LESSON

Developing Healthy Coping Strategies to Prevent Substance Misuse

RESPONSIBLE TEENS

Grades 9-12

Length 45 minutes

Summary

This lesson examines the link between mental and emotional health and the misuse of alcohol and other drugs. Students reflect on behaviors that support or harm their well-being, examine the risks of using substances to manage stress, anxiety, and other challenges, evaluate healthy and unhealthy coping strategies, and create a personalized guide they can use during stressful situations to support positive decision-making. Through discussions, self-reflection, and skill-building activities, students learn how developing safe, healthy strategies can build resilience and reduce the likelihood of substance misuse.

Learning Objectives

- Summarize the connections between emotional and mental health challenges with the misuse of alcohol and other substances.
- Identify the risks associated with using alcohol and/or other substances to manage emotional and mental health challenges.
- Evaluate coping strategies to support emotional and mental well-being.
- Create a personalized guide to use during stressful situations.

Vocabulary

- Alcohol misuse
- Alcohol use disorder
- Anxiety
- Cannabis
- Coping strategies
- Dependence
- Depression
- Emotional health
- Hangxiety
- Illicit
- Impulse control
- Mental health
- Mindfulness
- Paranoia
- Resilience
- Self-medicate
- Substance misuse
- Substance use disorder
- Tetrahydrocannabinol (THC)

Guiding Question

How can developing healthy coping strategies improve decision-making relating to alcohol and other substances?

Standards

National Health Education Standards:

- 1.12.4 Evaluate practices and behaviors that support health and well-being, including how to manage health conditions.
- 5.12.1 Analyze how health-related decisions may affect personal and community health and well-being from a variety of perspectives.
- 7.12.2 Evaluate practices, behaviors, and other factors supporting individual and collective health and well-being.

Common Core Standards:

- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RST.11-12.9: Synthesize information from a range of sources (e.g., texts, experiments, simulations) into a coherent understanding of a process, phenomenon, or concept, resolving conflicting information when possible.

Materials

- **Kahoot: Substance Use and Your Emotional and Mental Health**
- **Google Doc: Vocabulary List**
- **Google Doc: Developing Healthy Coping Strategies Pre-assessment**
- **Google Doc: Personalized Coping Strategies Handout**
- **Google Slide Presentation: Developing Healthy Coping Strategies**

Preparation

Before class, ensure students can access handouts and activities by printing copies, uploading materials to online learning management systems, allowing access to Google Docs and Slides, or by setting up a Kahoot! profile.

Identify any needed lesson modifications based on time limitations, student accommodations, or other factors.

Review content and teacher notes in The Risks of Alcohol Misuse Google Slides presentation and "What to do if" scenarios to prepare for any potential questions students might have.

PROCEDURES

1. Warm-up

10 MINUTES

A. Begin class by having students answer the following questions independently:
   i. *What words come to mind when you hear the term "emotional health"?*
   ii. *What words come to mind when you hear the term "mental health"?*
   iii. *What are some behaviors that might support your emotional and mental health?*
   iv. *What are some behaviors that might harm your emotional and mental health?*

B. Review student responses and make a class list of supportive and harmful behaviors, while being sensitive to the fact that some students might have had experiences with emotional and mental health challenges.

C. Use the Google Slides presentation to define both emotional and mental health. Explain the benefits of engaging in behaviors that support their emotional and mental well-being. Have the class discuss the following questions:
   i. *How can misusing alcohol and substances impact someone's emotional and mental health?*
   ii. *Why might drinking underage be particularly harmful for someone's emotional and mental health?*
   iii. *How can developing healthy coping strategies improve decision-making relating to alcohol and other substances?*

2. Pre-assessment: Emotional and mental health and substance use

15 MINUTES

A. Use either the **pre-assessment handout** or the Substance Use and Emotional and Mental Health **Kahoot** for students to assess what they already know about how substance use can impact emotional and mental health.

B. Use the information in the **Kahoot** or **Google Slide presentation** to explain the pre-assessment answers. Discuss any misconceptions and answer questions about the impact of alcohol and substance use on emotional and mental health. Emphasize the fact that underage drinking, cannabis use, and other substance misuse are both illegal and dangerous.

