

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

1. Alcohol abuse can entangle lives like knots in a fishing line.
2. Alcohol abuse may cause permanent damage to the body.
3. Alcohol abuse is a dream-breaker.
4. Alcohol abuse harms not only the abuser, but others as well.

OBJECTIVES

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

1. Describe how the effects of alcoholism go beyond physical harm to the alcoholic.
2. List various social and economic effects of alcoholism.
3. Describe the interconnections between the various effects of alcoholism.

MATERIALS / PREPARATION

In the Box: The Grandmothers' Letter, and fishing line in one-half meter lengths for the teacher and for every student, or a few lines for students in small groups (sewing thread or twine may be used if necessary)

- Make sure it has the effect of leaving kinks when it is tied tightly and then untied. If when untied, the line or thread doesn't leave a significant kink, then change the activity to tying tight knots in a thread and not untying the knots. It will be virtually impossible to untie these knots. Then the students will tie loose knots and tight knots in their strings. These tight knots will signify the damage that cannot be undone; the loose knots will signify those damages that can be healed.
- You should be aware that the Grandmothers' Letter for this lesson is a painful, and potentially tearful, story. You may want to read it out loud several times to be sure you can control your own emotions. You may also want to think through how you will handle the classroom if several of your students begin to cry while you are reading.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT 1 MINUTE

[Review the following:]

Last time, we said that our pile of stones is a reminder of the pain and problems that can come from abusing alcohol. But we also said it is a memorial to the freedom to pursue our dreams that comes when we decide not to abuse drink.

Last time, we learned about the physical effects of alcohol on the body. However, I suspect that many of you already know that the possible effects of alcohol can go far beyond giving you a headache or damaging your organs. Misuse of alcohol touches the people around you, your environment, and of course, your dreams. One of the grandmothers found that out. Let's hear her story.



STORY

ABOUT 4 MINUTES

[Read the following story.]

"Oh," said Tatyana Alexandrovna, obviously startled to see her three students enter the classroom. She quickly wiped her eyes and set the Grandmothers' Letter on the desk.

"There are some stories that are never meant to see the light of day – they are written for an audience of one. I can't imagine how difficult it must have been for your grandmother to write this letter and then leave it for you. There is little in the way of explanation, just a note that it was written long ago and locked away – until today."

Taking a deep breath, she began,

Dear Ones,

Alexei Stepanovich was a good husband. Of course he was. Do not let anyone say differently. He was my first choice, you know – the one I could only hope would choose me, too, when I saw him dance at the May Day festival so long ago. Right after the Great Patriotic War, it was. His medals were pinned to his shirt, and they reflected the sunlight, like fireworks, as he danced.

He was strong and handsome, and when I watched him, my heart began pounding in my chest. It wasn't just the women who admired him. Everyone cheered and clapped as he danced, and all the men tossed down big glasses of vodka along with him. He matched them, elbow for elbow, and showed not the slightest weakness for it, unlike the others, who wobbled and staggered as the alcohol took effect.

He saw me, my Alexei. His eyes were large and dark, like a storm sweeping in from the sea, and they flashed when he smiled or laughed. He saw me that day and smiled at me, and my heart was his. I smiled back at him.

I had very nice teeth, back then; people told me so. They were beautifully white and very straight, and I knew when I smiled, I looked pretty. Pretty enough to make men notice. Alexei noticed!

Once we were married, we were able to move into our own flat. It was a good flat, not like most of the workers' families, and we had it all to ourselves. The light shone in through the south window, which I kept clean despite the constant soot in the air. Every day I washed off the black grime from the factory smokestacks.

In the mornings, Alexei Stepanovich left for work early, in the winter and spring before the sunrise. I knew when it was spring, because the eastern sky would glow orange in the smoke. Then he would come home after dark, and we would have dinner together.

Alexei worked hard. He was tired when he came home. His hands and face were covered with the same grime I washed off the window. At first, he would wash his hands and face before dinner. Later, he was too tired, and he sat at the table and drank his vodka, his flesh pale underneath the soot, as if he had been painted to blend in with the walls and the window and the sky.

