



RISE ABOVE
COLORADO



CLOSING THE



GAP

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

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ABOUT CLOSING THE GAP

Closing the Gap was developed to create meaningful opportunities for teens to explore and shape the world in which they live through the critical analysis of data and fact-based reasoning. Engaging teens in the data discovery process can be beneficial for all involved, including educators and the program (or community) that is being studied. The following are just a few of the potential benefits:

- **Teens** – gain lifelong skills to analyze data and reflect deeply on their autonomy and the relationship they have to their community
- **Educators and other Facilitators** – gain a youth perspective on the stories and connections behind the data that can foster a fresh and more intricate perspective, as well as fostering authentic relationships with young people by working together to understand the world we share
- **Programs/Communities** – gain teen-driven conclusions & recommendations for addressing concerns and opportunities leading to greater relevance and impact

Teens will also explore how perceptions about substance use are shaped and how perceptions influence behavior. Discussing why misperceptions exist and correcting them is an effective strategy for prevention according to social norming theory¹. Leveraging the opportunities of adolescent development and teens' interest to understand themselves in relation to their peers and the world around them², *Closing the Gap* utilizes the **Science of the Positive**³ and **Positive Youth Development**⁴, both of which are evidence-based approaches that focus on growing the healthy, positive factors in our communities to mitigate negative influences.

Essential Questions Explored:

- How are our perceptions formed?
- What are the perceptions around youth substance misuse?
- What does the data tell us about youth substance misuse?
- How can misperceptions about our peers' substance misuse affect our behavior?
- How can we correct misperceptions around youth substance use?

Objectives:

Participants will be able to:

- Review recent data on teen substance misuse
- Explore connections between perceptions, attitudes and behavior
- Build critical thinking skills to interpret the world around them with an open mind
- Discuss hopes and concerns around Colorado teen substance misuse
- Plan ways to correct misperceptions and rise above substance misuse.

1. Perkins, H. & Berkowitz, A. (1986). Perceiving the community norms of alcohol use among students: some research implications for campus alcohol education programming. *International Journal of the Addictions*, (9-10): 961-76.

2. Siegel, D. J. (2015). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA).

3. Linkenbach, J. (2013). *Applying the Science of the Positive to health & safety*. Bozeman, MT: Montana Institute, LLC. Available online at: www.MontanaInstitute.com. [Workshop Manual]

4. Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (2019). *Positive Youth Development*. <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/positive-youth-development>

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE OVERVIEW

Using This Guide:

- Key ideas and main talking points are provided for each slide. Notes for the facilitator, optional activities, and supplemental materials are also provided. Please feel empowered to use what is provided and to also add to it to make it your own.
- This resource is best used when you help make it relevant with local context and adaptations! Creating opportunities to make connections to personal experiences and local examples is a powerful learning tool.
- Recommended time for optimal facilitation is 60 minutes; however, this can be facilitated in 45 minutes or over several sessions if necessary.

Resources Provided:

- Presentation slides
- Healing Centered Approaches
- Colorado Academic Standards for Comprehensive Health Education
- Overview of Common Reactions to the Lesson

Preparing:

- Run through the presentation ahead of time and determine how long you'll need to present, taking into consideration whether you plan to facilitate any optional add-on activities.
- If you are familiar with the group, highlight areas of the lesson that may connect with other concepts that participants may be learning or know about in other classes or activities.
- If you are a guest presenter, take some time to learn about local resources that may exist related to prevention, and specifically substance misuse prevention. Many schools make mental health services available either through the School- Based Health Centers, school counselors, or prevention counselors.
- Ask your host site in advance about existing ways they address sensitive topics before you present. What are the existing group/classroom norms? How do they normally handle sensitive subjects?

Facilitating:

- This lesson is designed to be youth and/or adult led. It is typically used in classrooms with a youth audience, though adults learn a lot from this presentation too.
- Discussion questions are interspersed throughout to encourage conversation and sharing of prior knowledge, experiences, and questions.
- The aim is to actively engage all participants through these questions by the end of the lesson. Try using different questions or rephrasing if no one is responding.
- This lesson incorporates Positive Youth Development (PYD) principles, which focus on building skills, authentic relationships, and opportunities to practice. PYD embraces a strengths-based approach while also engaging youth as partners. As such, we invite you to find ways to offer youth a platform to explore this material while building leadership skills and sharing their voice.

PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

KEY POINTS

- Introduce yourself, Rise Above Colorado and the lesson objectives.
- Inform participants of available resources and supports should they need them, including reaching out to a trusted adult or friend.
- Start to create a space of learning and respect for the issues to be discussed. Consider reviewing the supplemental resource on pg 19, Healing-Centered Approaches.

