

Refusal skills

Classroom activities

Overview of activities

This resource was developed to be used by educators for grades 4 to 8 to teach refusal skills to use when students face peer pressure. This document includes the following:

- [What is Peer Pressure?](#)
- [What is a Good Friend?](#)
- [What are Refusal Skills?](#)
- [10 Types of Refusal Skills](#)
- [Classroom Discussion Questions](#)
- [Refusal Skills Matching Activity](#)
- [Role Play Refusal Skills Activity](#)
- [Story Board Skit Refusal Skill Activity](#)
- [Small Group Refusal Skill Skits](#)
- [Foam Ball Refusal Game](#)
- [Additional Classroom Activities and Resources](#)
- [References](#)

Objectives:

By reviewing the information and performing the activities included in this document, students will be able to:

- Identify the different types of refusal skills.
- Provide examples of how to use each refusal skill.
- Identify different examples and forms of peer pressure.
- Recognize peer pressure situations and how to step up and say NO.
- Recognize healthy vs unhealthy relationships and how to react when in certain unhealthy relationships.

Curriculum Expectations

Grades 1–8: Health and Physical Education (2019)

- Grade 4- Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours: D2.3
- Grade 5- Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours: D2.3
- Grade 6- Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours: D2.4
- Grade 7- Substance Use, Addictions, and Related Behaviours: D3.2
- Grade 8- Human Development and Sexual Health: D2.3

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Lesson background

Note: The information on pages 2 to 5 can be used as content to guide a lesson prior to using the [Classroom Discussion](#) or activities included in this document.

Disclaimer: Prior to beginning the activities, allow students to self-reflect. Explain that these activities are intended to empower them in making healthy decisions, even they do not completely align with their personal values and choices.

What is Peer Pressure?

Peer pressure is about being influenced and choosing to do something you would not otherwise do, in the hope of feeling accepted and valued by others. Peer pressure can be spoken or unspoken, direct, or indirect and healthy or unhealthy. Students inevitably encounter pressure in one way or another. Peer pressure and influence might result in students:

- Choosing the same clothes, hairstyle, or jewellery as their friends.
- Listening to the same music or watching the same TV shows as their friends.
- Changing the way they talk or the words they use.
- Doing risky things or breaking rules.
- Working harder at school or not working as hard.
- Dating or taking part in sexual activities.
- Vaping, using alcohol, or other drugs.

Dealing with peer pressure can be difficult. It is very important students have the opportunity to learn and practice these skills. This will help them to make healthy choices when they find themselves in situations where they feel pressured.

The video below shows examples of peer pressure students might be faced with:

- Examples of Peer Pressure-YouTube (<https://tinyurl.com/3jh3pe46>) 2 mins and 19 seconds.

What is a Good Friend?

A good friend is:

- Someone who accepts you as you are, accepts your decisions, and watches out for you.
- Someone who does not pressure you into doing something you do not want to do.
- Is a positive peer influence.
- Someone who does not use drugs and can keep you from using drugs.
- Someone who wants to help you and recommends people or community resources that can provide support when dealing with choices or situations involving substance use and addictive behaviours.

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What are Refusal Skills?

Refusal skills are strategies or methods that an individual can use to say "no" in peer pressure situations. Refusal skills can help an individual say "no" to engaging in risky behaviors, such as using drugs or alcohol. These skills are also important because they allow individuals to avoid social peer pressure.

The videos below explain peer pressure and refusal skills:

- Refusal Skills - YouTube (<https://tinyurl.com/4wt28ep3>) 3 minutes 19 seconds.

10 Types of Refusal Skills

1. Say "NO THANKS"

- Say no politely BUT use a strong and assertive tone of voice.
- Ask the person offering substances to quit offering.
- Do NOT feel guilty for refusing drugs and Do NOT look away.
- Look at them in the eyes, be firm and appear confident.
- The more determined you are the less likely someone will try to challenge you.

2. Give a reason, fact, or excuse

The excuse needs to get you away from the person or situation. Practice an excuse so that you won't hesitate and will sound confident. Blame someone such as a parent to get out of the situation. Here are some examples:

- "My mom just called; sorry I have to go something happened at home."
- "My parents would ground me for life."
- "I will pass, that is not good for my health."
- "I forgot I have doctor's appointment this afternoon, sorry I have to go."
- "I already lost my phone privileges, if my parents find me doing this stuff, I won't be able to go anywhere for a month!"

3. Use humour, laugh it OFF

Humour is a great way to alleviate stress. When offered to do or try something you don't want, find a joke that can help excuse you from the situation. Here are some examples:

1. "No thanks, this stuff stunts my growth. I want to be tall to play ball."
2. "Man, I need all the brain cells I can get. No thanks."
3. "Pot messes with your brain and gives you yellow teeth...I'll pass."

4. Change the subject or suggest an alternative

When possible, try to change the focus and offer an alternative activity such as:

- "We could go and get something to eat instead."
- "No. Let's go and play ball instead."
- "I'm hungry, lets go and get a snack at my house."
- "I want to play PlayStation instead this afternoon."

