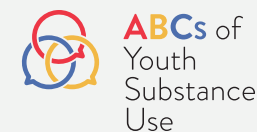
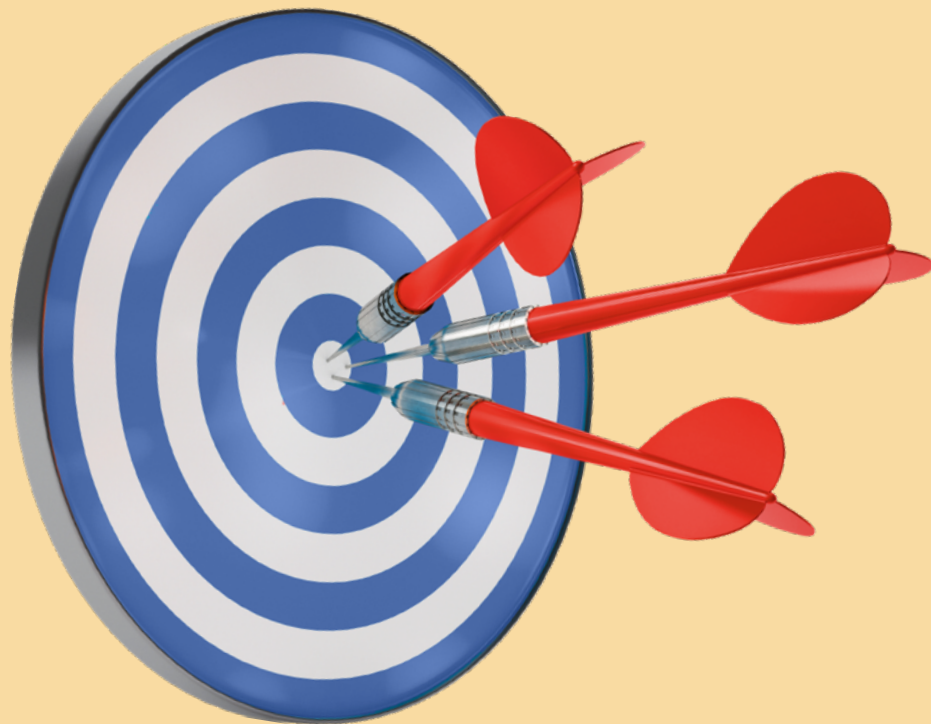


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Explaining Approaches to Youth Substance Use for K-12 Education Settings



**EVIDENCE-BASED
APPROACHES AND
RESOURCES**

PREPARED FOR:

School District Administrators
and K-12 Educators





The **ABCs of Youth Substance Use** is an initiative to promote evidence-based approaches to youth substance use education in BC schools. Autonomy, Belonging and Competencies are important protective factors that promote youth wellbeing and prevent, delay and reduce substance-related harms.

Introduction to this Resource

A number of factors can increase or decrease a student's risk of developing problematic substance use behaviours. Substance use prevention strategies are typically categorized into Universal, Targeted (aka Selective), and Indicated approaches based on these factors. This resource highlights programs and activities within a comprehensive school health approach for each category. Schools may adopt a combination of these approaches to address the unique needs of individual students as well as those of the broader student population. Familiarity with these approaches empowers school-based professionals to respond more rapidly and confidently.

Approach*	Examples within a Comprehensive School Health Approach			
	Social and Physical Environment	Teaching and Learning	Policy	Partnerships and Services
Universal Approach includes programs and activities that apply to and benefit all students. These programs or activities are often delivered in classroom settings to all the students. ¹	<p>Belonging</p> <p>Mentoring and peer education</p> <p>Peer-peer relationships through school clubs</p> <p>Having trusted adult allies</p> <p>Connection to land, place, school</p>	<p>Social-emotional learning related to autonomy, self-awareness, empathy, communication, self-regulation or conflict resolution.⁶</p> <p>Health education including:⁶</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sleep, nutrition • stress management • positive mental health • physical activity • consent and refusal skills training • health literacy skill-building • Substance use education for all ages⁷ • <p>In substance use education, interactive educational methods that provide access to accurate information are more effective than lecture- and textbook-based approaches.⁷</p>	<p>Policies that foster a safe and inclusive school climate for all, while discouraging bullying, harassment, stigma and discrimination.⁶</p>	<p>Community organizations and recreation centres, parks and libraries to increase access to programming that promotes youth wellbeing and fosters connection (for example, by offering reduced-rate workshops).⁶</p> <p>Volunteer and leadership opportunities for students within community organizations or initiatives (for example, local food banks, community bicycle co-ops, arts and culture festivals).⁶</p>



Targeted or Selective

interventions focus on students whose risk of developing substance use disorders is higher than average (based on known biological or social factors). These programs are provided to students who are intentionally selected to receive intervention. Often, these students are identified by teachers as a result of social challenges or minor classroom disruptiveness.^{1,2}

Middle school: strategies that improve healthy student-teacher relationships and enhance classroom connectedness.⁴

High school:

- Classroom instruction or activities encourage preparation for adulthood.⁵
- Creating designated “safe zones” or wellness hubs in school communities where youth can ask questions and seek support for substance use-related issues without fear of reprisal or judgment⁶
- Gay Straight Alliances⁸

Middle School:

- Cognitive behavioural therapy-based programs aimed at preventing, reducing, or delaying substance use⁹

High School:

- Basic skills training⁹

School Code of Conduct

Adapting policies to be more equity-oriented (for example, removing disciplinary policies that may re-traumatize students, allowing different styles of learning and testing).⁶

Applying a Gender-Based Analysis (GBA) + approach to policy development and review.⁶

Engaging an external community partner to staff the designated safe zone/ wellness hub within a school

For example, the New Westminster School's [wellness centres](#).¹⁰

Indigenous partnerships that offer culturally relevant substance use and mental wellness services and foster connection to culture. For example [Thunderbird Partnership Foundation](#)¹¹

Inviting external providers to screen youth to identify those at higher risk and offer individualized interventions (E.g. [Preventure](#)¹²)



Indicated approaches are focused on individuals who are identified as having an increased risk based on some individual assessment or their current use³

Displaying print materials designed by students (e.g. meme posters) that feature harm prevention messaging in common spaces within the school.⁶

Supporting reintegration into the school after suspension

Conversations about reducing substance-related harms and/or seeking cessation tools with public health or other health care providers. E.g. drinking responsibly, smoking cessation, safer injection, safer inhalation, overdose response training.

Resources such as [Erase](#)¹⁶ can help support such conversations with students, adults and school staff about substances and their related harms.

Substance use-specific policies and actions (suspension or alternates like progressive discipline and restorative justice practices).

Referrals to integrated youth services, such as those offered via the [Foundry](#)¹³

School-based alternate programs such as [Supporting and Connecting Youth \(SACY\)](#)¹⁴

Involvement of school liaison officers as needed

Healthcare services, including detox and cessation programs

* NOTE: Definitions for universal, targeted and indicated approaches are adapted from Institute of Medicine (1994) and Onrust et al (2016).^{9,15}



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