



**RISE ABOVE**  
COLORADO



**CLOSING THE**



**GAP**

**FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**

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## ABOUT CLOSING THE GAP

Adolescence is a time for immense growth and opportunity for young people. Teens contribute positively to their communities in many ways such as, supporting their families, employment, activism, creative expression, and much more. However, our society is rife with misperceptions of teens that paint a negative, counter-factual portrait of the lives most young people lead. These stereotypes frequently portray teens as apathetic and entitled, using drugs, and partying without providing the benefit of nuance, diversity, or hope in that narrative. Through Rise Above Colorado's work across the state, and partnership with the Montana Institute that supports social norming efforts across the nation, it's clear that teens simultaneously delight in, and are challenged by, data and messages that correct these common narratives and offer a more realistic portrayal.

*Closing the Gap* was developed to create meaningful opportunities for teens to explore and shape the world in which they live through the critical analysis of data and fact-based reasoning. Engaging teens in the data discovery process can be beneficial for all involved, including educators and the program (or community) that is being studied. The following are just a few of the potential benefits<sup>1</sup>:

- *Teens* – gain lifelong skills to analyze data and reflect deeply on their autonomy and the relationship they have to their community
- *Educators and other Facilitators* – gain a youth perspective on the stories and connections behind the data that can foster a fresh and more intricate perspective, as well as fostering authentic relationships with young people by working together to understand the world we share
- *Programs/Communities* – gain teen-driven conclusions and recommendations for addressing concerns and opportunities leading to greater relevance and impact

Through this lesson, teens will also explore how perceptions about substance use are shaped and how these perceptions can influence behavior. Discussing why misperceptions exist and correcting misperceptions is an effective strategy for prevention based on social norming theory<sup>2</sup>. Leveraging the opportunities of adolescent development and teens' interest to understand themselves in the context of their peers and the world around them<sup>3</sup>, this lesson also encourages youth and adults to consider the disparities presented in the data, considering the experiences of different groups and how that can also shape perceptions and realities. *Closing the Gap* utilizes the **Science of the Positive**<sup>4</sup> and **Positive Youth Development**<sup>5</sup>, both of which are evidence-based approaches that focus on growing the healthy, positive factors in our communities to mitigate against negative influences.

1 Flores, K. S. (2008). Youth participatory evaluation: Strategies for engaging young people. New York: Jossey-Bass

2 Perkins, H. & Berkowitz, A. (1986). Perceiving the community norms of alcohol use among students: some research implications for campus alcohol education programming. *International Journal of the Addictions*, (9-10): 961-76.

3 Siegel, D. J. (2015). *Brainstorm: the power and purpose of the teenage brain*. New York: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, a member of Penguin Group (USA).

4 Linkenbach, J. (2013). *Applying the Science of the Positive to health & safety*. Bozeman, MT: Montana Institute, LLC. Available online at: [www.MontanaInstitute.com](http://www.MontanaInstitute.com). [Workshop Manual]

5 Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (2019). *Positive Youth Development*. <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/positive-youth-development>

## Essential Questions Explored:

- How are our perceptions formed?
- What are the perceptions around youth substance misuse?
- What does the data tell us about youth substance misuse?
- What does the data tell us about disparities related to youth substance misuse?
- How can misperceptions about our peers' substance misuse affect our behavior?
- How can we correct misperceptions around youth substance use?

## Objectives:

### **After completing this lesson, participants will be able to:**

- Review the data and facts describing teen substance misuse
- Build critical thinking skills for interpreting the world around us with an open mind
- Explain how perceptions shape our behaviors
- Discuss hopes and concerns around Colorado teen substance misuse
- Plan ways to correct misperceptions and rise above substance misuse

## FACILITATOR'S GUIDE OVERVIEW

### Using This Guide:

- A script is provided related to each slide. Depending on your comfort level, feel free to use the script as presented or simply as a way to guide main talking points while you put the text into your own words. “Key Points” are provided at the beginning of each chapter, in case you would rather follow those.
- Notes for the facilitator, optional activities, and supplemental materials are provided in pop-out boxes.
- This resource and guide is best used when you help make it relevant with local context and adaptations! Creating opportunities to make connections to personal experiences and local examples is a powerful learning tool. Youth presenters can also help by sharing their own examples of connections they’ve made to a personal or local context.
- The lesson can be facilitated in 45 minutes to one hour (or even over several sessions), depending on the depth of conversation and activities that are used.

