

## **TEACHER PREPARATION**

### **KEY CONCEPTS**

1. The first decision about alcohol – whether to begin drinking before adulthood – is the crucial point at which a person has the greatest control of his or her future involvement.
2. Character plays a greater role in the way a person handles alcohol than family background or any other risk factor.

### **OBJECTIVES**

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

1. Play the Character Development game using a set of hypothetical factors.
2. Identify the factors that play the greatest role in a person's handling alcohol responsibly.

### **MATERIALS / PREPARATION**

There is no Grandmothers' Letter in this lesson.

Each student must have a coin, a pen or pencil, and some paper.

## LESSON

### BEGINNING THE LESSON

#### UNIT REVIEW:

You may wish to take some time to review the major points of the past four lessons. Be sure students have good written records for reminders and personal review.

In this unit, we have looked at the effects of alcohol and the consequences of abusing it. We've also tried to measure our own degree of openness about having a problem with drinking.

Today, we will finish this unit by looking at the value of making early decisions about alcohol use. We have no Grandmothers' Letter today but, instead, we will begin by playing another game.

### EXPLORING THE LESSON



#### GAME INSTRUCTIONS

ABOUT 5 MINUTES

**Goal of the Game:** To promote character by cultivating all five character qualities.

Write the traits and definitions on the board as you list them:

- Self-control
- Honesty
- Perseverance
- Reliability
- Confidence

*[Tell the class:]*

This game is similar to the game we played when we were studying drug abuse. As with that game, you will have 15 coin tosses in your "lifetime". Your game is over after that 15<sup>th</sup> toss, regardless of where you end up.

But this game is different in this: The goal in this game, and the way you will play it, will involve character. We will begin by randomly selecting a combination of character qualities and risk factors. The more character a player has, the greater his or her chances of avoiding trouble with alcohol. The goal of the game is to fully develop character; that is, to cultivate all five character qualities.

These five character qualities were chosen because they are opposites of the characteristics of an alcoholic. The five character traits in this game are the following:

1. **Self-control**: doing what I ought to do, even when I don't feel like it.
2. **Honesty**: telling the truth even when it hurts.
3. **Perseverance**: completing a task even when it gets tougher than expected.
4. **Reliability**: always doing what I said I would do.
5. **Confidence**: believing in myself even when others doubt me.

These are the four risk factors we will use in this game:

Write the four risk factors on the board as you list them.

1. A history of alcohol abuse in my family.
2. A permissive attitude about alcohol in my upbringing.
3. An unstable and distressing home situation.
4. Frequent anxiety and depression.

These were not the only risk factors we discussed a few lessons ago. Do you remember the other two risk factors we discussed before?

*[They are “early onset of drinking” and “blindness to the risks of alcoholism”.]*

This game will help us discover our risk of alcoholism in two key areas:

1. Our early decisions about alcohol.
2. Our willingness to cultivate a strong character.

Here’s how to play:

1. If a player has a greater number of character qualities than risk factors, the odds will be with him or her when he or she comes to a point of decision. This means that he or she would have to toss heads just once in three tries to make the right choice.
2. If a player has fewer character qualities than risk factors, his or her odds diminish. This means that he or she would have to toss heads twice in three tries to make the right choice.

Some decisions will lead to new choices. For instance, “Are your friends problem drinkers? That is, do most of the things they do for fun involve drinking and alcohol?” This leads to “Can you control your drinking?” Most decisions will lead to the addition or deletion of a character quality.

3. If a player makes a wise choice and lands on a +1 square, he or she may choose which of the remaining character qualities he gets to add. (“I already have self-control, honesty and perseverance. Now I have chosen well, and I choose to add reliability.”)
4. If a player makes an unwise choice and lands on a -1 square, he or she loses a character quality and must choose which one he will forfeit. (“I give up my confidence.”)
5. If a player loses all the character qualities, he or she will remain at zero until he or she is able to begin adding character qualities again.

 = 5 minutes



## SIMULATION GAME

ABOUT 10 MINUTES

### NOTE:

When this game was designed, we ran through several scenarios to see how it might play out. We discovered that the first three tosses were often the key to eventual success or failure. In two different scenarios – one with a predominance of character, the other with a predominance of risk – opening the game with three heads resulted in both cases in achieving fully developed character with zero risk of alcoholism.

In another scenario involving a character-dominant profile, opening the game with three tails – three unwise decisions – resulted in alcoholism and despair. In one risk-dominant scenario, two heads in the first three tosses resulted in a recovering alcoholic who cannot decide whether or not to begin drinking again because he spends time with friends who drink.