SLIDE 1



If you are a guest facilitator, **introduce yourself** and share **why you're leading this discussion**.

Ask participants if there are **group norms** they want to address for their time together, including being respectful of others' experiences as it relates to this subject.

SLIDE 2



An important part of media literacy & being a critical consumer of information is **knowing who the author or sponsor is** to gain an understanding of the point of view being presented.

This slide models this principle by introducing Rise Above Colorado.

Rise Above Colorado is a statewide prevention organization that measurably impacts teen perceptions and attitudes about the risks of substance misuse to empower teens to make healthy connections, decisions, and change.

SLIDE 3

Main Objective: It is important to address the sensitivity of talking about substance use and misuse. Substance use disorder and addiction are serious illnesses that can cause harm to the individual experiencing it as well as their family and friends. Contrary to popular belief, young people are also susceptible to substance use disorders and addiction. **In fact, 90% of people who become addicted to substances started using them before the age of 18.**



Discuss available resources and supports that are available to them.

Remind youth that it's also okay to take care of themselves while participating in this lesson (i.e. leaving the room, taking a break, debriefing with a trusted friend or trusted adult afterwards, etc.)

Provide an overview of resources for them if they (or someone they know) needs help: Safe2Tell, Colorado Crisis Services or accessing free counseling services through the **I Matter.** Campaign.

SLIDE 4

Review the **objectives** listed on the slide:

The slide has a blue header with the word 'Objectives' in white. Below the header is a list of five bullet points. To the right of the list is a heart-shaped logo with a blue and white striped background, a red and yellow center, and the text '#RISEABOVE'. A small 'RISE ABOVE COLORADO' logo is in the bottom right corner.

- **REVIEW** recent data on teen substance misuse
- **EXPLORE** connection between perceptions, attitudes & behaviors
- **BUILD** critical thinking skills to better interpret the world around us with an open-mind
- **DISCUSS** hopes & concerns about Colorado teen substance misuse
- **PLAN** ways to correct misperceptions and rise above substance misuse

SLIDES 5 & 6

These two slides drive home the point that MOST teens will overestimate peer substance use. We ask these questions to get live participation / poll the room to show that **use is actually significantly less** than the majority of youth in the room will predict or perceive.

Ask the questions on each slide and read each response item, providing wait time for participants to raise their hand to show their responses.

Slide 5:

What percentage of HS youth have NOT used alcohol in the past 30 days? **Answer: A) 76%**

2022: Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey: 24% have used

2021 HKCS: 24.7% have used

Slide 6:

What percentage of HS youth have NOT used marijuana in the past 30 days? **Answer: B) 83%**

2022: Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey: 17% have used

2021 HKCS: 13.3% have used

SLIDE 7

But is this information REALLY true?!?

Despite occasional pushback, this information is accurate and well documented.

- ❖ **"Yeah but teens lie..."** Some teens do indeed mislead, but there are failsafe measures to identify and remove dishonest participation. A large sample size helps ensure results are accurate. This data is consistent with many other surveys and studies.
- ❖ **Yeah but this is just propaganda..."** Do we have an agenda? Yes! We are unapologetically working to empower teens to help them stay healthy and connected. But this requires accurate and honest conversations - not propaganda.
- ❖ **"Yeah but all my friends smoke pot..."** Two things can be true at once but it's important to take a wider view, and confront something called *confirmation bias*, which is interpreting new evidence to confirm existing beliefs.

FACILITATOR'S NOTE: This slide is meant to proactively address and engage youth in common "pushback" to the data, spark conversation, and do some level-setting. Feel free to digest these 3 common responses from teens and put them into your own words to drive this discussion.

Teens Lie: Our survey is anonymous, so there isn't an incentive to lie – and it is administered remotely, which is a proven technique to ensure responses are more accurate. Also, having a large sample size also helps with accuracy, and ensures the results are representative of the state and local regions. The margin of sampling error is +/- 5 percentage points at the 95% level of confidence. That means that if you were to do this survey 100 times in the same way, 95 out of those 100 times you will get results that are within that margin of error.