### Preparing:

- Run through the presentation ahead of time and determine how long you’ll need to present, including facilitating activities. If you are co-facilitating, decide in advance who is leading which sections. The co-facilitator can offer support during the sections that they are not leading.
- If you are familiar with the group, highlight areas of the lesson that may connect with other concepts that participants may be learning or know about in other classes or activities.
- If you are a guest presenter, take some time to learn about local resources that may exist related to prevention, and specifically substance misuse prevention. Many schools make mental health services available either through the School-Based Health Centers, school counselors, or prevention counselors.
- Ask your host site in advance about existing ways they address sensitive topics before you present. What are the existing group/classroom norms? How do they normally handle sensitive subjects?

### Facilitating:

- This lesson is designed to be youth- or adult-led. It can also be co-facilitated and is typically used in classrooms with a general youth audience.
- Discussion questions are interspersed throughout to encourage conversation and sharing of prior knowledge, experiences, and questions.
- The aim is to actively engage all participants through these questions by the end of the lesson. Wait 10-15 seconds before calling on anyone to allow participants time to process a question and volunteer to speak. Make sure to call on a variety of youth. Also try using different questions or rephrasing the current question if no one is responding. Practice using open-ended questions to avoid yes/no

answers and encourage deeper conversations.

- This lesson incorporates Positive Youth Development principles, which focus on building skills, authentic relationships, and opportunities to practice. PYD embraces a strengths-based approach while also engaging youth as partners. As such, we invite you to find ways to offer youth a platform to explore this material while building leadership skills and sharing their voice.

## Healing Centered Approaches:

Facilitators should be prepared that this lesson contains material related to substance use, and some participants may have experienced trauma in their lives related to substance use disorders or addiction.

Trauma is an individual's experience of an event or enduring conditions that are physically and/or emotionally harmful or life-threatening to themselves or someone they know, in which the individual's emotional response is overwhelmed.

There are ways to approach conversations with sensitivity and care, which include understanding the impact of trauma and ways to support healing. Some strategies for a healing-centered approach are integrated into the facilitator's guide but there may be instances when the facilitator would like to expand upon these strategies using the techniques provided below.

- Whether you are a guest presenter or have an extended relationship with the youth, reestablishing existing group norms or working with students to develop group norms is critical to build an environment of mutual trust, respect, and safety.
- For guest presenters, begin the lesson with a personal introduction to provide the group with a little insight into who you are and why you are there. If you are already known to the group, consider warm-up activities that allow the group to get to know something new about one another.
- It is important to allow youth who have experiences related to substances to share what they know as it is beneficial to hear directly from peers about the dangers of misuse and addiction.
- If someone discloses sensitive information, do not ignore it. Take a moment to acknowledge the disclosure, ask the class how they are feeling, and remind them that this is sensitive and serious material. Most importantly, make sure to address it with the individual at the end and connect them to supports and resources in the school or community.
- If any students appear to be struggling, feel free to take a break or allow the youth to take a break, and make a connection to a trusted adult in the setting, perhaps a school counselor or the site host.
- This lesson is designed to provide the opportunity for future conversations. Should the participants ask questions that are not covered in the lesson, encourage them to conduct their own research while you also do your own. Provide time to reconvene in the next class or encourage a follow-up discussion because if one young person is brave enough to ask a question, others may also benefit from the conversation.

## Materials Provided:

- Presentation slides
- Small Group Discussion Questions
- Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey (RACYS) Infographics
- Overview of Common Reactions to the Lesson

## Additional Materials / Resources Needed:

- Projector for slide presentation
- Scratch paper for each participant

## Resources from Rise Above Colorado:

Rise Above Colorado implements a statewide positive social norming campaign. This campaign shares statewide survey data through social and digital media, highlighting factual statistics that show most Colorado teens have engaged in healthy, positive activities in the past month and not marijuana, alcohol, and prescription drug use. Youth are encouraged to follow and engage with us on social using the hashtag #IRiseAbove. If you are interested in *Fill Your World With Good* campaign materials, email [info@riseaboveco.org](mailto:info@riseaboveco.org).

[IRiseAboveCO.org](http://IRiseAboveCO.org) is a “for teens, by teens” website designed to be a space for teens to get additional facts as well as tools to rise above. Specifically, the *Together We Rise* page is available for teens to safely submit and explore written stories, poems, photos, videos, etc. We encourage your teens to contribute content of their own, which could potentially be further shared to Rise Above Colorado’s social media platforms, helping to promote positive social norms and push back against negative misperceptions. For ideas and instructions on how your teens can individually (or collectively) submit content, click [here](#).