In the beginning, a liter of vodka would last three or four days. Then, it was one each day, half before dinner, half after. The work was so hard. At first we did have pleasant talks together in the evening. I'd look forward to them all day. But soon he'd just drink his vodka; often we'd argue and then he'd stumble into bed. He hardly ever smiled, and his eyes were as dark as the smoke. . . .

Then came that evening when Alexei hit me. His fist was like a rock, and his strong arm drove it as fast and hard as the steel rods on the machines in his factory. The blow blinded me, for a moment, and I didn't realize at first what had happened. I didn't even realize I was on the floor, until Alexei was over me, tears in his eyes, saying how sorry he was and that it would never happen again. He seemed as surprised as I was. The bruise on my cheek hurt, but not as bad as the ache in my heart.

"I'm so sorry," he said, and the alcohol on his breath smelled like sickly sweet perfume. "But you mustn't bother me with so many questions and problems. I need to rest when I come home. I can't stand all the problems."

I had asked him what he would like for dinner. . . .

Time passed, and then the evening came that the beating didn't stop. He pounded me again and again, and I felt a sickening crunch as the teeth broke on the left side of my mouth. Gradually, the part of me that understood what was happening went away, and the light around me closed to a tunnel, a tunnel as dark as his blank, black eyes. . . . Many years passed, and it seemed to me like one long nightmare.

Then one day, I watched as the doctor came out of the back room and looked from one of us to the other. "I'm sorry," he said. "It's cirrhosis of the liver. There's nothing we can do."

Alexei clutched my hand. I could feel that he was trembling. . . .

He lay on his hospital bed, his yellowed skin swollen like overripe fruit. Even his eyes were yellow, except for the irises, which instead of the stormy flashing black I knew so well from our youth now were dull and empty, like two round pits dug into poisonous soil. His breath fought its way in and out, ragged and uneven.

"I was a good husband, wasn't I?" His voice was hoarse, and oddly squeaky, the way fingernails are on a chalkboard.

"Yes, Alexei, of course," I smiled. In the mirror I saw my reflection. My perfect smile and straight white teeth had long ago been replaced with caps of silver.

I think he must have seen the expression on my face, for he started to weep bitterly. It was the only time I ever saw him cry – at least for me.

Your Grandmother,
Ludmilla

Allow students to comment on story if they desire. Perhaps say, "Any thoughts or comments?"

We can see from the grandmother's experience, and maybe even some of our own, that alcohol abuse or misuse never affects just the person making the choice to drink. Other people and other areas of our lives are always affected.

EXPLORING THE LESSON



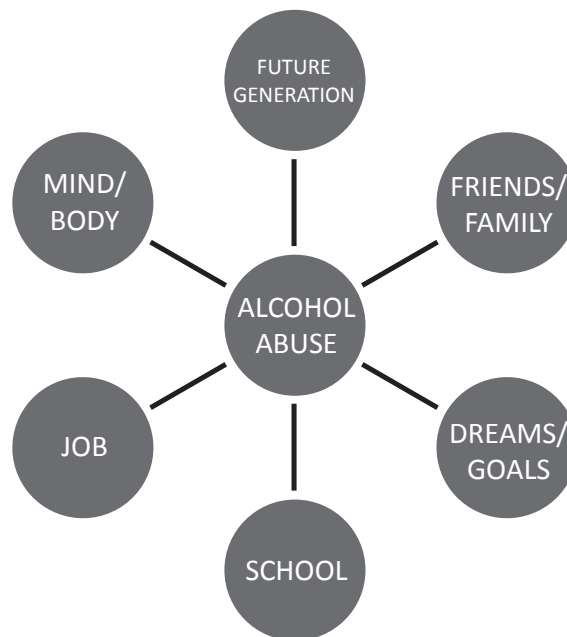
DIAGRAM OF CONSEQUENCES

ABOUT 5 MINUTES

Not only are many areas of life affected, but those areas are also intertwined, and one consequence of alcohol abuse may lead to several others. Each area of our life touches and has the potential to change the other areas.

Turn to an empty page in your notebook and copy what I draw on the board.

