

## Stop the Tears of Drug and Alcohol Abuse

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** By participating in this *Stop the Tears* teaching strategy, students will be able to: (1) analyze how alcohol and drug abuse could affect their lives as well as the lives of their friends and family and, (2) create a media message, such as a poster, pamphlet, poem, or song, in which alcohol and drug prevention is advocated specific to how alcohol and drug abuse has affected students in their school. **Target Audience:** Students in grades 6-12 and lower-division college students.

Shimon J, Gibson T-A, Spear C. *Stop the tears of drug and alcohol abuse*. Am J Health Educ. 2009;40(6):373-377.

### INTRODUCTION

Many adolescents engage in health-risk behaviors that are harmful to themselves and others. These behaviors often extend into adulthood. The use and abuse of tobacco, alcohol and other drugs is one of the major health-risk behaviors affecting youth, and these behaviors can have immediate and long-term effects on a person's health, leading to higher morbidity and mortality rates.<sup>1,2</sup>

To alleviate the potential harmful short-term and long-term effects of drug and alcohol-related abuse, information about this content is taught in school health units and collegiate-level general health courses. Often, however, information about the types or classification of drugs, or the physiological and psychological effects of use and abuse, is delivered only through lectures. Whereas this information is important for students to learn, knowledge alone may not be enough to bring about positive health behaviors. In

addition to lecturing to students, health educators need to use functional health strategies that help engage students in the content and personalize information by means of creative expression, personal thoughts and opinions, and critical thinking.<sup>3</sup> One way to help students engage and personalize health information is by applying the content in an active learning context.

Active learning activities involve students using what they hear and see during a lesson by means of saying and doing (thinking) tasks.<sup>4</sup> Engaging students in active learning (e.g., activities that involve investigating, examining, synthesizing, analyzing) enhances critical thinking and helps students remember information for future use.<sup>5-6</sup> One such activity that can be used in health classes is called *Stop the Tears*, which was originally an alcohol curriculum developed by Dr. Larry Tentinger.<sup>7</sup> This curriculum has been modified to include other drugs.

### OBJECTIVES

The purpose of the *Stop the Tears* activity is to apply drug and alcohol-related issues into a personal meaning context using higher levels of thinking. By participating in *Stop the Tears*, students will be able to:

1. Examine the "wall of tears" created by the class members and, thereby, analyze how alcohol and drug abuse could affect their lives as well as the lives of their friends and family.
2. Create a media message, such as a poster, pamphlet, poem, or song, demonstrating how

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alcohol and drug abuse has affected students in their school and advocating for alcohol and drug prevention.

The above objectives meet the following two National Health Standards:<sup>3</sup>

Standard 2: Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology and other factors on health behaviors.

Standard 8: Students will demonstrate the ability to advocate for personal, family and community health.

### MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Prior to the activity, the teacher will collect/construct:

- Three, 3x5 index cards (or small pieces of paper) for each student
- One large tear cut out of colored paper available for each student
- “Drug” cards (for an explanation, see #2 in the following Procedure section)
- A bulletin board (or an organized hallway wall space) with a “Stop the Tears” theme. Students’ “tears” of drug and alcohol abuse will be posted under the heading as part of the activity (Figure 1)