## PART ONE: INTRODUCTION

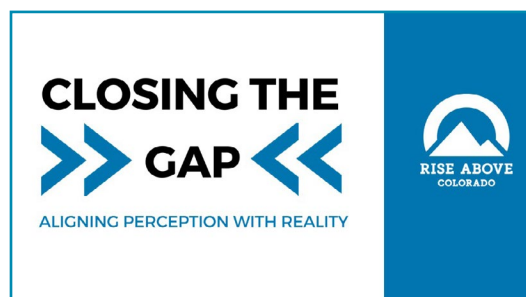
### KEY POINTS

- Introduce yourself, Rise Above Colorado, and the lesson objectives
- Lead a warm-up activity to create a space of learning and respect for the sensitive issues to be discussed
- Inform participants of available resources and supports should they need them, including reaching out to a trusted adult or friend

### FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

If you are new to facilitating, check out the [Seeds of Change](#) facilitation tool, for tips and techniques to use during this lesson.

### SLIDE 1:



If you are a guest facilitator, introduce yourself and share why you're leading this discussion. During this introduction, take time to discuss group norms for the lesson, including being respectful and mindful of others' experiences as it relates to this subject. Ask participants if there are any norms they want to add to the group's shared agreements. Even if time is short, a brief warm-up activity with introductions will help you get to know the participants and set the stage for active participation.

***Hi everyone, my name is [your name]. I am a part of [group you are representing] and I am here to [reason you are there.] I'd like to get to know each of you a little better before we get started so let's go around the room and please share with me 1) your name and 2) a topic or activity that you're passionate about, for example something you're learning about or working on not just as an assignment for school (although it could also be connected to school!)***

### SLIDE 2:

An important part of media literacy and being a critical consumer of information is knowing who the author or sponsor is to gain an understanding of the point of view being presented. This slide models this principle by providing an introduction to Rise Above Colorado.

***This lesson was developed by Rise Above Colorado. Because it's always important to know who is the author of information we're consuming and what their motivations are, let me tell you a little bit about the organization. Rise Above is***

### SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:

If you wish to dive deeper into media literacy with your students, Rise Above Colorado has a 3-4 week unit called [Media Smart Youth-Not Prescribed](#) that helps youth make the connection between media and substance misuse and learn essential media literacy skills.

*an organization that works with adults and youth across the state to impact teens' perceptions and attitudes about the risks of substance misuse in order to help youth make empowered, healthy choices for themselves. You can learn more about Rise Above Colorado by visiting their "by teens, for teens" website, [iRiseAboveCo.org](https://iRiseAboveCo.org), or following them on social media.*

### SLIDE 3:



*Through this lesson, you will:*

- 1. Review the data and facts describing teen substance misuse in Colorado*
- 2. Explain how perceptions shape our behaviors*
- 3. Build critical thinking skills for interpreting the world around us with an open mind*
- 4. Discuss hopes and concerns around Colorado teen substance misuse*
- 5. Plan ways to correct misperceptions and rise above substance misuse*

### SLIDE 4:



*Substance use and misuse can be a difficult subject. Substance use disorder and addiction are serious illnesses that can cause harm to the individual experiencing it as well as their family and friends.*

*Contrary to popular belief, young people are also susceptible to substance use disorders and addiction. In fact, 90% of people who become addicted to substances, started using them before the age of 18.*

*The total number of youth between the ages of 15-17 in Colorado is approximately 400,000 people, which would fill over 8,000 school buses! To put this into real numbers, 48,000 youth (1,000 school buses) this age report drinking alcohol in the last month. 24,000 youth (500 school buses) used marijuana and 8,000 youth (167 school buses) used prescription drugs. There are a variety of factors that influence why people do or don't use substances. That's part of what we'll talk about today.*

### SLIDE 5:



*It's important to know that there are resources available for you, should you need them, including school counselors. It's also okay to take care of yourself while participating - you can leave the room and take a break, or debrief with a trusted friend or trusted adult afterwards, including me.*

*If you or someone you know needs help, you can also reach out through Safe2Tell, the Colorado Crisis Line or the Trevor Project. We'll show you these resources again at the end of this lesson.*

## PART TWO: PERCEPTION, REALITY, AND BEHAVIOR

### KEY POINTS

- Perception is the ability to understand and take meaning from something
- Our perceptions are influenced by many factors, including our environments, the people that we interact with, our upbringing, media, the opinions of our community and society, etc.
- Our perceptions influence our attitudes and actions
- One strategy to help to critically analyze new information is 1) observe first, 2) question next, and 3) interpret last

### SLIDE 6:



*Take a few moments to scan each of the images presented here. On a sheet of paper, jot down a few of your observations. What are some things that all of these photos have in common? What conclusions are you making about the celebrities pictured?*

Provide a minute or two for personal reflection then solicit responses as a large group.



