



The Sweet Spot: Developing Alcohol Refusal Strategies

LESSON PLANS

YEAR 11

TEACHERS' GUIDANCE

FOR LESSONS 1 & 2

Teacher's Guidance

Ground Rules

We advise that you briefly establish some ground rules with your pupils. The nature of these lessons may raise confidentiality or Child Protection issues. For example, pupils may mention instances of underage drinking. We recommend that within the lesson you:

- establish ground rules relating to confidentiality and maintaining the content of discussions within the group/the classroom;
- outline to pupils, with their agreement, what they do and do not need to share with others before beginning the lessons; **and**
- remind pupils that this is a confidential environment, and they can talk to you if they have any concerns. Remind them of the limits of your confidentiality (child protection) if applicable, but encourage them to speak freely – the aim is to help prepare them for situations where alcohol may be involved, not to police their behaviour.

We recommend these guidelines for pupil behaviour and disclosure during the lessons:

- pupils should support each other in discussion and refrain from making judgmental, insulting or offensive statements against another pupil
- pupils should agree not to share stories that someone tells during the lessons
- pupils should feel comfortable to discuss their experiences as much or as little as they want to, not feeling compelled to give details

We suggest these guidelines for facilitation:

- adopt a non-judgemental, empathetic judgement throughout the lesson plans
- focus on personal strengths and social skills
- speak to pupils at their level, taking a facilitating more than a didactic approach
- avoid glamorizing excessive drinking (or allowing pupils to do this excessively – deflect the conversation or use as a discussion point)
- avoid focus on negative outcomes or risks of drinking as this detracts from the resilience message and can make drinkers defensive (or allowing pupils to do this excessively – deflect the conversation or use as a discussion point)
- maintain a focus on choice and behaviour
- avoid assumptions about who may or may not have prior experience with alcohol
- encourage critical discussion between the students, avoiding “right or wrong” answers
- be aware of who the Child Protection Officers are in your school, along with being familiar with the relevant Child Protection Policy and Procedures
- discuss beforehand with your Child Protection Officer whether and how you must report instances of illegal activity (e.g., underage drinking)

Resilience

These lesson plans are based on the idea of resilience. Resilience is a process whereby young people facing adversity develop strengths and make meaning from difficult situations. There are many possible *mechanisms* of resilience such as effective coping skills, strong social support, a sense of personal agency, and being able to learn from difficult situations. None of these mechanisms are enough in isolation: young people call upon different strengths, together or in combination, at different times. Resilience isn't down to the individual: it also involves social relationships, community and culture.

A resilience-based intervention for challenging adolescent drinking is based on developing young people's personal strengths and social skills so that they are better equipped for HOW to handle situations that may involve alcohol use. The intervention is about healthier and safer choices concerning alcohol.

Prior research indicates that merely providing adolescents with information about drinking moderately (or not drinking at all) is ineffective. This usually fails to acknowledge that drinking can be pleasurable, tends to focus on peer pressure, and may ignore the ways that drinking can be important for bonding with friends. This means that instead of simply telling students NOT to drink or to AVOID situations where alcohol may be present altogether, we acknowledge that they WILL be presented with such scenarios. We aim to help young people develop the personal strengths and social skills to make healthy choices. We believe that this will result in better behavioural outcomes (such as lower alcohol consumption) because they will have the *resources* to make healthy choices and be *motivated* to do so.

We focus on the idea of the "Sweet Spot" to help young people identify what it means to feel good in their daily lives and social situations, and encourage them to map this onto their short-term and long-term choices about whether and how they drink. In the long term, this may look different from person to person. One may abstain entirely. Another may decide not to drink until turning 18. Another may choose to drink, but want to avoid binge drinking entirely. Young people may start conversations or manage risky situations more effectively. We want to empower young people with knowledge of how best they can manage, based on their values and strengths, situations where they will have an option to drink.

The strategies that young people develop in these lessons depend on their strengths and values. Their strategies will vary: we aim to help them identify and develop strategies that work best for them, using their expertise about their own lives. Behaviour change strategies that support effective self-management include setting goals, identifying barriers to these goals, practicing and rehearsing strategies, self-monitoring and making specific resolutions. These behaviour change techniques, among others, are all included in these activities. We focus on positive techniques for behaviour change and on the benefits of healthy choices.

Next Steps

These lessons cover a lot of content. Students' discussions may take up more time than allocated. With such a challenging topic, it is important to maintain a non-judgemental and engaging atmosphere throughout the lessons – this may be the first time students have had the opportunity to openly discuss an issue which can have a huge impact on themselves and their friends. Be available to them, along with other staff with whom they have positive relationships, or let them know who else they can speak to following these two lessons. The plenary in the second lesson asks students to buddy up and use social media to support one another when they have had the opportunity to try some of their strategies. Keep these practice journals anonymous, as quotes may be used from them on the web site, regarding their experiences, along with what they did or did not find successful, with possible reasons why.

Ultimately, a lesson pack for a half term could be developed on this issue, giving students time to rehearse and practice their strategies/plans in “real life” and then come back to the class and share their experiences of what went well and what could have been better; giving them the time and space to explore reasons for this. We encourage you to use the resources available on our website www.sweetspot.ac.uk to develop interactive learning activities.

We also encourage you to remind your students that the website accompanying these lessons has a lot of extra information about how young people really feel about drinking, and how to enjoy social situations without drinking beyond their “Sweet Spot.”