5. Walk away

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One of the most effective refusal skills is to walk away. Even though you may feel obligated to stand and face “the person” you need to just walk away while saying NO. Leaving the situation sends a powerful message to those who try to push you into something you do not want to do or try. For some people it does not make a difference the amount of explaining or excuses you make, they just do not understand your situation. Therefore, you are better off just removing yourself from this situation.

6. Broken record or repeated refusal

Keep saying “NO” over and over again. It may buy you some time to use another refusal skill or the other person might give up.

7. Cold shoulder or ignoring

Avoid directly confronting the person. Turn your shoulder and talk to someone else or just ignore them like you don’t hear them.

8. Avoid the situation

Common sense tells you the places and times where there may be problems with peer pressure. Avoid these situations when you can.

9. Have an escape plan

Having an escape plan is a good option when attending a social event. An escape plan allows young people to try new things and attend places that might not be comfortable, but also gives them the security that there is a way out if things get too heavy. Before attending the event, coordinate with a friend or family member that will be there for you. You can arrange the following beforehand:

- **Safety agreement:** consider discussing with your parents (or another trusted adult/friend) a plan to have them pick you up if you do not have a safe ride home. Part of this agreement may be that your parents/trusted adult agrees to not ask any questions about what happened or delay asking any questions until the next day.
- **Texting a code word:** this is another type of agreement you may discuss with your parents, trusted adult, or friend. If you are stuck in a situation and need to get out of it you could text “X”, or another code of your choice, to your parents, a trusted adult, or friend. This would let the adult know you need help. They can call you back and make up an excuse for you to leave the situation and arrange a safe ride home.

10. Strength in numbers

Bring a friend-it is easier to say no as a group. You and your friend can watch each other’s back. If you surround yourself with friends that make good choices, then you will too.

***Self-confidence will grow the more refusals a person does.
The more a person works on these skills, the stronger they become.***

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Classroom discussion questions

1. What are some things that your friends may encourage you to do that you don't want to?
2. What are some different ways that people can pressure us? Some examples may include:
 - Rejection: Turning a person away, threatening to end a friendship.
 - Put downs: Calling a person rude names to make them feel bad.
 - Reasoning: Giving reasons why it's okay to try.
 - Unspoken pressure: Dirty looks, being left out, being offered to try.
3. Can you think of some ways that you or a friend could handle peer pressure?
4. What do you do if someone pressures you to try cigarettes, vapes, alcohol or other drugs?
5. What are some reasons a person may be trying to peer pressure you?
 - They may not really be your friend and deliberately try to get you to do something you are not comfortable doing.
 - They may feel guilty or not sure about doing it themselves, so they want someone else to do it to take that weight off their shoulders.
 - Reflection question: Has peer pressure made you do something that later you regretted? (No need to share out loud.)

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Refusal Skills Matching Activity

Materials needed:

- 10 types of refusal skills (found below)
- 12 refusal skills examples (found below)
- A box, container, or hat that can be used to draw the folded up papers.

Instructions:

- Cut up the 10 refusal skills and 12 refusal skills examples.
- Put the examples in a box, container, or hat and the *Types of Refusal Skills* on a board or desk for the students to be able to see and match the example to the skill.
- Call on a student to pick one out of the box, container, or hat, read it aloud and match it to the correct refusal skill.

Types of refusal skills

Cut out the type of refusal skills, fold them, and place them in the object.

Say “no thanks”	Broken record or repeated refusal
Give a reason, fact or blame someone else	Cold shoulder or ignore
Use humour- laugh it off	Avoid the situation
Change the subject or suggest an alternative	Have an escape plan
Walk away	Strength in numbers

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Refusal skills examples

Cut out the examples, they are organized in the same order as the table on page 7 to match with corresponding skill.

“No thanks, I’m good I don’t want to.”	You keep on saying NO repeatedly.
“I forgot that I have a doctor’s appointment this afternoon.”	Turn your shoulder and talk to someone else or just ignore them like you do not hear them.
“Man, I need all the brain cells I can get. No thanks.”	Common sense tells you the places and times where there may be problems with peer pressure. So, you can avoid the situation.
“We could go get something to eat instead.”	Pick a safe word or symbol and establish the ground rules. “Mom, if I send you an asterisk (*), that means come get me ASAP!
“I’m, OK” *Walk Away*	You bring a friend with you that will also refuse if peer pressure arises.
“Did you finish your homework for yesterday?”	“I can’t my parents would ground me.”

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Role play refusal skill activity

Materials needed:

- Types of refusal skills to be cut out (found below)
- 2 boxes/containers/hats

Instructions:

- Cut out the 10 refusal skills and place them in a box/container/hat to be chosen from.
- Cut out the peer pressure scenarios and place them in a box/container/hat to be chosen from
- Split the classroom into pairs -have one student choose a refusal skill at random and one student to chose peer pressure scenarios at random.
- The student with the peer pressure scenario will role-play the scenario while his/her partner will respond and create an excuse using the refusal skill that was selected.

