

WHAT DO YOU KNOW ABOUT ALCOHOL?

LESSON

11

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Some myths about alcohol are widely accepted as fact.
2. Many people need to recognize that alcohol is a problem in their families.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Distinguish between myths and facts about alcohol.
2. Be able to list the problems that alcohol creates.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Neuroscience for Kids” (<http://faculty.washington.edu/chudler/alco.html>) This includes links to other helpful sites.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

In the Box: The Grandmothers’ Letter and the story of “The Elephant in the Parlor”.

- Make enough slips of paper for each student to get one.
- On each slip, write one of the 17 statements about alcohol.
- Prepare a box of some kind to hold these slips of paper.
- Bring to class a large object such as a fur coat, a stuffed animal, or some other object that is too big to overlook and place it in the classroom before class begins.
- For the GOING DEEPER section: A number of small items to use as game tokens, such as buttons, coins, slips of paper, etc.

Before the Lesson:

Put the slips of paper with the statements listed below about alcohol into the artifact box. If you have more than 17 students, make two copies of some of the statements so each student will have a slip. Do not copy the words in parentheses (“myth” and “fact”) as these are for your information, not to be given to the students right away.

- **Alcohol is digested by the body at the same rate that food is.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: Alcohol is absorbed more directly and more quickly than food.*

- **Alcohol is high in calories and nutritional value.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: Alcohol has no nutritional value.*
- **Most cough medicines contain alcohol.**
(*Fact*)
- **A cold shower can help an inebriated person become sober more quickly.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: A cold shower only makes an inebriated person wet and cold.*
- **A 350ml can of beer contains as much alcohol as a 180ml glass of wine and a 45ml glass of vodka.**
(*Fact*)
- **It is possible to die from drinking too much alcohol.**
(*Fact*) *A person can die of a single alcohol overdose.*
- **A small amount of alcohol can help people become more alert.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: Alcohol is a depressant. It relaxes and slows the body and the mind.*
- **The body processes five ounces of alcohol every hour.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: The body can process only one-half an ounce of alcohol, the equivalent of one drink, each hour.*
- **Gender has no effect on how alcohol will affect a person.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: A woman who has had one drink will have a higher blood-alcohol level than a man who has one drink, even if their weight is the same. After more drinks, the difference is even more pronounced.*
- **A person's overall physical condition has an effect on how alcohol will affect him or her.**
(*Fact*)
- **In low doses, alcohol reduces tension and lowers inhibitions.**
(*Fact*)
- **In low doses, alcohol impairs concentration and reaction time.**
(*Fact*)
- **Continuous use of alcohol can cause the brain to shrink.**
(*Fact*)
- **A person's size has no influence on the effects of alcohol on his or her body and mind.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: The smaller the person, the more rapid the intoxication.*
- **Alcohol consumption by a pregnant woman disrupts normal brain development in the unborn child.**
(*Fact*) *Damaging her baby's brain is only one of the risks a pregnant woman takes when she drinks alcohol. Other alcohol-related birth defects include changes in facial characteristics.*
- **The alcohol in rubbing alcohol is the same as that in an alcoholic beverage.**
(*Myth*) *Fact is: Rubbing alcohol is a dangerous poison and should never be consumed.*
- **The liver is the organ of the body responsible for processing alcohol.**
(*Fact*)

Before class begins, bring in the large object and place it in a prominent, inconvenient position in the classroom – where all students will see it and wonder about it, and where it will affect how you move about the room. When they ask about the object, tell them, “We don’t need to talk about that right now” or something similar, replicating the kind of evasive language used by many families of alcoholics when the subject of drinking comes up.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON



STORY

ABOUT 2 MINUTES

[At the beginning of class time, read the story of “The Elephant in the Parlor.” You must not comment on the story or attempt to explain it. Simply pretend that the story is self-explanatory and that the large object you’ve brought into the classroom is not there. The explanation of the object and the story should gradually become obvious as the lesson progresses, and the class will discuss the story at the end of the lesson.]

As soon as they entered the room, the three friends felt the change. The enthusiastic greeting they had grown accustomed to failed to materialize. Dima gave a slight cough behind his fist, and Tatyana Aleksandrovna looked up and nodded them in.

Natasha saw the letter lying on top of the mysterious box and thought, I bet she has read something that made her sad, or maybe she’s weighing the cost of something she isn’t sure we’re ready for.

“Sasha, today’s letter is addressed to you. I’ve been sitting here wondering whether it is too private to share it with all three of you. Obviously your grandmothers didn’t think so. But I wonder . . .”