*Great! Hold on to those initial impressions because we will return to these images in a little bit.*

### SLIDE 7:

As a large group discuss the question on the slide, “How do you define perception?” Example responses may include how an individual sees something, the way people see the world, and how we process information.



*Thank you for sharing your ideas with each other. In short, the word PERCEPTION refers to your ability to understand and take meaning from something. In this instance, what do you see in the image on the slide?*

Solicit thoughts as a large group.



*You can either see two faces or a vase. There are situations where two different people can observe the same thing and come to different conclusions or have different perceptions.*

## SLIDE 8:

**“ Another popular example of people having different perceptions is a glass with water at the midpoint. A person feeling optimistic might respond that it's half full, whereas someone feeling pessimistic might respond that it's half empty. How a person views the water in the glass could also be related to their usage of the glass: are you in the process of pouring water in or drinking from it? ”**

Move into another group discussion using the question on the slide, “Where do you think our perceptions come from?” Common answers will be family, friends, school, personality, religion, politics, experiences, and media.

**“ The way we understand and interpret the world around us is influenced by our personalities, our family and friends, the experiences we have, the community we live in, and our society. There are things we might not even realize are influencing our perceptions like social media, television, and advertisements. The way we perceive things can also be influenced by our day to day emotions. ”**

### FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

We encourage you to use a current example to further explain this point. An example could be the COVID-19 pandemic. How have people been impacted differently by this crisis? According to the [Centers for Disease Control \(CDC\)](#), Black and Native Americans/Alaskan Natives are five times more likely to become seriously ill and be hospitalized from COVID-19 than their White counterparts and Hispanics are four times more likely. Do you think the perception of COVID-19 is different for people of color and Whites? How so? How might each group act differently?

## SLIDE 9:

**“ So far we've talked about how it is possible for two people's perceptions of something to be different. Does this mean that facts are different for all of us? ”**

Solicit responses as a large group. Expect mixed responses of yes and no.

**“ When it came to seeing either a vase or a face, the lines and colors in the image didn't change. Those were facts, yet different people saw different images. How do you reconcile that information? Can two things be true at once? ”**

Pause for self-reflection.

**“ Let's take a look at the other image on the slide. There is a number on the ground. Based on where they are standing, one person sees a nine and the other a six. Who is right? ”**

You can solicit responses as a large group or pause for personal reflection.

## SLIDE 10:

**“ Remember these photos? Well, we want to talk about two of the people in them with more depth to help us better understand the relationship between perception and reality. ”**

### SLIDE 11:



*Does anyone know who these two people are?*

Solicit responses as a large group.



*Lana Del Rey and Kendrick Lamar are top selling performers and popular entertainers among young adults (both have sold out the Pepsi Center in Denver). Both have songs and public images that frequently reference drugs, most of which glamorize its use. But both are sober. Lana struggled with substance use when she was a teen and has been sober ever since and Kendrick saw what drugs and alcohol did to his friends and family when he was younger and decided to live a substance free life. If you were to only focus on the public image created by the artists and, more importantly, their music labels, your perception of Lana and Kendrick would be incorrect. By questioning our initial perceptions and seeking out additional information, we can discover the facts.*

### SLIDE 12:



*No shame or judgment here, but how accurate are most people's social media profiles to the reality of their daily lives?*

Solicit responses as a large group.



*Think about your own social media. How often do you post when you are having a bad day? Social media tends to be a highlight reel for most people, not necessarily a representation of their true day to day life.*

#### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Use a polling platform like Poll Everywhere or Kahoot to engage participants in the question, "What percent of social media profiles do you think accurately reflect people's daily lives?"

### SLIDE 13:



*Do you know who the celebrity on the left is?*

Pause to solicit responses.



*Many celebrities like Kylie Jenner get paid to promote products and brands on social media. They are called influencers. In this post Kylie is promoting a quick-fix weight loss product. When youth see these ads, the perception is that Kylie Jenner looks the way she does because of these products when she actually has access to a lot of resources that most people don't, like personal trainers and chefs.*

*Instagram banned advertising of diet products to youth 18 and under because they deemed that the advice is misleading and in some cases harmful. This was mostly due to the efforts of actress Jameela Jamil, on the right, who called out celebrities promoting these products on Instagram, leading to a global movement that put pressure on Instagram to make changes to protect young people.*

## SLIDE 14:



*I want everyone to turn to the person next to you and share your answer to the question on the slide “Why is it important to have an accurate perception of the world around us?”*

Give pairs a few minutes to discuss and then solicit responses as a large group.



