

# Parkside Secondary School:

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Lakelse High School & The Teen Learning Centre

## **Substance Use Reflection Package (SURP)**

Complete the assigned sections to the best of your ability.

**1<sup>st</sup> Offense** = Complete Section 1 & 2 and meet with school counsellor to develop support plan.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Offense** = Complete Section 3, 4, & 5 and family meets with Principal to revisit support plan.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Offense** = Level 2 Suspension meeting with School Board Office District Staff

**Section 1** is a Reading Package. Please read it carefully, as you are expected to use what you have learned and think about the information.

**Section 2** is a Drug Assessment. Check off all aspects that are affecting you. Total each section and then total the entire assessment. You will then complete questions on your assessment.

**Section 3** is a Decisional Balance Worksheet that overviews the positives and negatives about quitting and not quitting your substance abuse.

**Section 4** is a Change Plan process.

**Section 5** is an Essay Reflection Question, time to think about what is important to you.

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 1 – Readings

### **Top Ten Reasons People Use Drugs**

1. They are legal: Yes, you read that right. Some of the drugs that are used are legal. Nicotine and alcohol are both legal and highly addictive.
2. They are prescribed: There are many medications which are prescribed for a specific purpose but people become easily addicted to them because of the reaction of the brain to these medications. Some examples are pain medications, anti-anxiety medications, muscle relaxers, Tylenol, cough medicine, etc.
3. Rebellion: Teenagers often begin using drugs as an act of rebellion or peer pressure. They experiment with drugs and alcohol, and some become addicted while others do not.
4. Self-medication: People live with varying degrees of stressors in their lives. Some seek advice from a doctor; some people believe they feel better when using marijuana, street drugs, or alcohol.
5. Boredom: There are those who begin to experiment with drugs simply because they are bored or feel emptiness in their lives. They are searching for something and think that drugs or alcohol will help them have fun.
6. Peer pressure: Not only teens, but many adults begin to experiment with drugs because their friends do. They begin casually at a party or gathering and continue from there.
7. They feel good: If addictive drugs made people deathly ill every time they tried them, they would never become addicted. Cocaine, meth, marijuana and other drugs make a person feel good. This leads to addiction as the good feelings get harder and harder to experience, leaving the addict wanting more.
8. Curiosity: The power of curiosity should never be underestimated. Many people try drugs simply to see what will happen. They are curious about effects of the drug and start using to find out how it will make them feel.
9. Availability: Prescription drugs and street drugs are accessible to anyone who wants to find them. They can be purchased on the street, or through doctors, online pharmacies or black-market measures.
10. Enhancement: Drug use and abuse very often starts with people drinking alcohol or using marijuana. When the effects of alcohol or pot aren't enough, they branch out into using other drugs as well in order to enhance the effects of the alcohol or marijuana.

**Initial and date when read “Top Ten Reasons People Use Drugs”**

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## **The Science Behind Drug Use and Addiction**

There are many reasons why some people start taking drugs. Many are social, but with the first use there is always the chance of becoming addicted.

### ***How do drugs work in the brain to produce pleasure?***

All drugs of abuse, directly or indirectly, target the brain's reward system by flooding the area with dopamine. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter present in the area of the brain that regulates movement, emotion, cognition, motivation and feelings of pleasure. The overstimulation of this system, which rewards our everyday behaviours, produces euphoric effects sought by drug users and teaches repetition of behaviour.

### ***How does stimulation of the brain's pleasure centre teach us to keep taking drugs?***

Our brains are wired to ensure that we will repeat life-sustaining activities by associating these activities with pleasure or reward. Whenever this reward circuit is activated, the brain notes that something is happening that needs to be remembered and teaches us to do it again and again, without thinking about it.

### ***Why are drugs more addictive than natural rewards?***

When some drugs of abuse are taken they can cause the brain to release 2 - 10 times the amount of dopamine that natural rewards do. This may occur immediately as when drugs are smoked, snorted or injected, and the effects can last much longer than those produced by naturally-rewarding behaviours such as eating. The effects of such powerful rewards strongly motivate people to take drugs again and again.

### ***What happens to your brain if you keep taking drugs?***

Just as we turn down the volume on a radio that is too loud the brain adjusts to the overwhelming surges in dopamine (and other neurotransmitters) by producing less dopamine or by reducing the number of transmitters that can receive and transmit signals. As a result, dopamine's impact in the reward circuit of a drug user's brain can become abnormally low, and the ability to experience any pleasure reduced. This is why the abuser eventually feels flat, lifeless, depressed and unable to enjoy things that previously brought them pleasure. Now they need to take drugs to bring their dopamine function back up to normal levels. The user must take larger amounts of the drug that they first did to create the dopamine high - an effect known as tolerance.