As her words trailed off, Sasha knew he didn’t want to face whatever was in the letter alone. “We’re not supposed to face these challenges by ourselves. Our grandmothers said so in the first letter you read.”

Tatyana Aleksandrovna smiled and opened the letter.

Dear Sasha,

There’s an old story about an elephant that lived with a human family. It took over the largest room of their house. A full-grown elephant isn’t easy to ignore. But that is exactly what everyone in the family did. They never mentioned it to each other, but they ordered their lives around the elephant.

The smell of elephant permeated the furniture and their clothes; even their food had a slightly musty odor to it. If you had ever been invited over to their home for dinner (which would never have happened), the stench would have turned your stomach. They ate each meal without uttering a single word about their unwelcome guest. The elephant crowded the dinner table when it was hungry – and it was always hungry. The family pushed and shoved each other, complained about not having enough room to eat and blamed each other for the lack of enough food to go around. But none of them ever spoke about the elephant that had taken over their lives.

I won’t bother you with the details of cleaning up after the elephant, but you can imagine the mess it made of the house and you can imagine the mess it made of their lives. There was seldom a moment in any day when the elephant didn’t weigh on their hearts and minds. The elephant was uninvited and unwanted. But still, they never addressed the problem of the elephant with each other or the elephant; they didn’t know how.

Sounds like a ridiculous children’s story, doesn’t it? The absurdity of it sounds quite humorous. Oh, how I wish that were true! But it is not. You see, I lived with an “elephant” in my home for a very long time on pretty much the same terms as those in the story. It was the elephant of alcoholism.

Your grandfather started drinking before we were married. I knew he drank, but everyone drank. Back in those days it was considered part of being a man to drink. That is such a destructive lie. It is a

myth that goes hand in hand with the notion that it is nobody else's business, or problem, if someone wants to drink himself into oblivion. Like the elephant in the room, the rest of us are intimidated into thinking that we're supposed to just let it be. And trying to put up with it, pretending it doesn't exist, hoping it will go away on its own, or keeping quiet about it doesn't work. I know because I tried them all, some for decades at a time.

It is high time we talk about this elephant. It is time to address the problem and come up with a plan to get it out of the house or, better still, see that it is never allowed in in the first place.

*Your Grandmother,
Ludmilla*

EXPLORING THE LESSON



MYTHS / FACTS AND DISCUSSION

ABOUT 33 MINUTES

You may designate one desk at the front of the room for myths and another desk at the rear for facts.

You can heighten the drama by your facial expressions and by murmuring to yourself: "Yes . . . no . . . hmmm . . . oh dear . . ." etc.

This step has the effect of encouraging the students to reconsider the statements that they don't understand.

[Write the words "MYTH" and "FACT" as headings on your board.]

I have written the words "Myth" and "Fact" on the board.

Please come to the box and take a slip of paper with a statement on it. First, silently read the statement and decide whether it is a fact or a myth.

Then go to the myth or fact location. Feel free to consult with one another concerning your decision. It may be that two of you draw the same statement and you may each decide to put the statement at different locations. However, when I say, "Time for final decision", you must immediately put your paper down at the nearest location and sit down.

[When all slips have been placed, have the students sit down while you silently review the results of their work.]

[If there are errors in the placement, give the class their first clue:]

There are more facts than myths. Think about where you placed your paper, consider and discuss your reasoning, and feel free to move slips from one category to another.

[If at any point in the exercise you see that your students have correctly placed all the slips, you can begin the discussion immediately by addressing one of the most controversial and confusing myth statements first:]

What makes this statement a myth?

Now think again. Do you want to move any of the statements?

[Keep prompting the students to consider moving the slips of paper after reviewing them. If necessary, after this first clue, tell your students:]

Discussion

There should be at least eight statements in the myth category.

[They still might not have all the slips placed correctly. If your students still need help, give them their second and final clue:]

There should be eight statements under “Myth” and nine under “Fact”.

[When the students have made their final decisions and moved the slips, tell them how many they got right and begin the discussion. It is not necessary to discuss all the items. Concentrate your discussion on the items that seemed confusing or controversial. Use the information included in parentheses and other information you can gather from the Web site listed under “Teacher Resources” to help fill in the gaps in the discussion.]