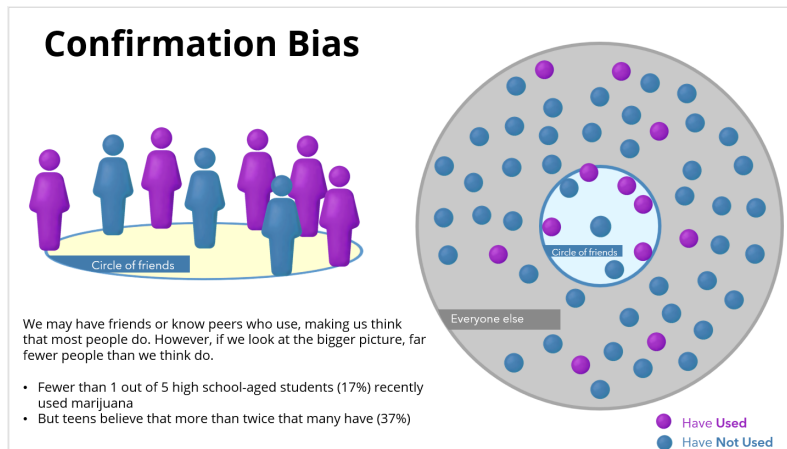
Propaganda: Yes, we have an agenda by doing this research, but it's not propaganda. This data is YOUR data, it's not fake news. The information in this research is what Colorado's youth told us. We didn't make it up – it came from teens 13-17 years of age, all selected at random from across the state. And what is our agenda? Our agenda is to help youth lead healthy lives, one that allows them to grow up to become the kind of adults they want to become, making the kind of choices early in life that will let them achieve that future. That's our agenda. Youth who use drugs often do so out of peer pressure or as a coping mechanism to things like stress. And sometimes, their drug use gets to a point where it begins to define who they are and what they do. We know that 90% of all addictions begin with use in the teen years. Our agenda is to empower teens to lead a healthy life, free of addiction. Full stop.

Two things can be true at once/the same time: If you smoke pot, chances are pretty good that your friends do too, this study validates exactly that point, that people who use drugs are far more likely to hang out with people who also do drugs, and because of that, to them, it looks like most people are like them and their friend group, this is one of the main reasons for doing this study, to show teens that not everyone is like them.

SLIDE 8

Main Objective: Explain Confirmation Bias / expand on the point that two things can be true at once.

Confirmation Bias: the tendency to seek out or interpret information to make it support already held beliefs or theories



Use the graphic and brief description to show that while it might be true for someone's closest circle of friends to include teens who have or do use, it is important to take a step back and look at the bigger picture.

Sometimes it's hard to see past your closest friends. We may have friends or people we know who use marijuana, making us think that most people do and possibly feeling pressure to use as well.

The reality is that significantly less teens have used/use substances than what most perceive.

PART TWO: PERCEPTION, REALITY, AND BEHAVIOR

KEY POINTS

- Perception is the ability to understand and take meaning from something.
- Our perceptions are influenced by many factors, including our environments, the people we interact with, our upbringing, media, the opinions of our community, etc.
- Our perceptions influence our attitudes and actions.
- One strategy to help us critically analyze new information is 1) observe first, 2) question next, and 3) interpret last.

SLIDE 9

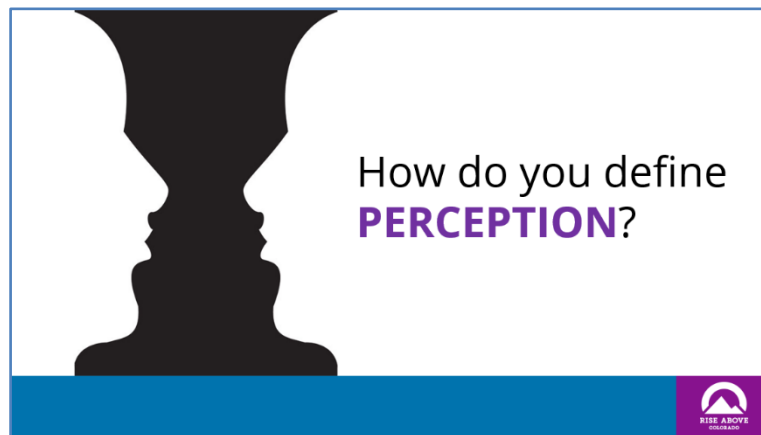
ASK the question on the slide, *“How do you define perception?”* and discuss as a larger group. Example responses may include:

- how an individual sees something
- the way people see the world
- how we process information

PERCEPTION refers to one’s ability to understand and make meaning from something.

ASK *“In this instance, what do you see in the image on the slide?”* Solicit thoughts as a large group.

- *Who sees two faces? Who sees a vase? There are situations where two different people can observe the same thing and come to different conclusions or have different perceptions.*



SLIDE 10

ASK question on the slide & elicit responses in the form of a **Turn & Talk**:

"Why is it important to have an accurate perception of the world around us?"

Turn to the person next to you and share your answer to the question on the slide.