*[Play the game once together.*

*This means that a player’s chances of making good choices could change from one coin toss to the next. To enhance the educational value of this game, work through the first scenario slowly with the whole class, explaining the significance of each decision.*

*For instance: “Sasha began with three character qualities – reliability, honesty, and perseverance – but he started out tossing two consecutive tails. This means he decided to begin drinking before adulthood. Now he must forfeit one of those character qualities, and his chances of controlling his drinking have been diminished because of his immaturity.”*

*Play up each decision. Cheer when Sasha chooses wisely, especially when the odds are against him. Moan and grieve for him when he makes bad turns toward disaster. Have the class play together the first time to acquaint them with this more complex and more realistic simulation. In this way, you can “script” Sasha’s life story from his first decisions about alcohol.*

*When you have finished with “The Life of Sasha”, discuss his decisions and the eventual outcome of his life. Did his character overcome his risk factors? What were the most important decisions he made? (Emphasize the importance of his early decisions.) Once Sasha made one or two bad choices, did he still have hope of recovery, or was he destined to failure?*

*Point out this fact to your students: Early decisions play a disproportionate role in creating ultimate success or failure.]*



= 15 minutes



## DIADIC SIMULATION GAMES

ABOUT 15 MINUTES

*[This game is similar to the game found in Lesson 10. We have shortened the amount of time to play this game in this lesson in order to accommodate all the elements. To begin, have the whole class play this game once. If you choose to lengthen the lesson and time allows, after the class has played together once to see how the game is played, have them break into groups of two.*

*Have each group select one of the two profiles – character-dominant or risk-dominant – and create a new “life story” complete with name and profile specifics (which character qualities, which risk factors).*

*Your groups may want to work with character-dominant profiles at first just to improve their chances of success. This is good.*

*Encourage that choice and remind them what this means: Character is a key component in the success of dealing with alcohol, even more important than risk factors.*

*Have the groups write the numbers 1 to 15 on a piece of paper and use a coin to write the script for their character.*

*As scenarios unfold, you will hear groans and cheers from groups as their characters fail or succeed in key decisions. When you hear such a reaction, “drop in” on a group to ask what happened.*

*When the groups have finished, ask whether any of them has a particularly interesting story to tell: a dramatic turn-around, a last-minute reversal, etc. Ask also whether any groups ended up with a short success story: a character-dominant profile that “won” (achieved zero-risk and fulfilled character) by making several early wise choices. Is such a scenario realistic? Is it desirable in real life?]*



**= 30 minutes**



## ENDING THE LESSON



### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS FROM GAME

ABOUT 15 MINUTES

**NOTE:**

By the time a player has reached “problem drinker” or “alcoholic,” he or she has lost so many character qualities that the odds are against making wise choices.

*[Once everyone has had at least one opportunity to experience the frustration and exhilaration of coping with alcohol, use the following questions to discuss the game with your students. Some important observations are shown in bullets. Be sure your students include these ideas in the discussion.]*

- 1. What are the most crucial choices, the ones that have the greatest impact on the way the game plays itself out?**
  - Whether to begin drinking before adulthood.
  - Whether my friends are drinkers, especially if they are problem drinkers.
  - Whether to begin drinking as an adult.
- 2. What are the most difficult choices, the places where it is very hard to make the right choice?**
  - A problem drinker deciding to seek help.
  - An alcoholic deciding to get into rehab.
- 3. Remember that the most important factor is to be aware that you could end up an alcoholic.**

*[Your students will want to play this game on their own, creating their own profiles with their actual risk factors. Encourage them to do this, but remind them of these important facts:]*

- 1. Character development isn't like the four risk factors we have listed. We have little or no control over most of those risk factors, but we can choose our own character by cultivating or neglecting positive character qualities.**
- 2. At their age, they are perfectly positioned to begin “writing their script” for maximum success.**
- 3. Even if a person does make early unwise choices about alcohol, his or her future is not dictated by the toss of a coin. He or she can always choose to do what is wise and good, even when that choice is difficult and painful. It is not random chance, but his or her own choice that will dictate his or her destiny.**



## PERSONAL JOURNAL ACTIVITY

Provide sufficient time for students to complete each task.

We have come to the end of the unit on alcohol in which we have discussed important information about how alcohol use can negatively affect our lives.

It is time to revisit the list of dreams and any related obstacles that you wrote several weeks ago on the first page of your Personal Journal under “My Dreams”, the comments you made in the “Stronger Together” section, and the “I Assert My Independence From Drugs” section. Take a few minutes to re-read your words and think about how they may have changed since then. If so, feel free to modify them in your Personal Journal.

