

# **Addictions and Mental Illness**

## **Grades 8-12**

### **Science & Physical and Health Education**

#### **Purpose of the lesson**

The purpose of this lesson is to teach students more about the science behind addictions. They will also explore the connection between addictions and mental illness. When students gain more understanding of these topics, they can develop compassion towards those with addictions. Hopefully, this will also help them to not stigmatize or jump to conclusions about people with addictions. This lesson integrates scientific knowledge with mental health education.

#### **Curriculum Competencies:**

##### **Science**

- ◇ Use scientific understandings to identify relationships and draw conclusions (Grade 8)
- ◇ Use knowledge of scientific concepts to draw conclusions that are consistent with evidence (Grade 9/10)
- ◇ Demonstrate an awareness of assumptions and bias in their own work and secondary sources (Grade 8)
- ◇ Demonstrate an awareness of assumptions, question information given, and identify bias in their own work and secondary sources (Grade 9/10)

*After Grade 10, Science divides into more specific areas of study. This lesson can be used for Biology, or Anatomy and Physiology.*

##### **Physical and Health Education**

- ◇ Describe and assess strategies for managing problems related to mental well-being and substance use, for others (Grade 8/9)

*After Grade 9, Physical and Health Education becomes an elective, but this lesson plan can still be used in health and career courses.*

## **First Peoples Principles of Learning:**

- Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

## **Video**

### **Troy's Story**

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- ◇ What did you notice about Troy?
- ◇ By looking at him, would you know that he has struggled with addiction?
- ◇ Does this change how you see people with addictions at all? How and why?
- ◇ Is addiction easy to overcome?
- ◇ What inspired you about Troy's story?

### **The Science of Addiction**

#### **Guiding Questions:**

- ◇ How does addiction develop?
- ◇ Is addiction a choice?
- ◇ What happens in the brain when addiction develops?
- ◇ Can addiction happen to anyone?
- ◇ What are some possible environmental factors of addiction? (The environment you live in)
- ◇ How is addicted related to biology?
- ◇ What are different substances or activities you can become addicted to?
- ◇ Why is addiction so hard to overcome?

## Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

**Preparation:** Print off Science of Addiction worksheets for students.

1. Start the lesson by asking the students in your classroom these two questions below. You can address the questions to the whole class or you can put students in groups of 2-3 to discuss.