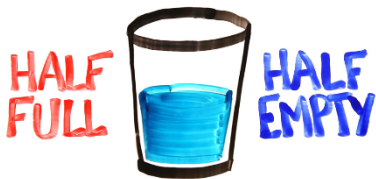
Give pairs a minute to discuss and then solicit responses as a large group.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS:

- Perception, or our ability to interpret and understand something, is the foundation for belief **and affects behavior**.
- A long time ago, many societies believed that the world was flat. If you believed it possible to quite literally sail off the edge of the earth, would that affect your behavior while sailing? One might avoid "the edge" for fear that you would sail off.
- There are examples throughout history of social norms that impact our behaviors: In the past, it was acceptable to spit in public, litter, and ride in a car without a seatbelt, **but the norms around these behaviors changed and now these things are viewed as objectionable forms of behavior**.

SLIDE 11

Where do our perceptions come from?



Most youth are familiar with this perception-related example of a glass with water at midpoint.

A person feeling optimistic might respond that it's half full, or someone feeling pessimistic might respond that it's half empty.

How a person views the water in the glass could also be related to their usage of the glass: are you in the process of pouring water into it or drinking from it?

ASK: *"Where do you think our perceptions come from?"*

Common answers will be family, friends, school, past experiences/background, religion, politics, media, etc.

KEY TAKE-AWAYS:

- The way we understand and interpret the world around us is influenced by our personalities, our family and friends, the experiences we have had, the community we live in, and our society
- There are other subtle things we might not even realize are influencing our perceptions like social media, television, and ads
- The way we perceive things can also be influenced by our day-to-day emotions and therefore shift over time

SLIDE 12:

Main Objective: This slide is meant to foster a whole group discussion around social media and the impact it may have on one's perceptions. The goal is to ask a variety of open-ended questions to encourage reflection, discussion, and critical-thinking skills.

How does social media impact our perceptions?



ASK: *"How does social media impact our perceptions?"* Responses might include:

- makes us feel that other people are having more fun, have more friends, have better X, Y, Z than me
- positive/negative/neutral impact on mood and perceptions
- social media ads are trying to get us to think a certain way, look a certain way, feel a certain way, buy a certain thing...
- social media algorithms deliver content that caters to our interests, possibly creating and reinforcing confirmation bias

Optional reflection questions:

- *No shame or judgment here, but how accurate are most people's social media profiles to the reality of their daily lives?*
- *Think about your own social media. How often do you post when you are having a bad day? Social media tends to be a highlight reel for most people, not necessarily a representation of their true day to day life.*

ASK: *Who is the consumer or customer on social media?*

- Flip the script – you're actually the product NOT the customer.
- Access to you and your data are being used (bought and sold) by social media and advertisers.

Why/how does this matter? How might knowing this change your perceptions and behaviors?

KEY TAKE-AWAY:

We are the product, not the customer on social media.

SLIDE 13



What are some tips to help us become healthier consumers of social media?

Too often, people seek out or grab onto information that supports the thoughts or opinions they already hold.

This is true when engaging with social media as well as offline.

ASK: How do we make sure we're pursuing an accurate perception on both social media AND out in the real world?

SLIDE 14:



Step 1:
OBSERVE
Step 2:
QUESTION
Step 3:
INTERPRET

Let participants know that as we continue through the lesson, we'll be reviewing current data.

Introduce the importance of using this 3-step process when engaging with social media and really ANY new information and data:

1. OBSERVING first,
2. QUESTIONING next, and then
3. INTERPRETING

This process helps us form our own opinions and make informed decisions and actions.

Encourage youth to actively participate by sharing their observations, questions and interpretations as we go.

PART THREE: DATA AND FACT-BASED REASONING

KEY POINTS

- Data from the Rise Above Colorado (RAC) Youth Survey shows that there are misperceptions around youth substance misuse
- Most high school and middle school youth in Colorado are choosing healthy, positive alternatives to substance misuse
- There are actions we can take to close the gap between perceptions and reality
- There are actions we can take to recognize and address the disparities in people's experiences related to substance use

FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

If you have access to local data through the [Healthy Kids Colorado Survey \(HKCS\)](#) or a separate survey through your school district, it may be beneficial to use it in the following section. The Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey is a statewide survey.

SLIDE 15



The Rise Above Colorado (RAC) Youth Survey asks 12–17-year-olds across the state about their behavioral health, which includes mental health and substance use. The survey examines the factors that make people less or more likely to use substances.

The survey is administered in an online format which teens take anonymously on their phone or computers outside of school on their own time.

(OPTIONAL) SLIDE 16:

Use this slide if your youth are familiar with the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) and you would like to explain the difference between HKCS and RAC Youth Survey.

Our community also surveys youth in schools through the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS). This survey collects information not only on behavioral health but on things like physical activity, eating habits, bullying, violence, etc. Does anyone recall taking this survey in school?