[Draw the diagram shown below on the board, leaving space for adding more circles around the perimeter of this diagram.]



We will be creating a web to show how one area of life can affect another.

At the center the web, write: Alcohol Abuse. Radiating out from that are all the parts of our lives: School, Family and Friends, our Mind and Body, a Job, the Future Generations, and our Dreams and Goals.

[Allow students to complete their individual drawings.]

= 10 minutes



EXPANDING THE CONSEQUENCES DIAGRAM

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

Refer students back to the agreement that they signed in Lesson No. 5, if necessary.

Encourage students to respond in light of the physical effects of alcohol they learned in Lesson No. 12. How would those physical changes dictate their choices and actions?

Be encouraging and considerate of student responses. Your chart should be much more complete and thorough.

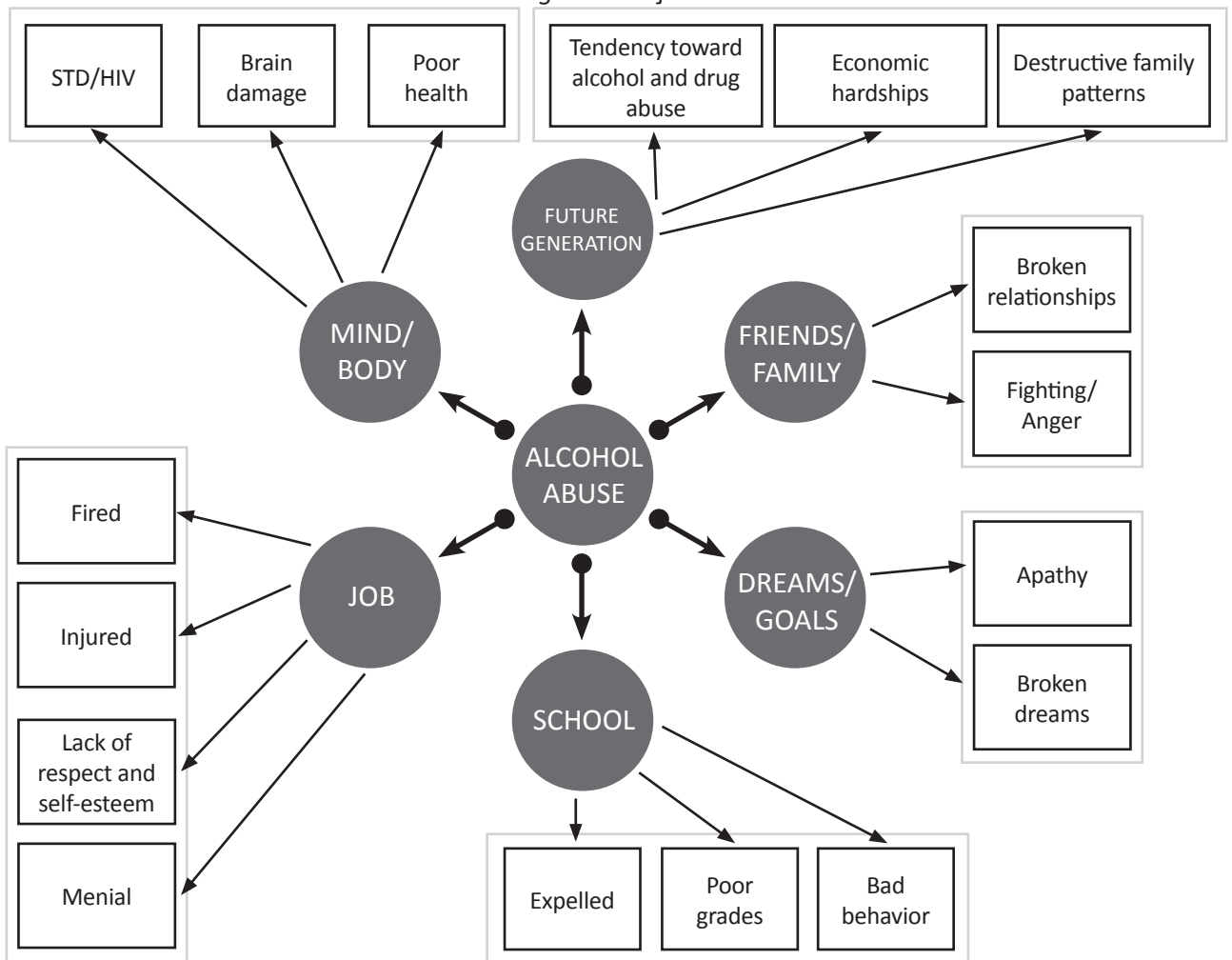
Now, let's do some thinking and sharing. Be sure to keep in mind our agreement about group participation and being considerate about the responses of all group members.