### ***How does long-term drug taking affect brain circuits?***

We know the same sort of mechanisms involved in the development of tolerance can eventually lead to profound changes in the neurons and brain circuits with the potential to severely compromise the long-term health of the brain. For example another neurotransmitter (glutamate) involved in learning is altered by drug abuse. The brain makes changes to accommodate for the drug use and cognitive functioning and can become impaired. Drug use can also make permanent changes to memory systems. Conditioning is

one type of learning whereby environmental cues become associated with the drug experience and can trigger uncontrollable cravings if the individual is later exposed to these cues even without the drug being available. This pathway is extremely strong and can show up even after many years of quitting.

***What other brain changes can occur with abuse?***

Chronic exposure to drugs of abuse disrupts the way critical brain structures interact to control behaviour – behaviour specifically related to drug abuse. Just as continued abuse may lead to tolerance or the need for higher drug dosages to produce effect, it may also lead to drug addiction, which can drive the abuser to seek out and take drugs compulsively. Drug addiction erodes a person’s self-control and ability to make decisions while sending impulses to take drugs.

***What do drugs make you feel like?***

Depending on the drug some people might say they feel pleasant or relaxed. However, in many cases, these feelings may be followed by more powerful sensations such as depression, anxiety, nausea, confusion, lack of control, paranoia, guilt, embarrassment, hangovers, loneliness, mental health concerns, cravings, and more. People who use drugs to have fun or to forget their problems may never really learn how to find things in their lives that truly make them feel fulfilled or find ways to cope with difficulties, and they may keep returning to drugs because they haven’t learned other ways to be happy.

***What are the short-term effects of drug use?***

Drugs are chemicals, natural or not. Every drug is different, but generally drugs interfere with your nervous system’s basic function. They work by tapping into the brain’s communication system and interfering with the nerve cells normally send, receive and process information. Some drugs such as marijuana and heroin can activate brain neurons because their chemical structures act like natural neurotransmitters that are found in the brain. This similarity in structure “fools” receptors and allows the drugs to lock onto the active nerve cells.

Other drugs such as amphetamines or cocaine can cause the nerve cells to release abnormally large amounts of natural neurotransmitters or prevent the normal recycling of these brain chemicals, which are needed to shut off the signal between neurons. This disruption produces a greatly amplified message, ultimately disrupting communication channels. The difference in effect can be described as the difference between someone whispering in your ear and someone shouting into a microphone.

*From the National Institute on Drug Abuse “Drugs and the Brain”*

*This is what causes the user to feel different – the signals coming and going from the brain have been altered from the way they normally function, leading people to have unfamiliar sensations. They can cause temporary euphoria. It can also cause hallucinations, anxiety, paranoia, and uncontrolled behaviour. It can also affect your muscles and how they function because the signals from your brain that control movements can be altered. This can cause your respiratory (lung) and cardiovascular (heart) systems to malfunction.*

Some abuse substances, such as glue or butane, can cause immediate death. Cocaine, ecstasy, and methamphetamine can give healthy people a heart attack on the spot. In addition to these mental, behavioural, and health-related effects, drugs also have social consequences – lying to and losing trust of friends and family; performing poorly in school; quitting academics, athletics, or social activities; losing self-control, making bad decisions like drugged or drunk driving; getting pregnant before you are ready, becoming violent or placing yourself at risk of becoming a victim of violence, and abandoning old friendships in order to be around people who also use drugs.

### ***What are the long-term effects of drug use?***

It depends on the drug. All drugs can cause negative health effects and can lead to addiction. Addiction is defined as a chronic, relapsing brain disease that is characterized by compulsive drug seeking and use, despite harmful consequences. It is considered a brain disease because drugs can change the brain – they change its structure and how it works. These brain changes can be long lasting and can lead to harmful behaviours seen in all areas of a drug user’s life.

Individuals who suffer from addiction often have medical issues such as lung and cardiovascular disease, stroke, cancer, mental health disorders, liver diseases, and/or obesity. Drugs can also make addicts susceptible to contracting HIV, hepatitis, and other diseases. Imaging scans, chest x-rays and blood tests show the damaging effects of drug abuse throughout the body. In addition, some drugs are toxic to nerve cells and may damage or destroy them either in the brain or the peripheral nervous system. Some of these effects occur when drugs are used at high doses or for prolonged periods of time. However, some may occur after just one use. In addition to health effects drugs can also have negative social consequences that can hurt people – being unreliable, forgetful, telling lies, stealing money for drugs, violent with others. The most important thing in their life is getting high. While addiction may result from any drug use, there are unique health effects for each drug.