RAC Youth Survey focuses on substance use and factors that can contribute to use or prevent it. You see some differences in data from each survey; however, the overall trends are similar. HKCS data tends to see higher rates, which may be a result of their age range being older (might include 18+ year olds). They report on their high school and middle school data separately, whereas the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey reports on data from 12–17-year-olds combined.

SLIDE 17

Take a minute to review the data on the slide. Ask youth to share their interpretation of what the graph shows and solicit responses. Note that the focus is on the black bar of each data point, highlighting the majority who are not using. Feel free to review all of the data or just select a few examples most relevant to your participants.

KEY TAKE-AWAY:

MOST Colorado teens are NOT using substances.

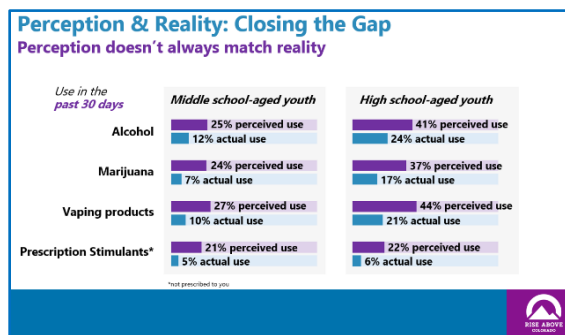
FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

We look at use in the past month (30 days) because it gives us a more accurate representation of current substance use behavior rather than looking at lifetime use.

You can reference the pushback "but wait" slides at beginning...

SLIDE 18

Take a minute to review the data on the slide. Ask youth to share their interpretation of what the graph shows and solicit responses.

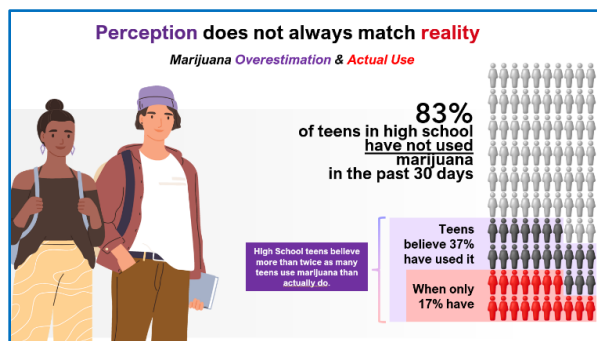


In this survey, we look at the difference between what teens think their peers are doing (perception, which is shown by the purple bars) and what teens are actually doing (reality, which is shown by the blue bars) when it comes to substance misuse.

KEY-TAKE AWAY:

Perceptions are higher than actual reported use.

SLIDE 19



FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

If you are presenting this to a group of middle school students or a mixed-aged group, feel free to focus on an example that is representative of the population you are presenting to. RAC provides data for alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and meth use into separate infographics. They are available on our website: RiseAboveCO.org

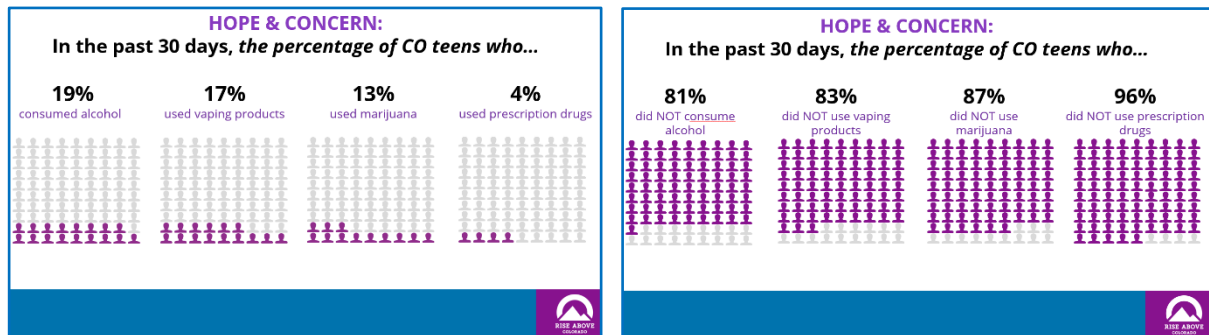
This graphic was created with input from Colorado teens. Ask your students to OBSERVE and share what they see on the graph. What QUESTIONS do they have? How do they INTERPRET the meaning or message?

KEY TAKEAWAY:

Emphasizing the gap in misperception of current Colorado High School marijuana use.

SLIDE 20

This slide shows the hopes & concerns related to current youth substance use. The slide first appears with the graphic on the left, and the second graphic appears as you advance.