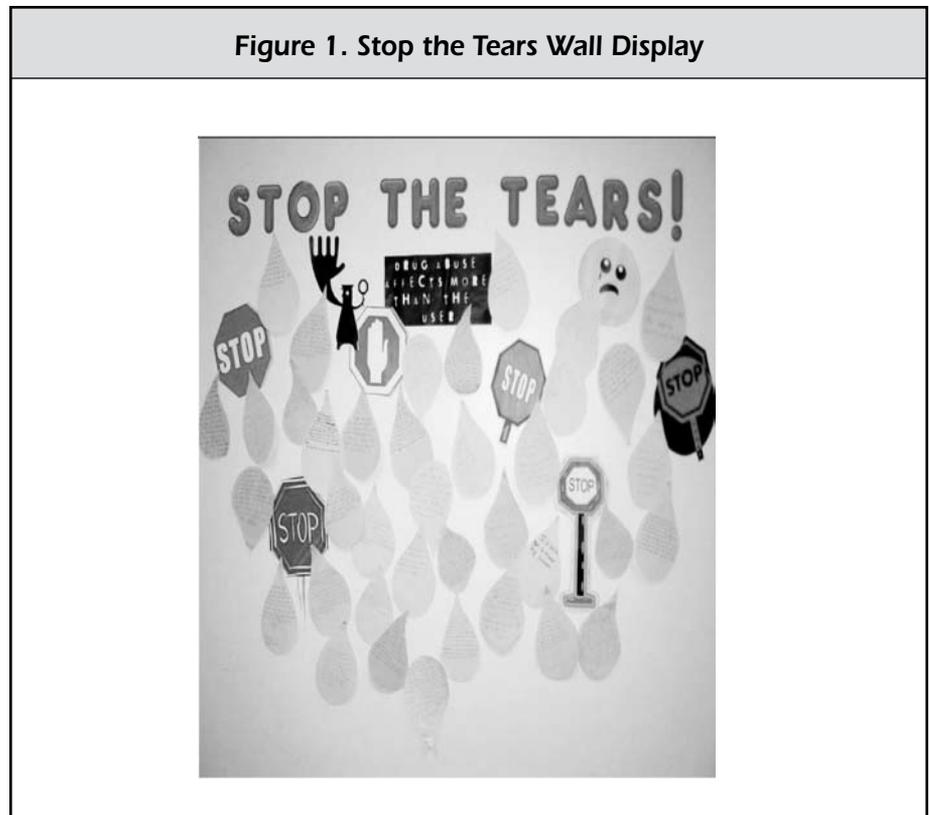
### TARGET AUDIENCE

*Stop the Tears* is appropriate for students in grades 6-12 and lower-division college students.

### PROCEDURE

The teacher should:

1. Distribute three index cards to each student. Ask students to think of the three most important things in their lives (e.g., family, friends, possessions, faith, pets), and require them to write one item on each card.
2. Ask several students to volunteer to explain what they wrote on their cards. After several students have shared their cards, approach a few of those students, taking one of their cards, and exchanging it with a card that has the word “drug abuse or alcohol abuse” written on it. Tell all students in the class that the exchanged card is a “drug” card. For a more dramatic effect, tear up their original card and toss the pieces into the air.



3. Ask students to share how they would feel if they were to lose the item(s)/people they listed on their cards. Explain that when persons become involved in drug use, they are at risk for losing many valuable items/people of their lives.

4. Require students to indicate how alcohol/drugs can cause loss, injury, money problems, family issues, loss of opportunities or items of value and sadness. Teachers should prod students for answers that are directed to both the user and those people affected by the user. For example, class discussion might include the following:

- a. Loss: death, imprisonment, divorce, dissolved friendships.
- b. Injury (physical and psychological): broken bones, damaged internal organs, disfigurement, memory loss, diminished thinking abilities, guilt, depression, suicide.
- c. Money problems: failure to provide for basic needs (food, clothing, shelter), stealing.
- d. Family issues: abuse, neglect, divorce, mistrust, enabling or creating an envi-

ronment for drug abuse of other family members.

e. Loss of opportunities or items of value: inability to secure or maintain a good job, graduate from high school, go to college, earn a degree, have a family, maintain a quality relationship, buy a new car; important items of value become damaged or destroyed by rage or destructive behavior.

f. Sadness: prolonged grief or guilt, depression, suicide as a result of any or all of the items mentioned in the previous discussion points—a. through e.