### ***Can you get addicted even though you only do it once in a while?***

No one wakes up in the morning and says “Today I’m going to be an addict.”

Addiction is a process, not an event. Most people who start using drugs do so with the intention of only using them once or occasionally. However, drugs can affect the brain; even only with occasional use changes are happening and addiction can happen at any time,

changing from occasional to frequent use and then to constant use. No one can predict when it will happen. If you don't use, then you don't become addicted.

***How many times does someone have to take a drug to become addicted?***

No one knows. A person's genetics play a role. That's why some people seem to get addicted almost immediately but others may take more time. There is a lot we still don't know about who becomes addicted and why, and after how much drug use. We do know that each person is different. Here is the science behind it: with repeated drug use, dopamine functioning in a drug abuser's brain becomes normal. Because dopamine is involved in feelings of pleasure and motivation, the person feels flat, lifeless and depressed why they're not taking the drug. Without drugs an abuser's life seems joyless. Now the abuser needs drugs to bring dopamine up to normal levels. They need it just to get them close to where they were before they even tried drugs in the first place. Larger amounts of the drugs are needed to create a dopamine flood, or high, an effect known as tolerance. By abusing drugs, the addicted person has changed the way his or her brain works. Drug abuse and addiction lead to long-term changes in the brain, causing addicted drug users to lose the ability to control their drug use.

***Is drug addiction a disease, or is there a cure?***

There is no cure for drug addiction, but it is a treatable disease. Drug addicts can and do recover, but they will always be aware of their addiction and work to never fall into that addiction again. It is a lifelong process. Drug addiction therapy uses behaviour change or modification and sometimes includes medications that assist the user to stop using drugs or alcohol. Like most people with diabetes or heart disease, people in treatment for drug addiction learn behavioural changes that may be assisted with medications that they need to keep drug-free for the rest of their lives. In other words, drug addicts do get better and can work to permanently stop. Scientists know that prolonged stoppage of certain drugs allows some of the drug-induced brain changes to reverse. But addicts have to change their lifestyle and learn how to cope in the world, and they may always have to fight the urge to use drugs. It is not easy.

***Are there reasons other than physical addiction why people keep taking drugs?***

Some people keep taking drugs because they become addicted to them. They want more – in fact, they feel like they need more. Eventually trying to get drugs becomes the most important thing in their life, using up their time, money and energy while hurting people close to them.

***Marijuana is just a plant. Is it really dangerous?***

Yes, marijuana is a plant but it has health consequences, including addiction. While some people or websites may try to convince you that it's no big deal, the real science shows differently. More teens are in treatment with a primary diagnosis of marijuana dependency than all other illicit drugs combined. Young people who use marijuana weekly have a

greater risk of depression later in life. This risk is even higher for girls; the odds that a female who uses marijuana daily will be depressed at age 21 are higher than that of non-users. The odds that a heavy marijuana user will be diagnosed with schizophrenia later in life are higher than the odds of non-users. And the odds that a teenager who used marijuana will drop out of school are more than the odds of non-users.

**Initial and date when read “The Science behind Drug Use and Addiction”**

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**END OF SECTION 1**

## **Section 2 – Drug and Alcohol Effects Assessment**

Check the statements that currently apply to you:

### **School and Work**

- Not completing assignments, homework, or studying
- Skipping class to use, avoiding getting caught smelling like marijuana, or to sleep
- Falling grades
- Failing classes
- Being suspended from school
- Being expelled from school
- Dropping out of school
- Attending an “alternative” program
- Difficulty concentrating or becoming easily distracted
- Poor memory
- Feeling ‘dumb’
- Difficulty learning
- Withdrawing from participating in school activities (sports, clubs)
- Being defensive or having an angry attitude toward teachers
- Having a poor attitude toward school in general
- Having little motivation to participate in school
- Having little motivation to look for a job
- Having difficulty finding a job
- Being fired from a job.

**Total number of check marks:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Family**

- Experiencing increased conflict, arguing, fighting with parents or siblings
- Withdrawing from family members (not wanting to be around them)
- Breaking family rules (curfew, etc.)
- Lying to family members
- Increasing overall secrecy from family (hiding drugs, money, etc.)
- Having secret phone calls
- Feeling guilty about hurting or disappointing family members
- Breaking trust with family
- Feeling fear of being caught by family members
- Neglecting household chores
- Avoiding family outings
- Exposing your family to negative people by using home to use or deal drugs
- Feeling different from your family
- Running away from home (couch surfing)
- Getting kicked out