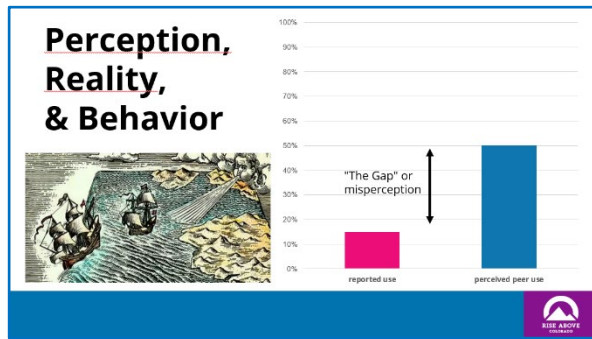
The first graphic shows the % of youth who reported recent (30 day) use; notice that use is low across the named substances. It is still concerning that there are youth who have reported use – we want to discuss and problem-solve around this.

The second graphic flips the narrative and shows visually how MOST Colorado teens have NOT used... we want to be a part of/connect to this larger % of youth NOT using. There is so much power in reframing the data using non-use as opposed to use.

Connect back to previous slide on common pushback (“Yeah, BUT....”)

- *The most important thing to notice in this data is that 81% of CO teens did NOT use alcohol in the previous month. You may feel this doesn't reflect your personal situation but remember our discussion of perception; sometimes we need to take a step back to see a wider view and understand the facts as a whole. And, like the vase and face, both things could be true at the same time. Your personal experience may not be the same when we look at the average across an entire community or state. It is important to recognize that there are groups in our community that can be impacted differently by issues and also recognize that we can take action to change this. OBSERVE, QUESTION, INTERPRET.*

SLIDE 21:



Show the graph and pause to allow participants time to digest the info.

ASK: *Why do you think we care about "The Gap in Misperception?", "Why does this matter to our work in prevention?"*

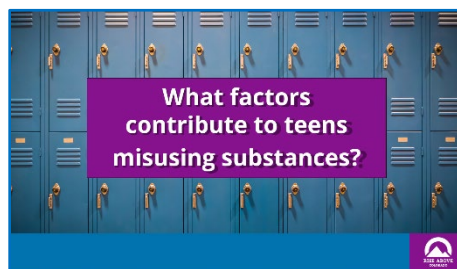
Follow-up question (if necessary):
Take a moment to reflect on what you think happens to someone's perception if

friends or family use drugs and alcohol? Do you think this would affect their behavior at all? Research shows that a person's perceptions impact their attitudes and beliefs... and ultimately, their choices and behaviors.

KEY TAKE-AWAY:

Having a more accurate perception is foundational to healthy decision-making.

SLIDE 22



We must balance our focus on positive data and trends with concerns that there are teens who use drugs and alcohol, which pose risks to their physical and mental health.

ASK: *What factors contribute to teens misusing substances?* Pause to allow for personal reflection and the solicit responses as a large group.

Research shows that there are factors in everyone's lives that can make them more or less likely to use drugs and alcohol. These are not just individual factors, but also exist at the community and cultural level of our experiences.

Examples of RISK FACTORS that can make a person more likely to develop a substance use disorder are:

- Family history of substance misuse and/or addiction
- Mental illness can influence a person's susceptibility
- Environment – experiencing discrimination, oppression, and marginalization
- Media – messages we consume influence our attitudes towards drugs by normalizing their misuse
- Mental health – stress, trauma, depression and anxiety have been connected to substance abuse
- **Stress- this is the #1 cause of teen substance misuse**

SLIDE 23

What HOPES & CONCERNS do we have?

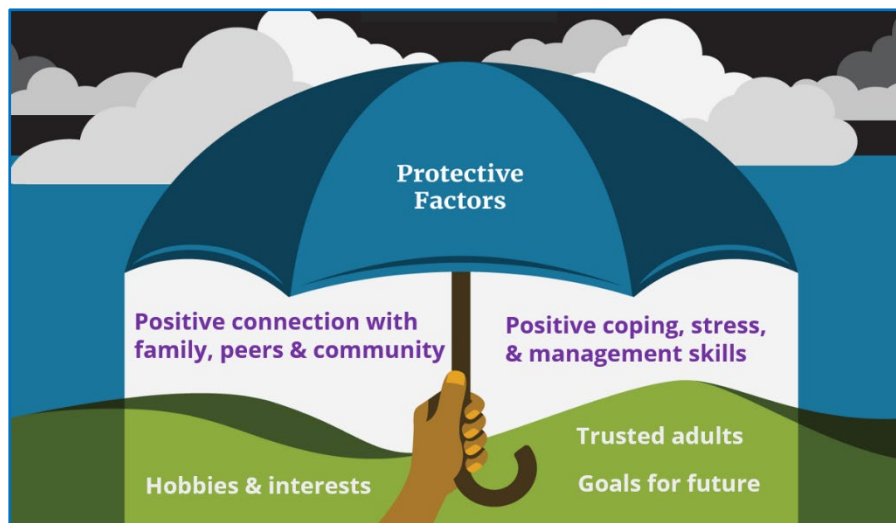
- Using **Observation**, what knowledge and skills can we focus on to help prevent ourselves and others from slipping into substance misuse?
- What **Questions** can we ask of ourselves and others to ensure this knowledge and/or these skills are effective?
- How will we **Interpret** and build on our success?