Finally, ask students to write a personal “tear” regarding the effects of drug and/or alcohol abuse. The “tear” can reflect an actual event or situation they have experienced; the “tear” can be used to describe an event or situation they have heard about (e.g., someone’s family member or friend); or the “tear” can represent the possible outcomes of alcohol and drug abuse. Require students to attach their nameless tear to the wall of tears (bulletin board or wall). If the instructor senses that confidentiality is an issue, s/he can re-



**Table 1. Tear Categories and Actual Accounts**

Categories	Tear Examples
<p>INNOCENT VICTIMS Those injured or killed by someone under the influence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My friend was killed in an accident. The driver was intoxicated by both alcohol and drugs. The driver killed his 17-year-old brother, his best friend, and his roommate.</li> <li>▪ A friend's mother was hit by a drunk driver. She suffered massive cerebral damage, as well as facial and upper extremity damage. She is unable to take care of her family, let alone herself.</li> <li>▪ My friend was having a few beers on his boat. His friend fell in and was run over by the boat and killed. My friend could not live with the guilt and took his own life three years ago. Alcohol kills in many different ways.</li> <li>▪ One of my best friends in high school was killed by a drunk driver. The drunk driver was also one of our very good friends. The hard feelings and guilty feelings among our group of friends was more than we could all handle. The friend that caused the accident had to be admitted to the state mental hospital due to a suicide attempt. He tore families and friends apart.</li> </ul>
<p>SUFFERING CHILDREN Children who were affected by someone under the influence in their care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My father is an alcoholic, and at 26, I am still affected by his choices. He's helpless and I'm the parent – at 26. I'm a parent to my parent. That is how it has been my whole life.</li> <li>▪ When I was six, I watched my alcoholic dad try to kill my mom by shooting her.</li> <li>▪ I grew up in a home with an abusive alcoholic for a dad, a heroin addict for an older sister, and a cocaine addict for an older brother. My brother just lost custody of his son because of his addiction. My nephew doesn't see his dad anymore b/c drugs were more important than family.</li> <li>▪ My parents were/are substance abusers as were their parents. My brother and sister both grew up to be meth users. Guess what? Their kids are now experimenting with pot and alcohol as young teens. I moved far, far away from my family so that my child would never have to see the things I have. Substance abuse opens the door for every other kind of abuse imaginable: physical, emotional, neglect, sexual – and it tears families apart.</li> </ul>
<p>FEARING PARENTS Abusive or neglecting fathers and/or mothers due to alcohol and drugs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ My dad was drunk and dragged my dog behind his motorcycle and covered my head in duct tape.</li> <li>▪ My father abused alcohol and drugs. He tried to beat my mother to death; kicking her with his steel-toed boots. He abused my elder brothers and sisters physically, emotionally, and mentally. Some members of my family are still dealing with problems created by him. Abuse is cyclic and I hope it ends in my family!</li> <li>▪ I grew up in a home with an alcoholic/drug addict mom. Life was very hard for me &amp; there was definitely neglect. This does happen &amp; this does affect children.</li> <li>▪ My stepfather was an alcoholic. He sexually abused me. He beat my mother. He beat my brother. My mother worried that he would kill a young family with the car because he was always drinking and driving.</li> </ul>
<p>NEVER THE SAME Despair or remorse by the user and/or victims</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drug and alcohol abuse stole my parents and my childhood. To heal myself, I had to go through the grieving process for the child I was never allowed to be. No child should ever know such fear and anxiety.</li> <li>▪ My brother-in-law lost his mom in a drunk-driving accident. It still affects him today. He doesn't believe in God anymore, and doesn't teach his children about God either. He has a strained relationship with his Dad now, and is still filled with hatred toward the driver. It has changed the way he deals with everyone</li> <li>▪ Both parents of mine are alcoholics and it has definitely affected my life. Do you think I like to drink? It's definitely genetic.</li> <li>▪ In high school, one of my friends OD'd on LSD. Now he has to rely on his parent to take care of him due to the lack of his mental ability from LSD.</li> </ul>



quire all students to submit their tear to the teacher, who will post the tears him/herself. Tell students that the “wall of tears” will be a reminder to all who read them that alcohol and drug abuse can bring sadness, loss, and conflict to all it touches. Ultimately, the message from *Stop the Tears* is that drug abuse affects more than the user.

