



## Dear Teacher:

This installment of *Heads Up* has something new.

Past series articles have well documented the science of the effects of drug abuse and addiction, as well as how adolescent brain development has profound implications on decision making in teens.

Knowledge of these facts is essential for teens to make smart choices when it comes to drugs. In this new article and lesson, you'll find valuable facts about the dangers of abusing prescription drugs, marijuana, alcohol, and tobacco. You'll also find practical tools for students to help them take smart actions in light of the facts.

This installment highlights real-life scenarios that teens may encounter involving drugs, as well as techniques they can practice in making good decisions—all while navigating the myriad choices and concerns that they face as teens.

We hope you will share the article and this lesson with your students and encourage them to practice putting **facts** into action.

Nora D. Volkow, M.D.  
Director,  
National Institute on Drug Abuse

## In This Installment:

- **Student article:** Practical techniques for teens to make smart decisions based on their factual knowledge of drugs
- **Student worksheet:** Role-playing exercises to build skills for taking smart actions when it comes to drugs

# FACTS INTO ACTION

**Lesson Overview:** The decision-making lesson below and role-play reproducible worksheet on the reverse side reinforce comprehension of techniques students will learn about in the student article "Facts Into Action." The worksheet also contains myth-busting facts to help students make smart choices when it comes to drug abuse.

### Alignment With National Science Education Standards (NSES)

- *Science in Personal and Social Perspectives:* Risks and benefits; Personal and community health

### Student Article:

**Discussion Questions:** Before you conduct the lesson, have students read the student article "Facts Into Action." Choose from the questions below to guide discussion before and after reading.

**Before-Reading Discussion:** Engage students in the topic by asking them to think of a time when they had to make a difficult decision. Discuss the following:

- What facts played a role in their decision? Why were the facts important?
- What other factors did they have to consider to make a decision?
- What goes into making a smart choice when one faces a tough decision?

### After-Reading Discussion:

- Do you think the scenarios in the article were true to life? How so? How not?
- Why is knowing the facts about drugs important? What are some good sources for getting facts about drugs?
- How are the tips for action helpful? What are some other ways you could get out of a sticky situation in which drugs are involved?

### Activity Prompt:

Explain to students that practicing thoughtful decision making can help in making smart choices about many things, including drug abuse. First, outline on the board these steps to decision making:

- What is the problem?
- What are your options?
- What facts do you know? What *don't* you know?
- What are other factors to consider?
- What is the outcome of each option?
- What decision will you make?
- How can you implement the decision?

Second, divide students into small groups and ask them to choose a scenario from the student article. Third, have each group work through the decision-making steps for the scenario by answering the questions outlined on the board. As a wrap-up, ask students: Why is it important to pause and think before making a decision?

### Student Worksheet:

**Role-Play Activity:** Introduce the activity by telling students they will role-play in hypothetical situations involving tobacco, alcohol, and prescription drugs. Divide students into groups of four. Have students work together to decide what Character #4 should do to avoid using the drug. Point out that leading by example might give others the courage to say "no, thanks" as well.

### More Information

- For more facts about the drugs discussed in this lesson, visit <http://teens.drugabuse.gov> and [www.drugabuse.gov/](http://www.drugabuse.gov/).
- To learn more about how teens make decisions, read the article and lesson "Teens and Decision Making: What Brain Science Reveals" found at <http://teacher.scholastic.com/scholasticnews/indepth/headsup/support/index.asp?article=reproducibles>.
- For more about teens and decision making, check out [www.fox.com/pause/](http://www.fox.com/pause/).

For printable past and current articles in the **HEADS UP** series, as well as activities and teaching support, go to [www.drugabuse.gov/parent-teacher.html](http://www.drugabuse.gov/parent-teacher.html) or [www.scholastic.com/HEADSUP](http://www.scholastic.com/HEADSUP).



## ROLE-PLAY: FACTS INTO ACTION

Read each scene, the facts in “Reality Check,” and other considerations in “Time Out.” Pretend you are Character #4. What would you do? On a separate sheet of paper, write the action you would take, why, and how it might impact the other characters. Then, as a group, take turns being Character #4 and acting out the scenes.

### SCENE #1:

(Characters #1–3 are about to smoke cigarettes behind the high school gym. Character #4 is asked to join them in smoking.)

**CHARACTER #1:** “Does anyone have a cigarette I can bum?”

**CHARACTER #2:** “Here you go. I snuck a pack out of the house last night. My mom would freak out if she knew I smoked. She’s always saying how hard it is for her to quit.”

**CHARACTER #3:** “It’s only bad if you smoke a lot. I heard you have to smoke a ton of cigarettes to get addicted. Hey, what about you—want one?” (*directed to Character #4*)

**CHARACTER #4:** (*Follow the directions in “Now What?” below to script your response.*)

**Reality Check!** It seems Character #3 has it all wrong: One cigarette can start someone down the path toward addiction. And it’s a fact that teen smokers are more likely than adults to become addicted to smoking, and at a faster rate.

The primary chemical in cigarettes, nicotine, is highly addictive. Within 10 seconds after inhalation, nicotine activates “pleasure” feelings in the brain. These feelings dissipate quickly, meaning you need to take another puff to feel good again. This cycle can lead to long-term smoking and its lethal consequences. In fact, of smokers under 18, more than 6 million will likely die prematurely from a smoking-related disease.

**Time Out:** Think about it. You really don’t want to smoke, but how can you tell your friends? Will you feel awkward if you flat-out say “no”? Will they still ask you to hang out? Even if they don’t, why risk your health? Plus, all that smoke in your lungs could hold you back in any sport you may want to participate in.

**Now What?** (*Write your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.*)

- What is your response?
- Why did you choose this action?
- How might the other characters react?

### SCENE #2:

(Characters #1–3 have snuck alcohol into a party. Then Character #2 surprises everyone by offering prescription pills.)

**CHARACTER #1:** “I can’t believe we snuck in those beers. I’m feeling pretty buzzed from just two.”

**CHARACTER #2:** “Man, I’m not. It takes me like a six-pack to get a buzz. Let’s really party and take these pills that were prescribed for my cousin.”

**CHARACTER #3:** “Wow, I’ve never done that. Sure, I’m up for trying anything—how about you?” (*directed to Character #4*)

**CHARACTER #4:** (*Follow the directions in “Now What?” below to script your response.*)

**Reality Check!** Characters #1, 2, and 3 are all on a dangerous path. Drinking when you are a teenager increases your chances of developing alcohol problems when you get older—more than four in 10 individuals who start drinking before age 15 eventually become alcoholics. Individuals who need to drink a lot just to get a buzz often do just that. Since they are tolerant to alcohol’s effects, they need to drink more and more to get a buzz, which increases their chances of becoming alcoholics.

And mixing prescription medicines with alcohol? Definitely not smart. Abusing prescription medications—painkillers like OxyContin® or Vicodin®, or anti-anxiety drugs like Xanax® or Valium®—is dangerous enough. But mixed with alcohol, they can be lethal—as in, you stop breathing, or go into a coma, which you may never come out of.

**Time Out:** Think about it. Most people at the party aren’t doing drugs and you know that drinking and abusing prescription drugs is not for you—the health risks are real and serious. So is your fear of doing something you’ll regret (which any cell phone could record for all the world to see). But you still want to have fun with your friends. How can you get out of this situation without feeling embarrassed?

**Now What?** (*Write your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.*)

- What is your response?
- Why did you choose this action?
- How might the other characters react?