*Thank you for sharing. Perception, or our ability to interpret and understand something, is the foundation for belief and affects behavior. Take this image for example. A long time ago, many societies believed that the world was flat. If you believed it possible to quite literally sail off the edge of the planet, would that affect your behavior while sailing?*

Pause to solicit responses.



*Yes. You would avoid “the edge” for fear that you would sail off. There are examples throughout history of social norms changing our behaviors. In the past, it was acceptable to spit in public, litter, and ride in a car without a seatbelt, but the norms around these behaviors changed and now these things are taboo.*

## SLIDE 15:



*Let’s come back to the two images on the slide that we explored earlier. We know that it is possible for two people to have different perceptions of these images, but how can we figure out what is real?*

Solicit responses as a large group.



*We can use our analytical skills and ask questions to uncover more context. What if we were able to zoom out from the images? Maybe we would see that there is an 8 and 10 on either side of the number, or a vase sitting on a table. We could also find the person who wrote the numbers and ask them which number they intended it to be. We used critical thinking questions at the beginning of this lesson when we considered Rise Above as the author of this lesson: Who wrote these numbers? Why might they be presenting this information to this audience in this way?*

## SLIDE 16:



*Research has shown that the image you see the first time you look at the vase/two faces is what you what you are psychologically inclined to see for the rest of your life<sup>1</sup>. Regrettably, people sometimes select information that supports opinions they already hold, instead of pausing to seek out facts, asking relevant questions, and only then making judgements or interpretations. Using the process of observing first, questioning next, and interpreting last when exploring new information can help us form our own opinions and make informed choices. This is a critical and exciting responsibility as a teenager, when you’re exploring many new things on your own and making many decisions for yourself.*

1. Peatfield, Nicholas & Müller, Nadia & Ruhnau, Phillipp & Weisz, Nathan. (2015). Rubin-vase illusion perception is predicted by prestimulus activity and connectivity. Journal of vision. 15. 429. 10.1167/15.12.429.

## SLIDE 17:



*Let's go back to our opening activity one last time. Drawing on what we learned with Lana Del Rey and Kendrick Lamar, we now know that perception is not always reality. What key questions did we miss earlier, and consequently, why were our original interpretations off?*

Pause for self-reflection or to solicit thoughts as a large group.



*You might not know it from their movies, music, or magazine spreads, but everyone in these photos is sober in real life, as are MANY other prominent famous people. Similarly, when teens are asked to comment on the drug and alcohol use of their peers, misperceptions emerge that are often based on what we see in pop culture. In the following section we'll explore these misperceptions, and learn how to apply observation, questioning, and interpretation to close the gap between our misperceptions and reality.*

## PART 3: DATA AND FACT-BASED REASONING

### KEY POINTS

- Data from the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey (RACYS) show that there are misperceptions around youth substance misuse
- Most high school and middle school youth in Colorado are choosing healthy, positive alternatives to substance misuse
- There are actions we can take to close the gap between perceptions and reality
- There are actions we can take to recognize and address the disparities in people's experiences related to substance use

### FACILITATOR'S NOTE:

If you have access to local data through the [Healthy Kids Colorado Survey \(HKCS\)](#) or a separate survey through your school district, it may be beneficial to use it in the following section. The Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey is a statewide survey.

### SLIDE 18:



*The Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey (RACYS) surveys 12-17 year olds across the state about their behavioral health, which includes mental health and substance use. The survey examines the factors that make people less or more likely to use substances. RACYS has traditionally been conducted by phone by a trained interviewer. However, in 2020, nearly half of the surveys were completed online because more teens are reachable through online platforms as opposed to phones. The data we are going to discuss on the next few slides come from the RACYS.*

### (OPTIONAL) SLIDE 19:

Use this slide if your youth are familiar with the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS) and you would like to explain the difference between HKCS and RACYS.