Once you have completed reviewing the previous sections, you are ready to write on a new page of your Personal Journal: “I Assert My Independence From Alcohol”. Today is an opportunity to make an affirmative statement about how you are working to achieve your goals and the potential impact that abstinence from alcohol may have on your dreams. Take a few minutes to describe specifically how you will avoid the negative consequences of alcohol, and then sign and date it. Be sure to leave enough room for a couple of signatures as you did in the previous section.

The next step is for you to share your statement about independence from alcohol with at least two people. They can be the same people with whom you shared the previous section or someone else (a parent, grandparent, teacher, sibling, or friend) whom you can trust to be supportive. Tell them some of the things you have learned about how the use of alcohol can affect one’s dreams and how you plan to avoid such things.

Be sure to have them sign their name beside your signature and under the commitment “I Assert My Independence From Alcohol” as a witness to your commitment. If you have the courage to take this step, you will be on your way to realizing your dreams and have the benefit of a trusted partner along the way – someone who can be a source of strength for you when you encounter the challenges and obstacles that lie ahead.

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



**= 45 minutes**



## RESOURCES

### GOING DEEPER

One ancient ruler was given some valuable advice: “It’s not for kings to drink, lest they forget the requirements of the law and deprive the oppressed of their rights” (paraphrased from Proverbs 31:4-5). Many people, not just kings, drink alcohol to forget their troubles. But the problem is that alcohol tends to make us forget everything! The story I’m going to read is true. It comes from the family history of one of the authors of this curriculum. It illustrates the problems of alcoholic “forgetfulness”.

The old farmer hauled his crop to town in a wagon that Christmas Eve. He should be able to sell his crop for enough money to buy food to feed his family for the winter and have enough left over to buy Christmas presents. The finest of those presents would be the piano he was going to buy for the family so his oldest daughter could give piano lessons.

After selling his crop for a good price, the old farmer had a fistful of money – plenty for all the shopping he planned to do. He bought fruit, candy, and toys for the little ones – and the piano for his oldest daughter and the entire family. He had the piano loaded onto the wagon and headed for home.

On the way home, he passed his favorite bar. He thought it might be good to go in and celebrate his bumper crop and fine profits with a little bit of whiskey. But he didn’t stop at one glass. Before he knew it, he had drunk himself into a stupor. He woke up in the alley behind the bar early the next morning, barely able to remember how he had gotten there. All his money – all the money that would get his family through the winter – was gone. Someone had taken it while he was passed out.

Slowly, he began to piece together the last several hours of his life. He remembered the wagon full of gifts – and the piano. But when he went back to get his wagon, it too was gone.

His despair was complete. Not only would he have to walk the ten miles back to his farm without his horse and wagon, but all the money and presents were gone, too.

Overcome with grief and self-loathing, the old farmer wandered around town on Christmas morning in a daze. Then, he realized he still had his pistol. That was his way out. He looked up and realized he was passing by the lumber yard, with its stacks of

lumber. He sneaked into the lumber yard, crawled between two stacks of lumber and put the barrel of the pistol into his mouth. He had already disgraced himself and his family. This was his only way out. He simply couldn't face his family or his friends and neighbors with this failure on his conscience. Surely, suicide was his only legitimate option.

## LOST CHRISTMAS MONEY STORY DISCUSSION

*[Stop the story at this point and ask your students: What should the farmer do? How do you think this true story actually ended? After several students have guessed, finish reading the story.]*

As the farmer's fingers closed over the trigger, he remembered how he had gotten to this place. "Whiskey got me into this mess. I'll never take another drink as long as I live," he said to himself. Somehow he plucked up the courage to make the ten-mile walk home that lonely Christmas morning. As he neared his property, he saw his horse grazing in the field. As he neared the house, he heard the sound of a piano and children singing!

Later that day, he finally learned what had happened to him on Christmas Eve. His son-in-law had found him drunk in the bar and tried to get him to come home. When the farmer stubbornly refused to come, the son-in-law took all his money and the wagon full of gifts (so that no one would steal them) and took everything home to the family.

## DISCUSSION

Do you think the farmer was able to make good on his promise to himself never to drink again? Why or why not?

## 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. A strong, stable, and prosperous life belongs to people who say "no" to drugs and alcohol.
2. People who consume alcohol risk everything that is precious to them.

## PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

### **For Family Discussion:**

1. Ask your adolescent to describe the character traits he or she studied in this week's lesson.
2. If you have observed any of these character traits in your adolescent's life, tell him or her!