Remember that we made a commitment that this class would be a safe place to share our ideas and experiences.

If a person were to abuse alcohol, how would these areas of their lives be affected or limited? Let's think back to our last lesson for a moment when we learned about the physical effects of alcohol. If those changes were occurring in your body and brain, and the addiction was growing or already existed, how would those effects play into your outer actions and choices?

Let's draw other circles near the affected areas to show the possible consequences of alcohol. For example, what would be an effect on a person's job if he or she were to abuse alcohol?

[Elicit responses from students, and draw circles and lines connecting the effect to the appropriate area. See diagram below for drawing format and possible effects. Students should continue their own drawings as well.]



Add any final contributions.

As you listen to student responses and draw lines connecting effects, point out to students how web-like this is becoming; you can't touch just one area of your life.

We can certainly see that there are many opportunities and experiences in our lives that can be affected by abusing alcohol. Do we have all of the effects in our drawing that we want?

Take a moment to examine the interaction of all of the related effects. Notice how one consequence has the potential to affect several areas.

For example, if you drop out of school, how might this contribute to some of the other effects we have identified here? Would it cause you to miss out on some of your goals?

- **If you are thinking more about drinking than anything else, you could stop even caring about your goals.**
- **Not finishing school will greatly affect not only your dreams but probably your relationships with your family and friends as well.**

Next, draw lines to illustrate how they affect each other.