*Our community also surveys youth in schools through the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey (HKCS). This survey collects information not only on behavioral health but on things like physical activity, eating habits, bullying, violence, etc. Does anyone recall taking this survey in school?*

*RACYS focuses on substance use and factors that can contribute to use or prevent it. You see some differences in data from each survey; however the overall trends are similar. HKCS data tends to see higher rates, some of which is due to their age range being older. They report on their high school and middle school data separately, whereas the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey reports on data from 12-17 year olds combined.*

## SLIDE 20:

***“ In this survey we look at the difference between what teens think their peers are doing, or their perception, and what teens are actually doing when it comes to substance misuse. What we see is that teens think their friends and classmates are using drugs and alcohol way more than they actually are.***

## SLIDE 21:

***“ The data on the left shows middle school students and the data on the right is from high school students. Each is looking at the actual use, represented by the light blue bar, and perceived use represented by the dark blue bar of alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and vaping.***

*If you are presenting this to a group of middle school aged students or a mixed aged group, feel free to focus on an example that is representative of the population you are presenting to Rise Above Colorado provides the data for alcohol, marijuana, prescription drugs, and meth use into separate infographics. They are available on our organizational website: [RiseAboveCO.org](https://RiseAboveCO.org)*

## SLIDE 22:

***“ Additionally, this second graph highlights the percentage of youth who did not use drugs or alcohol in the past month. We’re going to zoom in on alcohol use for high school students as an example.***

## SLIDE 23:

***“ The light blue bar is showing us that 14% of high school students in Colorado reported using alcohol last month. However, these teens think that 43% of their peers used alcohol. Why do you think this is?***

*Pause to solicit responses.*

***Take a moment to reflect on what you think happens to your perception if most of your friends use drugs and alcohol? Do you think this would affect your behavior at all? Feel free to use your scrap paper to write down your thoughts.***

*Pause to allow for personal reflection.*

***“ The most important thing to notice in this data is that 86% of high schoolers did NOT use alcohol in the previous month. You may feel this doesn’t reflect your personal situation but remember our discussion of perception; sometimes we need to take***

## SUPPLEMENTAL MATERIAL:

When we talk about surveying, some youth have questions and concerns about the data being an accurate representation of teens’ behaviors. At the end of this lesson we’ve provide common reactions youth have to the lesson to support you in these conversations.

## FACILITATOR’S NOTE:

We look at use in the past month (30 days) because it gives us a more accurate representation of current substance use behavior than looking at lifetime use.

*a step back to see a wider view and understand the facts as a whole. And, like the vase and face, both things could be true at the same time. Your personal experience may not be the same when we look at the average across an entire community or state. It is important to recognize that there are groups in our community that can be impacted worse by certain issues and also recognize that we can take action to change this.*

#### **SLIDE 24:**



*While we're focusing on the positive data and trends, we can balance that with concern that there are teens who use drugs and alcohol, which poses risks for both physical and mental harm.*

*What factors do you think contribute to teens misusing substances? Take a moment to write down your thoughts on the scrap paper and then we'll go around the room and ask each person to say one thing they came up with.*

*Pause to allow for personal reflection and then solicit responses as a large group.*

#### **SLIDE 25:**

*We are all impacted by a variety of risk and protective factors that influence the likelihood for substance misuse and addiction. Risk and protective factors are not just individual factors, but also exist at the community and cultural level of our experiences, such as the media messages we consume and the environments we live in.*



*Research has shown that there are factors in everyone's lives that can make them more likely or less likely to use drugs and alcohol. These are not just individual factors, but also exist at the community and cultural level of our experiences, such as the media messages we consume and the spaces we live, work, and play in.*

*Examples of factors that can make a person more likely develop a substance use disorder are:*

- *Family history of addiction – family history of addiction and even mental illness can influence a person's susceptibility to drug use and addiction*
- *Environment – experiencing discrimination, oppression, and marginalization can effect mental health and substance use*
- *Media – messages we consume influence our attitudes towards drugs by normalizing their misuse. This reflects our conversation on perception and social norms. The way you perceive substance use and the way your friends, family, and community perceive substance use can make you more likely to use drugs and alcohol.*
- *Poor mental health – Stress, trauma, depression and anxiety have been connected to substance abuse*

*Examples of factors that can protect a person from substance misuse are:*

- *Trusted adults – an adult other than parents that is trusted and available for support*
- *Positive peers – interacting with peers who engage in positive, healthy activities*
- *Future goals – having positive expectations for the future, such as goals related*

- to college, career, family, and other life experiences
- **Hobbies and passions** – this includes a person’s involvement in clubs, sports, extracurricular activities as well as their access and ability to participate in them
- **Community connections** – feelings of connection, and ability to access and contribute to that community, provide a sense of belonging
- **Coping and stress management skills** – including self-awareness, time management, mindfulness, goal setting, emotional outlets – physical, creative, or social – allow for healthy ways of managing stress

## SLIDE 26:



**What do you think the connection is between substance misuse and mental health?**

Common responses could be: when youth are stressed out they use substances to feel better, mental health help and resources are hard to access, and substance use makes youth feel better in the moment but they don’t know about or think about the long term effects.