Use a Think, Pair, Share protocol to allow participants to respond to these prompts.

2-3 min of pair or small group reflection is recommended.

SLIDE 24



While we are all impacted by a variety of risk factors, we're also all impacted by protective factors that reduce the likelihood for substance misuse and addiction.

Review protective factors listed on the slide and ask participants to share their favorite stress management/coping skills (this provides an opportunity to connect through protective factors).

Common responses include: listening to music, movement, journaling, spending time with animals, creating art, etc.

PART FOUR: CLOSING

KEY POINTS

- Participants identify things in their lives that give them strength to rise above substance use
- Review available resources and supports including Safe2Tell, Colorado Crisis Services, and the Trevor Project
- Discuss available resources through Rise Above Colorado

SLIDE 25

As a wrap up to the lesson, have students take a few minutes to reflect on steps they can take with their peers and classmates to correct misperceptions.



Through this lesson we've learned that the majority of teens are NOT using substances and are participating in healthy, positive activities. What are actions YOU can take to correct the misperceptions or "close the gap" among your friends, peers, family, and community?

Common responses may be: discussing this lesson with friends and family, highlighting the fact that most youth don't use substances, and talking to peers and classmates about the positive influences in their lives that can help them rise above substance use.

Bring together as a large group. Ask for volunteers to share what they came up with.

SLIDE 26

Rise Above Colorado wants to continue the conversation online and see how you rise above stress in your life in order to inspire and help other teens. Connect with @riseaboveco on social media to share your stories and photos that show how and why you rise above, using the hashtag #IRiseAbove with your posts.

Thank you for participating in these important conversations. Please remember the support resources we shared should you need them. You can also reach out to Rise Above via social media if you want to engage in their virtual conversation or ask a question you weren't able to ask today.

SLIDE 27

Please have youth take anonymous survey (3-5 min) before leaving/closing.

SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES

HEALING-CENTERED APPROACHES

Facilitators should be prepared to proactively address that this lesson contains material related to substance use, and that some participants may have experienced trauma in their lives related to substance use disorders or addiction.

Trauma is an individual's experience of an event or enduring conditions that are physically and/or emotionally harmful or life-threatening to themselves or someone they know, in which the individual's emotional response is overwhelmed.

There are ways to approach conversations with sensitivity and care, which include understanding the impact of trauma and ways to support healing. Some strategies for a healing-centered approach are integrated into the facilitator's guide but there may be instances when the facilitator would like to expand upon these strategies using the techniques provided below.

- Whether you are a guest presenter or have an extended relationship with the youth, reestablishing existing group norms or working with students to develop group norms is critical to building an environment of mutual trust, respect, and safety.
- For guest presenters, begin the lesson with a personal introduction to provide the group with a little insight into who you are and why you are there. If you are already known to the group, consider warm-up activities that allow the group to get to know something new about one another.
- It is important to allow youth who have experiences related to substances to share what they know as it is beneficial to hear directly from peers about the dangers of misuse and addiction.
- If someone discloses sensitive information, do not ignore it. Take a moment to acknowledge the disclosure, ask the class how they are feeling, and remind them that this is sensitive and serious material. Most importantly, make sure to address it with the individual at the end and connect them to supports and resources in the school or community.
- If any students appear to be struggling, feel free to take a break or allow the youth to take a break, and make a connection to a trusted adult in the setting, perhaps a school counselor or the site host.
- This lesson is designed to provide the opportunity for future conversations. Should the participants ask questions that are not covered in the lesson, encourage them to conduct their own research while you also do your own. Provide time to reconvene in the next class or encourage a follow-up discussion because if one young person is brave enough to ask a question, others may also benefit from the conversation.