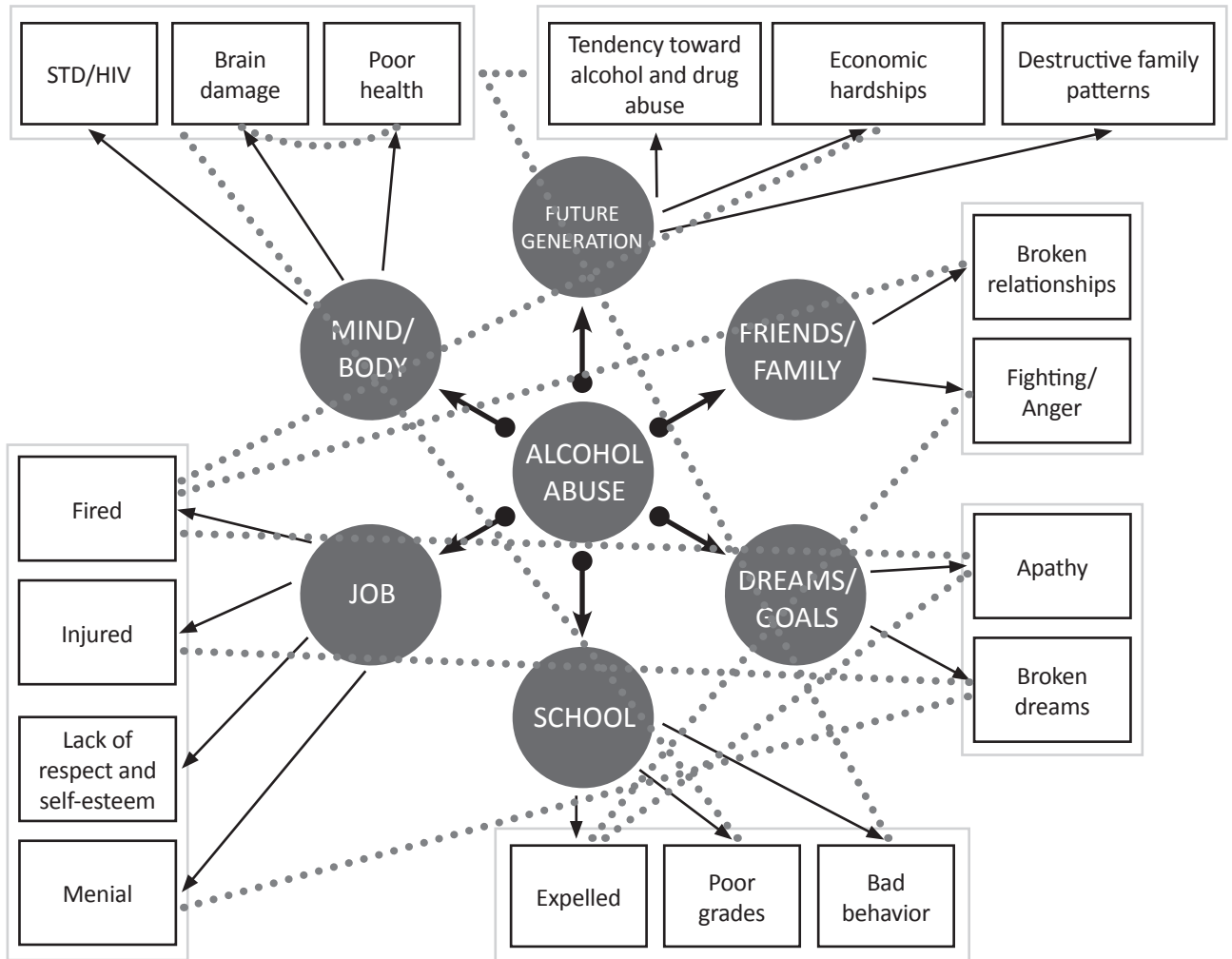
 = 20 minutes



DIAGRAM OF CONSEQUENCES

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

[Draw lines connecting consequences that create other consequences. You may choose to change the lines and the boxes they connect. Have students do the same on their papers. See the diagram below for examples. The lines may make the diagram appear cluttered, which will illustrate that the consequences of alcohol abuse clutter our lives.]



We can see from all of these lines and connections that alcohol-abuse problems or difficulties affect more than just one area of life. Like a spider web, every area is somehow connected to every other. Changing, manipulating, or ignoring one area will affect other parts of our own lives, as well as the lives of other people.

Can you imagine trying to undo all of the lines? Are there some connections that look easier to break than others? Why? Any that appear more difficult? Why?

 = 30 minutes



KNOT ACTIVITY

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

You may use a length of fishing line for each student, a few lines for students in small groups, or only one for yourself.

In the box, there are pieces of fishing line. We will use fishing line to help illustrate some ideas in our discussion.

[Pass the fishing line out to students.]

Tie three very tight knots anywhere along the line. They can be very close to each other or far apart. Be sure to pull and tug to

Adjust the demonstration to suit your materials and classroom.

A different type of string or twine may be substituted for fishing line if fishing line is unavailable.

For untying the **loose knots**, use examples of effects or consequences that would be relatively easy to turn around such as hangovers, cost of buying drugs, and risk of being discovered. Use student responses if they give good, pertinent examples.

For the **tightly tied knots**, responses may include life-changing consequences such as:

- addiction
- damage to the body
- killed dreams, etc.

NOTE:

If you test the line or thread in advance and discover that when you untie the knots there is no significant kink left behind, you will need to alter the activity.

As an alternative, you could tie tight knots in a thread and not untie these knots. The tight knots will be virtually unable to be untied. In this version of the activity, students will tie loose knots and tight knots in their string. The tight knots will signify the damage that cannot be undone, whereas the loose knots will indicate kinds of damage that may be healed.

You may use other examples of tangled, difficult consequences or effects.

get them as tight as possible. Use all of your strength!

Now I'd like each of you to tie two loose knots anywhere along the line. They shouldn't be so loose that they come undone, but don't make them too tight either.