**1 in 3 youth in Colorado say they experienced 6 or more difficult mental health days in the last month. These youth were more likely to have tried alcohol, marijuana, or e-cigarettes. Helping teens with their mental health can reduce substance misuse.**

## SLIDE 27:

Break the larger group up into small groups of 3-4. Hand out copies of the RACYS infographic on social norms or your own HKCS data along with the Closing the Gap small group discussion questions.

1. What concerns do you have after reviewing this data?
2. What makes you hopeful after reviewing this data?
3. Why do you think misperceptions around teen substance misuse tend to grow with age?
4. What information do teens typically use to form their perceptions and opinions? How can we use “Observe, Question, Interpret” to avoid forming misperceptions?
5. Looking at the factors that protect young people from substance misuse, which do you believe have the most potential for making positive change in your community?

### OPTIONAL ACTIVITY:

Create five stations around the room with chart paper or white boards to capture students’ answers to the five questions asked using a world cafe model- check out how to do this here <http://www.theworldcafe.com/key-concepts-resources/.world-cafe-method/>



**In your small group look more closely at the data we just reviewed and answer the questions on the screen. Remember the process of critical thinking we reviewed in the first part of the lesson and use it here. Observation first. What are the numbers? Questioning next. What questions do we have about the data? Interpret last. What does the data mean? You have a worksheet where you can write down your thoughts.**

Give students time to discuss in small groups Come back together to debrief. Have a member from each group share what they discussed.

## PART 4: CLOSING

### KEY POINTS

- Participants identify things in their lives that give them strength to rise above substance use
- Review available resources and supports including Safe2Tell, Colorado Crisis Services, and the Trevor Project
- Discuss available resources through Rise Above Colorado

### SLIDE 28:



As a wrap up to the lesson, have students take a few minutes to reflect on steps they can take with their peers and classmates to correct misperceptions. There is room provided on the Closing the Gap small group discussion worksheet for them to write down their thoughts.

**Through this lesson we've learned that the majority of teens are not using substances and are participating in healthy, positive activities. What are actions YOU can take to change the misperceptions or "close the gap" among your friends, schoolmates, family, and community?**

Common responses may be discussing the facts with friends and classmates, highlighting the fact that most youth don't use substances, and talking to peers and classmates about the positive influences in their lives that can help them rise above substance use.

Bring together as a large group. Ask for volunteers to share what they came up with.

### SLIDE 29:

**Please remember that there are resources available for you, should you need them, including me, school counselors and other trusted adults in your life.**

**Safe2Tell is a portal for youth to anonymously report safety concerns to help their peers or themselves. Safe2Tell gets the most calls about suicide, followed by substance abuse and bullying. There are real stories of real students whose lives have been saved because someone intervened through Safe2Tell on their behalf. It can be a powerful tool to help someone when you don't know what else to do.**

**The Colorado Crisis Line is a great resource to use if you or someone you know is struggling and needs to talk with someone. Trained counselors are available to talk**

*about stress, anxiety, relationship problems, bullying, substance use and many more topics. You can call the Crisis Line at 1-844-493-8255, text “TALK” to 38255, or chat with someone online. The Trevor Project is similar to the Colorado Crisis Line but is specifically for LGBTQ+ individuals and serves people nationwide. To contact the Trevor Project call 1-866-488-7386 or text START to 678-678.*

### GET HELP 24/7:



### SLIDE 30:



*Rise Above Colorado wants to continue the conversation online and see how you rise above pressures in your life in order to inspire and help other teens. Connect with @riseaboveco on social media to share your stories and photos that show how and why you rise above, using the hashtag #IRiseAbove with your posts.*

*Thank you for participating in these important conversations. Please remember the support resources we shared should you need them. You can also reach out to Rise Above via social media if you want to engage in their virtual conversation, or ask a question you weren't able to ask today.*

# CLOSING THE GAP

## *Small Group Discussion Questions*

**What concerns do you have after reviewing this data?**

**What makes you hopeful after reviewing this data?**

**Why do you think misperceptions around teen substance misuse tend to grow with age?**

**What information do teens typically use to form their perceptions and opinions? How can we use “Observe, Question, Interpret” to avoid forming misperceptions?**

**Looking at the factors that protect young people from substance misuse, which do you believe have the most potential for making positive change in your community?**

**What are actions YOU can take to change the misperceptions or “close the gap” among your friends, schoolmates, family, and community?**

# COLORADO COMPREHENSIVE HEALTH EDUCATION STANDARDS

Closing the Gap is aligned with the Colorado Comprehensive Health Education Standard 4: Risk Management in Health. Under this standard, prepared graduates should be able to: apply knowledge and skills to make health-enhancing decisions regarding the use marijuana, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, alcohol, and tobacco.