**What does someone who has addictions look like?**

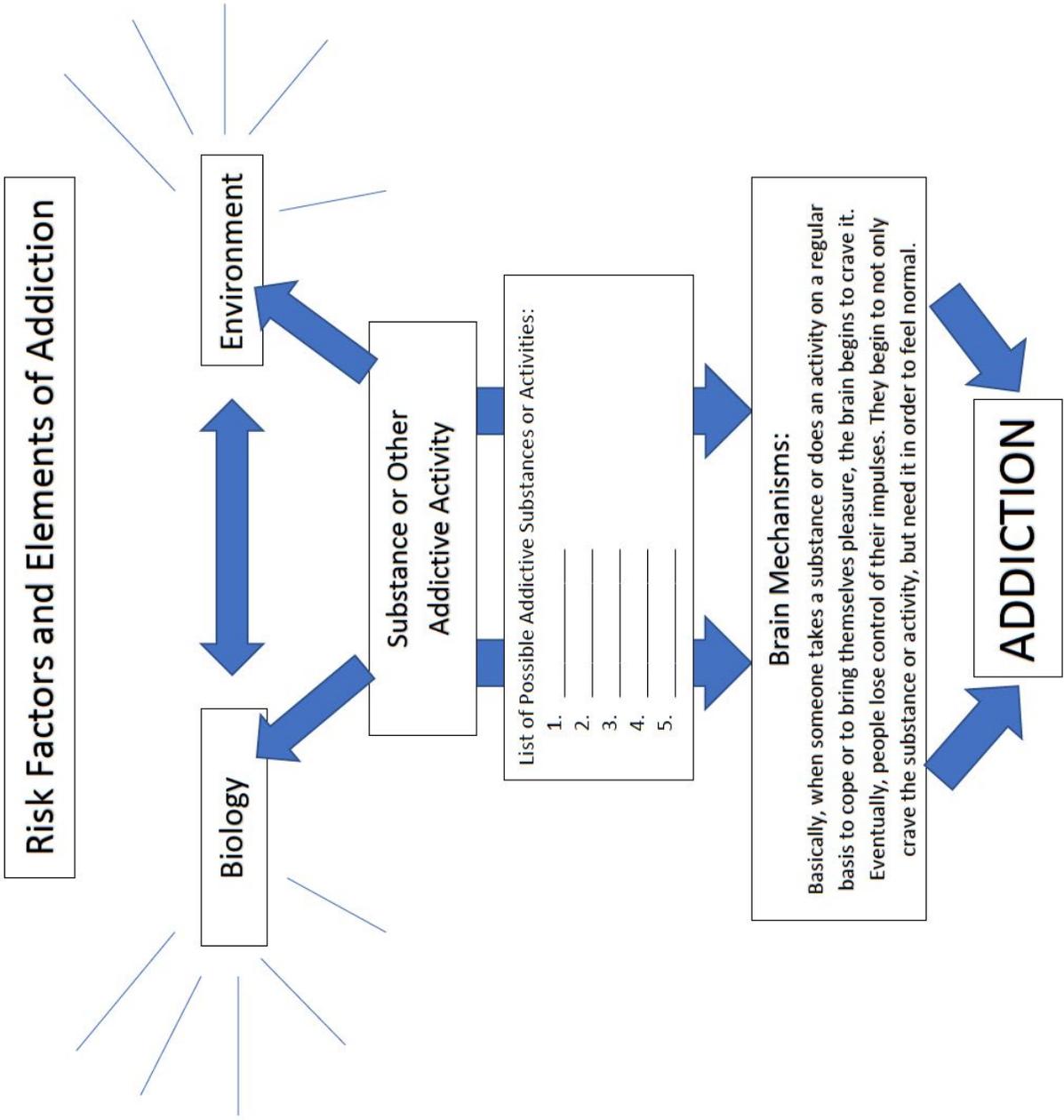
**Why do people become addicted to drugs, alcohol, etc?**

2. Follow-up after a discussion around this topic by watching this video by one of our Stigma-Free Warriors Troy from the Inspiring Stories Section of the Toolkit. Watch it [HERE](#). **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.** (*Trigger Warning: Brief mention of suicide. Here at Stigma-Free Society, we believe it is important to talk about this even if it is difficult. Silence only increases the chance of suicide.*)
3. You will now begin the science-related portion of this lesson. Explain to students that addiction develops due to a disruption of the balance of chemicals in the brain. Although someone may choose to use a substance in the beginning to make their body feel a certain way, they do not choose to become addicted. At a certain point, if they do not use the substance, they will not even feel “normal.” Watch this video that explains [The Science of Addiction](#). **Pause the video and use the Guiding Questions to spark discussion.**
4. **Follow-up Activity:** Use the “Science of Addiction Worksheet” below to further the student’s understanding. Have them fill out the spaces provided to explain each factor in the development and continuation of addiction. See answers below.
5. Ask students:
  - *How has your view of addictions changed since the beginning of this lesson?*

6. **Lesson Closure:** Explain to students that there is a lot of stigma related to addictions, and it is important not to judge people or make assumptions. They are not choosing to be addicted, it is a disease. Watch this video to conclude the lesson about [Living Stigma-Free](#).

**More Resources on Addiction for Students:**

- ◇ [16 and Recovering: MTV](#)
- ◇ [Drug Free Kids Canada](#)



## **Answers for Science of Addiction Worksheet**

Below are non-extensive lists and more answers are possible.

### **Elements of Biology that Affect Addiction**

1. Genetics
2. Gender
3. Mental Illness/Mental Disorders
4. Age (Teenager's brains are not yet developed so they are more prone to addiction)
5. Other health conditions

### **Elements of Environment that Affect Addiction**

1. Home Environment – Ex. If there are parents, caregivers or others in your family who abuse drugs or alcohol, or have addictive tendencies.
2. Friends/Peer Environment - Especially for young people, who they are surrounded with affects their risk of developing addiction.
3. Media
4. Education or Lack of Education about Addiction in School
5. Stigma of addiction
6. School/life achievement
7. Geographical area

### **Substances or Activities That Can Become an Addiction**

1. Drugs
2. Alcohol
3. Sex
4. Diet
5. Exercise
6. Gambling
7. Shopping, etc...