5. (Closure) Instruct students to get into small groups of three or four and identify ways they will avoid using drugs and reduce related “tears” to help avoid losing their prized pos-

sessions. Based on the tears posted on the wall, students also may share how their lives may change if they were dependent on drugs. Ask students to analyze the collection of tears and determine categories, themes, or specific areas of concern that affect their classmates and/or school as a result of alcohol and drug abuse. For example, students, who previously have been involved in this teaching idea, have been creative in categorizing the tears (Table 1).

Some of the categories they developed have included: Fearing Parents (tears that

speak of abusive or neglecting fathers and/or mothers due to alcohol and drugs); Suffering Children (tears for the children affected by those in their care who abused alcohol and drugs); Innocent Victims (tears for those who were injured or killed by someone who was under the influence); Never the Same (tears of terrible despair or remorse by the user and/or victims), Relative Speaking (tears of the relatives who initiated drug use of family members, especially children); One More For the Road (tears about the

**Table 2. Assessment Rubrics**

**Scoring Criteria for Tear Analyses:**

- 4 pts = Written analysis is complete and shows proficiency/expertise; Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation are commendable
- 3 pts = Written analysis is mostly complete, yet is not fully proficient; Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation are acceptable
- 2 pts = Written analysis is inaccurate or incomplete; Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation need attention
- 1 pt = There is little or no evidence of a written analysis; Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation is unacceptable

**Analyses of Tear Influences and Effects**

- \_\_\_ Describes the external factors that affect tobacco/drug/alcohol abuse (e.g., parents, friends, family members, community, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Describes the internal factors that affect tobacco/drug/alcohol abuse (e.g., fear, likes or dislikes, curiosity, desire, anger, etc.)
- \_\_\_ Demonstrates the evidence of interrelationships and complexities of tobacco/drug/alcohol abuse by sorting and categorizing tears
- \_\_\_ Use of spelling, grammar, and punctuation

**Scoring Criteria for Media Message Advocacy:**

- 4 pts = Message is clear, information and product is complete and proficiently (meticulously organized) prepared; Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation are commendable
- 3 pts = Message is mostly clear, information and product is complete, but many not be fully proficient (general organization/neatness); Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation are acceptable
- 2 pts = Message is unclear, information and product is inaccurate or incomplete (unorganized, sloppy); Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation need attention
- 1 pt = There is no evident message, little or no evidence of information, no visible organization or neatness); Grammar, spelling and/or punctuation is unacceptable

**Advocacy Media Message**

- \_\_\_ Health-enhancing message is based on tear factors and/or interconnections
- \_\_\_ Message is supported with health content information
- \_\_\_ Demonstrates ability to connect message with making healthier choices
- \_\_\_ Shows evidence of audience awareness and conviction of the health message
- \_\_\_ Message demonstrates quality of product & preparedness
- \_\_\_ Use of spelling, grammar and punctuation



terrible effects of drinking and driving). The collections of tears that the authors of this paper have gathered over the years have been heart-wrenching and eye-opening, and have revealed repeated accounts of profound sadness and personal loss. As an extension or continuation to *Stop the Tears*, students could use the tears as a way to promote and advocate for drug and alcohol awareness in the community.

### ASSESSMENT TECHNIQUE

Following a class discussion and posting of the “tears,” groups of students will conduct a written assessment of the tears analyzing internal and external influences, and effects on life (e.g., How do the *tears* support current information about alcohol and drug abuse; How do the *tears* support the phrase “Alcohol and drug abuse affects more than the user?” What *tear* themes or

topic areas can be generated that reflect the effects of alcohol and drug abuse?). Require students to demonstrate what they have learned by creating a media message, such as a poster, an article for the school or local newspaper, pamphlet, poem, or song. A scoring rubric may be used to assess their understanding the effects of alcohol and drug abuse on self, friends, family members, and/or the community (Table 2).

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