We have each been given the gift of a life. Each individual is responsible to take care of his or her own gift. Everyone will have circumstances in his or her life that become either opportunities for growth or become knots because of a wrong choice. Some knots are more difficult or nearly impossible to undo compared with others. Why?

Some knots may seem to be easier to undo. For example, you can choose to change how you behave in school.

Now untie the loose knots on your line. What kinds of problems did you encounter? What is the condition of the section of line where you untied the knot?

[Probably very easy to untie with no associated damage to the line.]

Now untie the tight knots. Remember that these represent the truly serious consequences, which may not come undone.

[Allow a minute or less to untie them.]

What kinds of problems did you encounter? What is the condition of the section of line where you untied the knot?

[Probably very difficult to untie without associated damage to the line.]

Is the line in exactly the same smooth, unbent, or unfrayed condition as when you received it? Has the line been altered in any way? If so, this change is like the effects and consequences of alcohol abuse.

What can we do about life's most severe consequences, the ones that can't be undone so easily? What if drinking too much alcohol leads you to sexual activity that results in herpes or HIV? HIV or herpes would be a consequence, or knot, that couldn't be untied.

Sometimes it is possible to get untangled from some consequences that result from wrong choices, but your life will not be what it would have been if you had made confident, healthy choices. Your life is like the fishing line – once a tight knot has been tied, there is always some remaining effect, or kink, even if you succeed in getting the knot untied.



= 40 minutes

ENDING THE LESSON



PERSONAL JOURNAL RESPONSES

5 MINUTES

Hang all the students' fishing line or just your fishing line as a concrete reminder.

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



= 45 minutes

Open your Personal Journal and glance again at your list of dreams and goals. Which of those do you think might be hurt or even destroyed completely if you abuse alcohol?

Now take some time to describe in your journals the damage you've seen from alcohol abuse in your family or a friend's family. You may make a list of things. It may be a story of broken relationships, or it may be a list of broken dreams.

Have you begun tying any knots in your lifeline already? If so, what can you do today to stop the knot from becoming so tight that the effects become a permanent part of your life?

Are there knots that other people are trying to get you to tie into your lifeline? If so, what can you do today to stop it from happening?

What can you do to help others from getting their lives tied up in knots?

We will hang up our fishing lines (or threads) in the classroom as a concrete reminder of the potential tangling effects of abusing alcohol. They will remind us to keep our dreams undamaged from unwise decisions.

Our threads will remind us to avoid tying knots in our lives. They can also remind us to be good examples to each other and encourage each other to remain healthy and stay focused on our dreams.

RESOURCES

GOING DEEPER

WRITE STORY WITH TWO ENDINGS

There is a description of the sad fate of an alcoholic in the book of Proverbs, Chapter 23, verses 29-35.

[Have your students read that passage and write and perform a single skit with two endings. Begin by having the class brainstorm together the two versions.]

Both versions will begin with the same set of circumstances: A character is exposed to the opportunity to abuse alcohol (possibly at a party or one night while out with friends).

One version will illustrate the trials of the alcoholic as described in the passage. Use the passage of Scripture to provide the details of the first ending of the skit.

The second version begins the same way, with the character facing the same set of circumstances. But this version will illustrate the struggles and benefits of a drinker deciding to quit. In the second version, the character decides to quit drinking after several years of alcohol abuse. He is hassled by his friends who want him to continue drinking with them. The skit will end by showing one or more life-changing opportunities he would have missed if he had continued to drink (the beautiful girl in his class who now wants to meet him, the boss who now wants to give him a promotion with a raise, etc.).

[After the whole class brainstorms ideas for both versions, divide the class into two groups. Each group independently organizes its skit. End with each group performing its version of the skit for the other group.]

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 abuse alcohol miss opportunities they never see.**
2. **People who avoid alcohol are in the best position to take advantage of life-changing opportunities.**

PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

For Family Discussion:

1. If a family member or friend has had trouble in his or her family because of alcohol, talk about how you as a family could help that person without being judgmental.
2. As a family, see whether you can make your own web about all the areas of a person's life that could be affected by alcohol.