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/cohealth/statestandards>

STANDARDS FOR EVIDENCE OUTCOMES	
<b>6th Grade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze internal influences such as genetics, personality, and risk-seeking behaviors on alcohol and tobacco use</li> <li>Analyze external influences on alcohol and tobacco use</li> <li>Analyze the influence of exercise, nutrition, and social relationships on alcohol and tobacco</li> <li>Analyze various strategies the media use, including advertisements and movies, to encourage or discourage tobacco and alcohol</li> <li>Analyze the perception versus the reality of alcohol use in adolescents</li> <li>Demonstrate decision-making skills that lead to being substance-free</li> <li>Identify and summarize positive alternatives to substance use</li> </ul>
<b>7th Grade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain how alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs alter the body and the brain</li> <li>Describe how exercise, nutrition, and positive relationships can mitigate the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</li> </ul>
<b>8th Grade</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Describe how mental and emotional health and life circumstances can affect alcohol or other drug use</li> <li>Analyze the validity of information, products, and services related to the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</li> <li>Analyze the accuracy of images of alcohol and tobacco use conveyed in the media, including advertisements</li> <li>Express intentions to be alcohol, tobacco, and drug free</li> </ul>
<b>High School</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze healthy alternatives to substance use</li> <li>Evaluate strategies for managing the impact of internal and external influences on alcohol, tobacco, and other drug use</li> <li>Analyze the role of individual, family, community, and cultural norms on the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</li> <li>Describe the financial, political, social, and legal influences on the use of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</li> <li>Develop a personal plan to improve health by staying free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs</li> </ul>

## OVERVIEW OF COMMON REACTIONS TO THE LESSON

Our behaviors are influenced by the norms we perceive in the world around us. Utilizing the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey (RACYS), Closing the Gap engages teens with data-driven discussions about media, perception, norms, and peer pressure to align our perceptions with reality and promote positive community norms. Being prepared for the conversations this lesson generates will ensure that youth feel heard and that the dialogue is meaningful and productive. To help your efforts, we have compiled a list of the most frequent reactions to the lesson from teens and responses to help guide your conversations.

### **1. Teens don't answer these surveys honestly. They provided false information. The data being presented is incorrect.**

- Yes, like people of all ages, teens sometimes don't tell the truth- especially when asked about drug use or sexual behavior. But teens don't always lie or not always in the same way. Some won't admit they use drugs while others falsely claim they do. At the end, data experts report that the average of overstating and understating comes close to the reality.
- There are things researchers can do to get more honest answers. How we choose to ask the question, where in the survey (beginning, middle, or end) sensitive questions like drug use are asked, whether the teen is being asked these questions by an interviewer or if they are completing it by themselves, and, if the teen is completing it, are they doing that at school or at home? A lot of careful thought and planning goes into designing effective studies to account for a certain level of error.
- When we compare data from the Rise Above Colorado Youth Survey to other similar surveys, we see the answers are comparable and consistent over time, which lends us to have more confidence in its accuracy.

### **2. All my friends smoke pot. Everyone at my school does drugs.**

- If the people closest to you (friends and family) use substances often then it may be true in your immediate surroundings that everyone is (or a lot of people are) using substances.. It is also true, however, that most youth across Colorado are not using drugs and alcohol. By expanding our focus beyond our immediate surroundings, we have an opportunity to see where there may be disparities among our communities and take action to try to make things better for everyone.

### **3. This is propaganda. Your work is government-controlled. You are biased, and these results are tainted.**

- Yes, we have an agenda by doing this research and supporting this lesson, but we aim to be objective and directly engage youth in critically reviewing this data in an effort to support your own healthy development. The data are YOUR data. The information in this research is what Colorado's youth told us. We didn't make it up - it came from teens 12-17 years of age, all selected at random from across the state.
- We do this work to help youth lead healthy lives, one that allows them to grow up to become the kind of adults they each want to become, making the kind of choices early in life that will help them achieve that future. That's our agenda. Youth who use drugs

often do so out of peer pressure or as a coping mechanism for things like stress. And sometimes, their drug use gets to a point where it begins to define who they are and what they do. Research also tells us that 90% of all addictions begin with substance use before the age of 18. Our agenda is to empower teens to lead a healthy life, free of addiction.

# CLOSING THE »» GAP ««

Closing the Gap  
**FACILITATOR'S GUIDE**



**RISE ABOVE**  
COLORADO