**Total number of check marks:** \_\_\_\_\_



## **Money/Law**

- Spending most of your money on drugs
- Always feeling broke
- Owing friends or dealers money
- Worrying about paying off debts
- Being the target of violence or intimidation because of unpaid drug debts
- Stealing money from family, friends, or other people
- Committing crimes to get money for drugs (B&Es, fraud, breaking into cars, etc.)
- Robbing people
- Being involved with police
- Being involved with crime
- Being on probation
- Going to jail
- Experiencing fear of being caught
- Experiencing paranoia of police or other authority figures
- Rebelling against authority

**Total number of check marks: \_\_\_\_\_**

## **Peers**

- Changing friends to drug-using friends
- Experiencing rejection from old friends
- Losing a romantic relationship
- Listening to peers tell you that you've changed
- Mistreating or victimizing other youth
- Peer group is largely made up of "using" friends
- Losing interest in or quitting activities you once enjoyed
- Experiencing strained relationships with friends over money or drugs
- Experiencing increased conflict with friends

**Total number of check marks: \_\_\_\_\_**

## **Self**

- Believing you are not good at anything
- Not liking yourself
- Not living your dream
- Having a reputation (as a druggie, pothead, crackhead, loser, etc.)
- Being unable to follow through on small goals you've set for yourself
- Difficulty motivating yourself
- Feeling lost
- Feeling alienated or different from everyone else
- Feeling afraid to try new things
- Feeling like you are stuck in a rut
- A 'tug-of-war' going on inside you between good and bad, or right and wrong

- **Total number of check marks:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Health**

- Low energy
- Always feeling tired
- Sleeping in on school days
- Sleeping during the day (naps)
- Difficulty going to sleep without using at night
- Using drugs to go to sleep
- Increased coughing
- Frequent colds, flus, or bronchitis
- Aggravated asthma
- Shortness of breath while exercising, going up stairs, running short distances
- Headaches
- Losing weight
- High-risk sexual activity
- Regrets about sexual choices
- Physical injury resulting from accidents while under the influence
- Car-related incidents (fines, tickets, accidents, charges)
- Fighting

**Total number of check marks:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Mood**

- Irritability when not using
- Mood swings
- Feelings of anxiety or nervousness
- Feelings of depression or hopelessness
- Feelings of confusion
- Feelings of loneliness
- Feelings of guilt
- Feelings of shame (“I’m no good”, “I’m a bad person”)
- Feeling numb (no feelings about anything)
- Having suicidal thoughts
- Attempted suicide
- Having cravings when you haven’t used
- Having an “I don’t care” attitude
- Hearing voices

**Total number of check marks:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Total number of check marks from all categories:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Questions about your score

**Drug use has negatively affected my life in \_\_\_\_\_ (total score) different ways.**

**If you scored 1 -10**, you are in the ***Experimental Stage***. You could be in this stage because of curiosity or peer pressure. This stage includes the use of drugs without any negative consequences. Having a drink, cigarette, a joint or taking other drugs with friends without any serious social or legal consequences is regarded as experimentation.

**If you scored 11 – 30**, you are in the ***Recreational Stage***. In this stage the user may use on weekends with friends, and/or just to unwind from a stressful week. Tolerance increases and more substances may be used such as amphetamines (speed), and large quantities of alcohol. This individual experiences some of the negative consequences as a direct result of having used. Symptoms may include staying out later, someone having to drive you home, and hangovers.

**If you scored 31 – 79**, you are in the ***Early Dependency Stage***. During this stage, the regular user becomes an abuser. Maintaining an addictive life now begins to affect others. Symptoms include broken relationships, and running up debts to obtain drugs. There is a daily preoccupation with looking for your next supply of drugs, and this may lead to negative social and legal consequences.

**If you scored 80 or higher**, you are in the ***Full Addiction or Dependency Stage***. During this stage there is a self-destructive and compulsory desire to escape oblivion or escape reality. Sobriety is too difficult to face for long in this stage. If left untreated, the addict may face despair and risks of premature death through overdose, suicide, accidents, or side effects from the drugs. The person may end up with legal problems, imprisonment, and family breakdown.

**1) How do you feel about your score? Explain.**

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**2) Are you prepared to pay the current price to have drug use in your life? Why or why not?**

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**3) How can you start to work toward making changes in your score?**

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**END OF SECTION 2**



## Section 4 - Change Plan Worksheet

**1) The changes I want to make are:**

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**2) The most important reasons why I want to make these changes are:**

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**3) The steps I plan to help make these changes happen are:**

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**4) The way other people can help me are:**

1. Person's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Possible way they can help:

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2. Person's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Possible way they can help:

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**5) I will know if my plan is working when:**

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**6) Some things that can interfere with the plan are:**

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**END OF SECTION 4**