Types of refusal skills

To be cut out:

Say “no thanks”	Broken record or repeated refusal
Give a reason, fact or blame someone else	Cold shoulder or ignore
Use humour- laugh it off	Avoid the situation
Change the subject or suggest an alternative	Have an escape plan
Walk away	Strength in numbers
Use any refusal skill	Use any refusal skill

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Peer pressure scenarios

To be cut out:

“Hey, do you want to smoke this cigarette?”	“Me and couple friends are drinking at my house after school today, do you want to come?”
“Hey, do you want to hit my vape?”	“Let’s spray paint our school tonight.”
“We should smoke some weed after school today, are you in?”	“Just lie to your parents and say you’re at my house, they won’t find out.”
“Look at that kid, let’s go make fun of him.”	“Did you hear what he said about me? Let’s fight him.”
“I’m skipping class today, want to skip with me?”	“Don’t be friends with that person, I don’t like them.”
At a store “Don’t pay for that, I steal them all the time they never know.”	“Your dress is too long; you should roll it up so your legs show more like we do.”

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Storyboard skit refusal skill activity

Materials needed:

- A blank chart paper.

Instructions:

- Divide the classroom into 4–5 groups.
- Each group is to create a peer pressure story that they will act in front of the classroom.
- Make sure the story is school appropriate as they will be acting it out.
- Discuss refusal skills that could be used with each scenario role played.
- Ask them what they learned during this activity.

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Small group refusal skill skits

Materials needed:

- 10 refusal skills (listed below)
- 12 scenarios (listed on page 13)

Instructions:

- Break students up into groups of 3–4 (more or less depending on class size).
- Cut out 10 *Types of Refusal Skills* and 12 scenarios found below; the groups can choose 1 of each at random.
- Once the groups have selected one of each, they will break out for 10–15 minutes to create a short skit to present.
- When they rejoin each group, they will present a short skit about their peer pressure scenario and the refusal skill they received.
- To make it more interactive, the peer pressure scenario and refusal skill will not be told before the skit is performed and the listeners will guess at the end of the skit which 2 scenarios and refusal skills they had.

Peer pressure scenarios

“Hey, do you want to smoke this cigarette?”	“Me and a couple friends are drinking at my house after school today, do you want to come?”
“Hey, do you want to hit my vape?”	“Let’s spray paint our school tonight.”
“We should smoke some weed after school today, are you in?”	“Just lie to your parents and say you’re at my house, they won’t find out.”
“Look at that kid, let’s go make fun of him.”	“Did you hear what he said about me? Let’s fight him.”
“I’m skipping class today, want to skip with me?”	“Don’t be friends with that person I don’t like them.”
At a store “Don’t pay for that, I steal them all the time they never know.”	“Your dress is too long; you should roll it up so your legs show more like we do.”

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Types of refusal skills

Say “no thanks”	Broken record or repeated refusal
Give a reason, fact or blame someone else	Cold shoulder or ignore
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Walk away	Strength in numbers

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Foam ball refusal game

Materials needed:

- Elephant skin/foam/soft ball
- List of refusal skills (listed below)

Instructions:

- Using a foam ball/elephant skin ball or any type of ball appropriate to toss in a class.
- Have the students stand or sit in one big circle (depending on how many students are in your classroom you might want to split the classroom into groups).
- The teacher can start off with a peer pressure example and pass it to someone in the circle. The person that catches the ball has to use one of the refusal skills to turn down the peer pressure (If they don't remember all of the *Types of Refusal Skills* off the top of their heads once someone catches the ball the teacher can call out one of the 10 refusal skills below for them to use that one).
- The game continues with that person passing the ball to someone else.
- The students must come up with a different answer each time to remain standing. If they take too long to answer, don't come up with an answer, or repeat an answer already said, then they must sit down.
- The last person standing wins the game.

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Additional classroom activities/resources

- Ophea: Creative ways to say No (<https://tinyurl.com/3njb972c>)
- Ophea: Factors of Intoxication (<https://ophea.net/factors-intoxication>)
- Ophea: Under Pressure (<https://tinyurl.com/3b2j5b4t>)
- Ophea: Target your Influences (<https://tinyurl.com/ycknzcsc>)
- Ophea: What Would I Do? (<https://tinyurl.com/4cst636n>)
- Public Health Sudbury & Districts: Refusal skills for vaping and e-cigarettes (<https://tinyurl.com/4r37p3zw>)
- Alberta Health Services: The importance of refusal skills (PDF, <https://tinyurl.com/bdb6kpd6>)
- Niagara Region Health Unit: Refusal skills scenarios (PDF, <https://tinyurl.com/4ahuenb4>)

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References

- Niagara Region: Refusal skills (PDF, <https://tinyurl.com/bddtv89y>)
- Niagara Region: Be drug free teaching tool (<https://tinyurl.com/ya5myzmv>)
- Public Health Sudbury & Districts: Refusal skills for vaping and e-cigarettes activity (<https://tinyurl.com/4r37p3zw>)
- Choosing Therapy: Peer Pressure—Types, examples, and how to respond (<https://tinyurl.com/36bedvdh>)
- Health Link BC: Peer pressure and teens (<https://tinyurl.com/yc34u6h2>)

Adapted and reprinted with the Permission of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.

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