COLORADO COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARDS

Closing the Gap is aligned with the Colorado Comprehensive Health Education Standard 4: Risk Management in Health. Under this standard, prepared graduates should be able to: apply knowledge and skills to make health-enhancing decisions regarding the use marijuana, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cohealth/statestandards>

STANDARDS FOR EVIDENCE OUTCOMES	
6th Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze internal influences such as genetics, personality, and risk-seeking behaviors on alcohol and tobacco use Analyze external influences on alcohol and tobacco use Analyze the influence of exercise, nutrition, and social relationships on alcohol and tobacco Analyze various strategies the media use, including advertisements and movies, to encourage or discourage tobacco and alcohol Analyze the perception versus the reality of alcohol use in adolescents Demonstrate decision-making skills that lead to being substance-free Identify and summarize positive alternatives to substance use
7th Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain how alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs alter the body and the brain Describe how exercise, nutrition, and positive relationships can mitigate the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs
8th Grade	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describe how mental and emotional health and life circumstances can affect alcohol or other drug use Analyze the validity of information, products, and services related to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs Analyze the accuracy of images of alcohol and tobacco use conveyed in the media, including advertisements Express intentions to be alcohol, tobacco, and drug free
High School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze healthy alternatives to substance use Evaluate strategies for managing the impact of internal and external influences on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use Analyze the role of individual, family, community, and cultural norms on the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs Describe the financial, political, social, and legal influences on the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs Develop a personal plan to improve health by staying free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs

OVERVIEW OF COMMON REACTIONS TO THE LESSON

Our behaviors are influenced by the norms we perceive in the world around us. Utilizing the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey, Closing the Gap engages teens with data-driven discussions about media, perception, norms, and peer pressure to align our perceptions with reality and promote positive community norms. Being prepared for the conversations this lesson generates will ensure that youth feel heard and that the dialogue is meaningful and productive. To help your efforts, we have compiled a list of the most frequent reactions to the lesson from teens and responses to help guide your conversations.

1. **Teens don't answer these surveys honestly. They provided false info. The data being presented are incorrect.**

- Like people of all ages, teens sometimes don't tell the truth, especially when asked about drug use or sexual behavior. But teens don't always lie. Some won't admit they use drugs while others falsely claim they do. In the end, experts report that the average of overstating and understating comes close to reality.
- There are things researchers do to get more honest answers. How we choose to ask the question, where in the survey sensitive questions like drug use are asked, whether the teen is being asked these questions by an interviewer or if they are completing it by themselves, and where they are doing the survey. Careful thought and planning goes into designing effective studies to account for a certain level of error.
- When we compare data from the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey to other similar surveys, we see the answers are comparable and consistent over time, which lends us to have more confidence in its accuracy.

2. **All my friends smoke pot. Everyone at my school does drugs.**

- If the people closest to you (friends and family) use substances often then it may be true in your immediate surroundings that everyone is (or a lot of people are) using substances. It is also true, however, that most youth across Colorado are not using drugs and alcohol. By expanding our focus beyond our immediate surroundings, we have an opportunity to see where there may be disparities among our communities and take action to try to make things better for everyone.

3. **This is propaganda, you are biased, and these results are tainted.**

- Yes, we have an agenda by doing this research and supporting this lesson, but we aim to be objective and directly engage youth in critically reviewing this data in an effort to support your own healthy development. The data are YOUR data. The information in this research is what Colorado's youth told us. We didn't make it up – it came from teens 12-17 years of age, all selected at random from across the state.
- We do this work to help youth lead healthy lives, one that allows them to grow up to become the kind of adults they each want to become, making the kind of choices early in life that will help them achieve that future. That's our agenda. Youth who use drugs often do so out of peer pressure or as a coping mechanism for things like stress. And sometimes, their drug use gets to a point where it begins to define who they are and what they do. Research also tells us that 90% of all addictions begin with substance use before the age of 18. Our agenda is to empower teens to lead a healthy life, free of addiction.

MORE RESOURCES FROM RISE ABOVE COLORADO

Rise Above Colorado implements a statewide positive social norming campaign. This campaign shares statewide survey data through social and digital media, highlighting factual statistics that show most Colorado teens have engaged in healthy, positive activities in the past month and not marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drug use. Youth are encouraged to follow and engage with us on social using the hashtag #IRiseAbove. If you are interested in *Fill Your World With Good* campaign materials, email info@riseaboveco.org.

IRiseAboveCO.org is a “for teens, by teens” website designed to be a space for teens to get additional facts as well as tools to rise above. Specifically, the *Together We Rise* page is available for teens to safely submit and explore written stories, poems, photos, videos, etc. We encourage your teens to contribute content of their own, which could potentially be further shared to Rise Above Colorado’s social media platforms, helping to promote positive social norms and push back against negative misperceptions. For ideas and instructions on how your teens can individually (or collectively) submit content, click [here](#).



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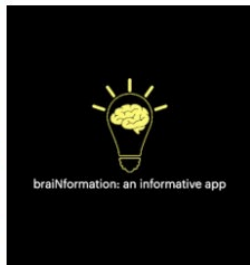
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