health.

### Part 2: Handout

Hand out [My Health, My Life Framework](#) sheet to each participant or display in room on projector.

Ask girls to draw an “x” or an arrow in any area they think may be affecting their health and well-being.

### Part 3: Discussion

- Which area of health do you think affects young women the most?
- Which area of support do you think young women need the most?
- How are mental, spiritual, emotional and physical health connected?
- Is there an area on this sheet or not on this sheet affecting your health and how are you coping with this?

**Art Activity:** Ask young women to create posters, poetry or art on the ideas in My Life, My Health Framework.

### Tips

**Be Prepared:** Have local health resources on hand.

# Activities

## SELF CARE ACTIVITY FOR GIRLS

### Objective(s) & Context

1. To help girls understand the important of self-care.
2. To allow girls the opportunity to try a new self-care exercise.
3. To give girls the time to listen to their bodies and explore topics of coping with anxiety and stress.

**Duration:** 3 hours

**Group Size:** 5 +

**Age Group:** 13 +

**Format(s) & Techniques(s):** Group opening circle, self-care activity, de-brief and closing circle

### Space:

Locate a safe, quite, calming and uninterrupted space.

### Self-Care Activity Ideas:

- Invite a local holistic health practitioner to volunteer to do a workshop on Reiki, massage or other bodywork
- Invite a local Aboriginal elder to do smudging, ceremony and/or sharing circle
- Grounding activity
- Yoga
- Journaling
- Mindfulness activity
- Healthy eating
- Meditation

## WORKSHOP

### Part 1: Opening Circle

Lead a group opening circle and introduce the topic self-care and what it means physically, spiritually, mentally and emotionally.

### Discussion:

- What does self-care mean to you?
- What are some examples of self-care activities?
- What self-care things do you like to do for yourself?
- Do you find any self-care activities particularly helpful in dealing with stress and/or anxiety?
- Topic suggestions: Healthy eating, physical activity, reducing stress, time management, relaxation, mindfulness, assertiveness, being good to yourself.

### Part 2: Self-care Activity

Introduce activity/ workshop and describe any benefits, history or information related to the practice.

**Tip:** Explain that this activity or any self-care activity could trigger an emotional response. This is normal and not something to be ashamed of.

### Part 3: De-brief activity

### Discussion:

How did the activity impact your mental, physical, spiritual, emotional health?

### Part 3: Closing circle

Lead a group closing circle. It might be helpful to lead a grounding exercise to ensure girls leave feeling centred and present.

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