

Educator Guide

Alcohol Education for High Schoolers

About Responsible Teens

Responsible Teens: Alcohol Education for High Schoolers is Responsibility.org's high school underage drinking prevention program. These classroom resources are designed to help students (grades 9-12) choose to be alcohol-free while establishing a foundation of positive decision-making skills. Lessons provide the knowledge and skills for students to make responsible choices regarding alcohol throughout their lifetime.

Recognizing the range of settings in which underage drinking prevention is taught in schools, these skill-based classroom lessons and materials can be used as a comprehensive underage drinking prevention and alcohol education series or incorporated individually to complement existing substance use prevention curricula.

Since high school is often the final opportunity for many students to receive classroom education about alcohol and its effects, this collection of resources covers a broad range of topics to help prepare students for life experiences before and after graduation. *Responsible Teens* is designed to equip young people with the knowledge and skills needed to make responsible decisions, including the choice to stay alcohol-free.

Lesson Topics Include

- Informed Decisions: Identifying Alcohol Facts and Fiction
- Responsible Choices: Recognizing Alcohol Impairment
- Protecting Yourself and Others: Knowing the Risks of Alcohol Misuse
- Choosing What Matters: Practicing Refusal Skills
- Understanding the Consequences: Alcohol and Driving
- Mental Health and Substance Use: Developing Healthy Coping Skills

Program Objectives

- Provide high school educators with engaging, flexible, skills- and fact-based educational resources that can supplement existing substance use prevention curricula.
- Build students' understanding of alcohol effects on physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being.
- Strengthen students' decision-making, refusal, and coping skills so they can confidently navigate peer pressure, assess risk, and make responsible choices.
- Encourage students to choose not to drink underage and build a foundation to make a lifetime of responsible alcohol choices.

Classroom Implementation

Lesson Materials and Structure

Lessons within the *Responsible Teens* program are designed to be flexible and adaptable for a variety of classroom settings. Materials are available in digital formats, including Kahoot!, Google Docs, and Google Slides, as well as in printable versions. Each lesson plan also includes suggested modifications and extensions to help you tailor the content to meet the needs of your students and classroom environment.

EACH LESSON INCLUDES:

- Comprehensive lesson plans with detailed instructions as well as:
 1. Learning objectives
 2. Guiding questions
 3. Vocabulary
 4. Assessments
 5. Possible modifications
 6. Optional extension activities
- Student handouts for printing or for use as digital materials through Google Docs
- Educator resources with Google Slides presentations and additional instructions for classroom activities
- Alignment to SHAPE America's National Health Education Standards and Common Core Standards

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Curriculum Integration

Responsible Teens lessons are designed to be either implemented as a series or as standalone resources that educators can integrate into existing curricula. Depending on curriculum structure, these lessons can be incorporated into units on decision making, driver education, and/or alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.

Beyond the Classroom

Because underage drinking prevention is most effective when learning extends beyond the school day, *Responsible Teens* lessons include strategies to encourage students to engage in conversations with parents or trusted adults and family members about alcohol responsibility.

To support these conversations and highlight the risks of underage drinking, additional information and resources for parents and caregivers are available on the *Responsible Teens* website.

Before implementing these resources, we recommend informing school counselors, social workers, and/or administrators in case students or families have questions or concerns. You may also consider sending a letter home to parents and caregivers to provide an overview of the content and encourage continued discussion about the risks of alcohol misuse and underage drinking.

Additional Resources for Educators

To expand your background knowledge on underage drinking and alcohol misuse, the following resources provide more in-depth information on a range of alcohol-related topics.

- **Alcohol Topics A-Z- National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA)**
- **Substances: Alcohol- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**
- **National Survey on Drug Use and Health- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration**

The following free classroom resources may complement *Responsible Teens* lessons and provide additional content on substance misuse, vaping, and mental health.

- **National Institute on Drug Abuse**- High school lessons and activities on the science and consequences of drug use.
- **Know the Truth**- Youth vaping prevention resources from the Truth Initiative.
- **Erika's Lighthouse Classroom Education**- Mental health literacy resources for grades 8-12.

To learn more about incorporating skills-based health education into your classroom, explore the resources below:

- **SHAPE American National Health Education Standards**
- **Teaching Standard-Based Health Education (National Consensus for School Health Education)**

About the Development

Although underage drinking rates among high school students are at, or near, historic lows (**Monitoring the Future, 2025**), educating teens about the risks of alcohol use and misuse remains essential. Continued education can help sustain this decline and empower young people to make informed, responsible decisions about alcohol in the future.

Launched in 2026, *Responsible Teens* was developed to address a key gap in Responsibility.org's underage drinking prevention efforts, bridging **Ask, Listen, Learn: Kids and Alcohol Don't Mix**, designed for middle school students, and **Alcohol101+**, the organization's college-level program. To inform the program's design and scope, Responsibility.org conducted interviews with educators from across the United States.

Based on this feedback, the program was designed to provide a balanced approach that integrates both skills-based and fact-based education, while remaining adaptable to diverse classroom settings. It also incorporates evidence-informed prevention practices including:

- Teaching social resistance skills to help students recognize and navigate peer pressure;
- Providing normative education to correct misconceptions about substance use; and
- Using competence enhancement strategies to build essential life skills, such as decision-making and coping (**Griffin & Botvin, 2010**).

To develop and refine the materials, Responsibility.org collaborated with educational consultants and its **Educational Advisory Board**. The *Responsible Teens* program draws on research and data from leading organizations, including the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (**NIAAA**), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (**SAMHSA**), and the annual Monitoring the Future survey, ensuring accuracy and relevance.

Prior to its national launch, select materials were pilot-tested by high school educators. All participating educators reported that the resources were easy to use, that they effectively engaged students, and that they would recommend the resources to other teachers.



For more information about the dangers of underage drinking, visit

ResponsibleTeens.org

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Educational Advisory Board members

- Leticia Barr, Founder, Tech Savvy Mama
- Susie Bruce, Director, University of Virginia's Gordie Center
- Alice Cahn, Founder, Cahn Works
- Erin O'Malley, Counselor, Holton-Arms School
- Leigh Parise, Ph.D., Co-founder, Classroom Champions

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SOURCES

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