3. Healthy coping skills discussion

5 MINUTES

A. Either individually or using a think-pair-share approach, have students answer the following questions about coping skills and discuss as a class:
   i. *What are some emotions that someone may feel when they are overwhelmed?*
   ii. *What are some healthy and unhealthy strategies for managing these emotions?*
   iii. *What are some challenges in using healthy coping strategies?*
   iv. *How could some of those barriers be addressed?*
   v. *How can misusing alcohol and other substances to cope with challenging situations and strong emotions be harmful to someone's mental health?*

B. Review responses. Use the explanations in the notes sections of the slide presentation to discuss the importance of identifying potential situations that might make someone feel overwhelmed and why it's necessary to develop strategies to manage emotions associated with these situations.

4. Activity: Make a personalized coping guide

10 MINUTES

A. Use the **Personalized Coping Strategies handout** to have students explore their own strategies for coping with challenging situations. Emphasize that this is a personalized resource for them to use when they are dealing with stress, anxiety, sadness, or other feelings and emotions, and it will not be shared with others.

B. Using the handout, students will:
   i. *Identify healthy strategies they can use when experiencing stress, strong emotions, or difficult situations. Also identify unhealthy strategies – such as drinking alcohol or using other substances – that they should avoid.*
   ii. *List five situations that could cause stress, strong emotions, or a feeling of being overwhelmed.*
   iii. *Identify a healthy coping strategy for each situation and explain how that strategy could help them manage emotions, make a safe choice, or seek support when needed.*

C. Model the activity by either discussing your own experiences and coping strategies, or provide hypothetical answers.

D. Explain how some ways of coping may be more effective for some people in some situations but not for others. Also explain that using alcohol or other substances to cope is never healthy.

E. After students complete the activity, engage the class in a broad discussion about coping strategies using the following prompts:
   i. *Why do some coping strategies work better for some people?*
   ii. *Why is it important to have multiple strategies to use?*

5. Closing

5 MINUTES

A. Have students answer the following question to summarize what they have learned by completing an exit ticket or having a think-pair-share discussion.
   i. *How can developing healthy coping strategies improve decision-making relating to alcohol and other substances?*

B. Review student responses and identify any topics needing to be readdressed later.

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Assessments

Formative:

- Personalized coping strategies handout
- Exit ticket on healthy coping strategies and decision-making
- Optional post-assessment using the questions from the pre-assessment

Possible Modifications

Throughout the lesson:

- Provide students with a list of vocabulary words and definitions used within the lesson.
- Provide students with copies of the Google Slides presentations to follow along and review.

Warm-up activity: Use sentence starters such as:

- "Some words that come to mind when I hear "mental and emotional health" include _____, _____, and _____."
- "A behavior that might support my mental well-being is _____."
- "A behavior that might harm my mental well-being is _____."

Pre-assessment

- Provide physical copies of the pre-assessment handout before completing the Kahoot.

Exit slip: Use a sentence starter such as:

- "Developing healthy coping strategies can help you make safe choices when you are stressed, overwhelmed, or facing pressure because it..."

Extension/School-to-home Connection Options

Post-assessment

- Use the same assessment provided at the beginning of the class as a post-assessment to evaluate students' mastery of the content.

Raising awareness about healthy coping strategies

- Have students create a poster or social media post/graphic educating people on the following:
  - The benefits of developing healthy coping strategies
  - Examples of healthy coping strategies

Take the lesson home

- Have students identify a trusted adult in their lives (i.e. parent, family member, coach, community leader, etc.) to have a conversation with about emotional and mental health.
- Ways to start the conversation might include:
  - Discussing what coping strategies work for them, and identifying some that don't
  - Sharing information about how alcohol and substance misuse can affect emotional and mental health
  - Asking questions from the pre-assessment

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Additional Prompts:

PROMPT
How are emotional health and mental health related?

PROMPT
What barriers might prevent someone from asking for help when they need it?

PROMPT
Why might establishing and practicing healthy coping methods often help you in a time of stress/distress?

PROMPT
Why might some people experience both emotional and mental health challenges and substance use disorders at the same time?

PROMPT
What makes a coping strategy "healthy" or "unhealthy"?

PROMPT
How could relying on alcohol to cope affect a person's relationships, school performance, or future goals?

PROMPT
What is one takeaway from today's lesson that you think everyone should remember?



SOURCES

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RESPONSIBLE TEENS

For more information about the dangers of underage drinking, visit

ResponsibleTeens.org

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