

Kids, Alcohol and Advertising: Messages about Drinking

Level(s): Grade 4 to 8

Overview

In this lesson, students look at the different groups in our society that deliver messages to the public about drinking and consider the influence of each of these groups on the attitudes and perceptions of young people. Beginning by brainstorming words or ideas associated with the word "beer," the class develops a mind map of people and organizations that deliver messages to us about alcohol and drinking and the different messages that each provides.

Learning Outcomes

Students will demonstrate:

- a beginning awareness of their own attitudes toward drinking
- an understanding of the different groups that deliver messages about alcohol
- an understanding of the specific messages that are expressed within these groups
- an awareness of the influence of specific groups or individuals on their own attitudes and beliefs about alcohol

Preparation and Materials

- Before beginning this lesson, read the teaching backgrounder [Alcohol Advertising and Kids](#)
- For the mind map exercise, refer to [Mind Map: Where Do We Get Messages about Alcohol?](#) (PDF)
- [The Target is You!: Alcohol Advertising Quiz](#) is a companion activity for the lesson series *Kids, Alcohol and Advertising*. It can be a fun and interactive way to introduce the topic, or after, to re-enforce learning (optional resource).

Procedure

Tell students they will be looking at all the different messages that kids receive about alcohol.

Begin with a simple word association game. On the board, write the word BEER in big letters. Ask students to write down the first word or expression that comes into their minds when they see that word. Elect two students to record responses on one side of the board and then ask the class to share the words or expressions that came into their heads. Once their responses have been recorded, take a moment to step back and discuss them with students. Are they generally favourable, neutral or negative?

Every day we are surrounded by countless messages about drinking. (This should be reflected in the wide range of words and expressions that students associate with BEER.) Ask students to think about the questions: "Where do we get messages about

alcohol? Who are the people and the organizations that try to influence our attitudes about drinking?" (See [Mind Map](#) (PDF) for an overview.) Based on the model provided, and your students' suggestions, create a mind map on the board. (For younger grades, you may want to use a simplified version.)

Once your mind map is completed, review the BEER words that students have provided.

Ask students to match various words or messages about beer with appropriate groups in the mind map. *(Words can be connected to more than one group. For example, "party" and "fun" might be associated with media or friends and peers; "drink responsibly" and "don't drink and drive" might be associated with school, government or medical and anti-drinking groups; "tasty" and "cold" might be associated with alcohol industry, media, government liquor stores, and so on.)*

Once this is done, take a look at each of these groups and ask students to think about the different messages each group delivers about drinking. Be prepared for a wide range of answers, and don't be surprised to find conflicting messages from within the same group. For example, under *family*, the general message from parents might be that drinking is for adults and that kids shouldn't drink; from older siblings, it might be that drinking is fun.

Once this is done, ask students:

- Which of these groups gives us the most positive messages about drinking? Why might this be so? *(Guide them to consider motivation – for example, the media and alcohol industries make money from advertising and selling alcoholic beverages.)*
- Which of these groups gives us the most negative messages about drinking? Why might this be so?
- Do any of these groups have conflicting messages about drinking? *(For example, the alcohol industry creates both ad campaigns and social responsibility messages; some friends and peer groups may support drinking, others may not.)* How do you feel about these "mixed messages"?

Thinking about Messages

Discuss:

Every day, we are surrounded by thousands of messages that inform, entertain and educate us. Some of these messages try to sell us things, some want to influence how we think and behave, while others try to keep us safe. All want to persuade us one way or another.

Before deciding whether or not to listen to or believe a particular message, we need to ask some questions.

- Think about everything we've discussed today. What are some questions that you should ask about messages?

Answers might include:

- Who is behind this message? (*A company? An advertiser? A health practitioner? My parents? A friend?*)
- What is the message? (*"Buy my product"? "Don't participate in high-risk activities"? "Learn about this so you can be better informed"? "Do this because it's fun"?*)
- How is the person or organization trying to convince me to listen to their message? (*Making it sound like fun? Stressing that this is really important? Making it appear to be a cool thing?*)
- Is the person or organization qualified to tell me what to do? (*For example, is my friend experienced enough to help me make decisions that might affect my health? Should advertisers have a say in what foods we need? Is this Web site a credible source for my homework assignment?*)
- And, most importantly, why is this person or organization sending me a message? What is their motivation? (*To sell me things? To get me to influence other people? Because they care about my safety and well-being?*)

Homework

In their notebooks have students write a short paragraph outlining the word or expression they associated with BEER at the beginning of the class, and what they think may have influenced their word choice.