 = 35 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON



IDENTIFY THE ELEPHANT

10 MINUTES

One or more of your students may have figured it out, but if no one does (or if you can see that your students are making wild speculations), explain:

Although you want the discussion eventually to return to the gigantic problem of alcoholism, you might stimulate this part of the discussion by mentioning:

Here is your opportunity to guide your students away from despair and equip them with the resources to cope with overwhelming problems that are beyond their control.

Some of you asked about the object in the room, and I told you that we could not talk about it at that time. Now, tell me what you recall about the story of “The Elephant in the Parlor” and compare it to the *[name the large object]* that has been prominently displayed in the room. What do these things mean?

I have been acting as if *[the object]* is not here, even though its presence is not only obvious but also intrusive. Eventually, you went along with me and ignored it yourselves, just like the family that ignored the obvious problem of the elephant in their parlor.

Can you think of problems in our society that are like that elephant? Everyone knows they are there, but no one knows what to do about them, so no one says or does anything.

As you know, in our country we have beggars on the street and in some places organized crime. Like the problems of poverty and crime, the problem of alcoholism – both in families and in society as a whole – is so overwhelming that many people don’t know what to say or do about it, so they act as if the problem is not there, just like the family with the elephant.

While you may not be able to solve the problems of poverty, crime, or alcoholism – either in society or in your own homes – you can make wise choices that affect your own lives and the lives of those around you:

- You can be a help rather than a burden to your parents.
- You can be an example to younger siblings and friends.
- You can encourage your peers to make wise choices.

In other words, you can take responsibility for your own decisions and help solve problems in your own sphere of influence, even though that sphere of influence is small right now. Coping effectively with the elephant in your own lives might make it easier for others around you to cope with their elephant as well.

In this lesson, we saw that for many individuals and families, alcohol is a problem, often a problem that is simply ignored. Next time, we'll start looking at why alcohol is such a problem. We'll begin by seeing the effects alcohol can have on our bodies.

Before dismissing your students, remember to dictate the Parent-Teacher questions to them.



= 45 minutes

RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

An ancient Jewish proverb observes: “It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor be hasty and miss the way” (Proverbs 19:2). A contemporary proverb restates this idea: “A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.” People who know only a little about alcohol can make deadly errors. If you’re smart, you won’t make a decision about drinking until you know what the long-term effects may be. This game will illustrate the need to collect complete information before charging off to begin a task.

YES – NO TREASURE HUNT ACTIVITY

[Before this lesson, you should have hidden several game tokens (buttons, coins, slips of paper, etc.) in locations in your classroom out of plain sight. They should be accessible only if the seeker has a complete set of instructions to find them. The number of game tokens will depend on the number of teams participating in the game.]

The object of the game is to recover a certain number of tokens. There should be enough hidden game tokens that the winning team must find two or three tokens.

1. *Each team should write up as many as three “yes” or “no” questions on a sheet of paper about the location of the hidden game tokens. The teacher, who knows where all the tokens are hidden, will write “yes” or “no” answers to all the questions and set the folded papers on the table in front of the teams. Teams may not open their papers until the teacher gives the signal. All teams will read their papers at the same time.*
2. *After each team reads its paper, teams may go off in search of game tokens, or remain to write more questions (no more than three at a time). As soon as the players think they have enough information, they should begin the search.*
3. *Team players must stay together as they search. They may not split up. The first team to recover enough tokens wins.*

When the teams have reassembled, discuss the process. Did any teams begin their search without adequate information? How many questions did the winning team ask to find the tokens? What insights does this give us on obtaining complete information before beginning to drink alcohol?]

FOCUS POINT

Be sure to leave time for discussion at the end of the learning activity so your students can discuss the connection between the learning activity and the lesson. Listen to see whether they seemed to understand the key points listed. If you sense that one or more of these points may have been lost, be sure to guide the discussion to make sure they get these main ideas.

1. **People who know only a little about alcohol can make deadly errors.**
2. **Young people need to get all the facts before they decide whether, and when to, consume alcohol.**

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

There are many problems that we often ignore, thinking they will go away. There are many societal problems we ignore, hoping they will go away – like homeless people or beggars on the street.

Only when we acknowledge the problems we encounter can we begin to deal with them. Today, there was an entertaining story called “The Elephant in the Parlor” that helped illustrate this idea.

One problem that is often ignored is the problem of alcohol. One reason it is ignored is that people have many misconceptions about alcohol.

For Family Discussion:

1. What are some of the misconceptions about alcohol? The students discussed 17 of them in class.
2. If alcohol has caused problems in your extended family, please discuss them with your adolescent.

