

## Focuses on Reinforcing Protective Factors and Increasing Perceptions of Personal Risk and Harmfulness of Engaging in Specific Unhealthy Practices and Behaviors

**Description:** This characteristic provides opportunities for students to examine current protective factors in their lives and think about ways to increase the modifiable protective factors. Protective factors are assets (internal to individuals) and resources (external to individuals) that counteract, reduce, or eliminate the adverse effects of risk factors.<sup>1</sup> Protective factors can be fixed, meaning they don't change over time — for example, *not* being genetically predisposed to addiction. Protective factors can also be modifiable, meaning they can be changed over time. Examples of modifiable protective factors include having a strong social support system (i.e., family, peers), being successful in school academically, feeling connected to classmates and teachers, and participating in community engagement. Effective health education curricula focus on strengthening and reinforcing modifiable protective factors related to the topic being taught.

An effective curriculum also provides instructional strategies for students to assess their vulnerability to health problems, determine their actual risk of engaging in harmful health behaviors, and evaluate their exposure to unhealthy situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Health Education Curriculum Analysis Tool* (Atlanta, GA: CDC, 2021).



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**Directions:** Click on the grade-level icon below for examples of how to support this characteristic in a lesson.

Grades  
**K - 2**  
EXAMPLE



Grades  
**3 - 5**  
EXAMPLE



Grades  
**6 - 8**  
EXAMPLE



Grades  
**9 - 12**  
EXAMPLE



## Grades K–2 Examples

### Example 1

The unit being taught is Alcohol and Other Drugs, and the healthy behavior outcome (HBO) for the lesson is *AOD-2: Avoid misuse and abuse of over-the-counter and prescription drugs* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. This activity focuses on helping students build the protective factor of seeking the help of a trusted adult when taking any medicine.
2. The teacher begins the activity by showing students a poster or graphic displaying pictures of over-the-counter and prescription drugs. The teacher leads a discussion with students to answer the following questions:
  - a. What is in the containers shown in these pictures?
  - b. What is the most important rule about using medicines?
    - i. Medicine should always be given by a trusted adult or health helper.
3. The teacher explains that trusted adults and health helpers are people who care about them. Trusted adults and health helpers keep students healthy and safe and help them when they are sick or injured. The teacher asks the following questions:
  - a. Why is it important that medicine always be given by a trusted adult?
    - i. Taking the wrong amount of medicine or the wrong medicine can make us very sick.
  - b. Who are trusted adults at home?
  - c. Who are trusted adults and health helpers at school?
  - d. Who are trusted adults outside of school?
  - e. How do trusted adults and health helpers keep you healthy and safe?
  - f. How do trusted adults and health helpers help you when you are sick or injured?
4. The teacher poses a series of what-if situations in which students may encounter unsafe use of medications. Examples may include these situations:
  - a. What if you have a headache, and you know where medicines are kept at your house?
    - i. What is the risk of taking a medication without the help of a trusted adult?
    - ii. Who is a trusted adult who can help you?
  - b. What if you are on the playground at school, and you see a bottle that looks like candy?
    - i. Who is a trusted adult or health helper at school that you can tell about the bottle on the playground?
    - ii. What is the risk of not telling a trusted adult or health helper about the bottle on the playground?
    - iii. What is the benefit of telling a trusted adult or health helper about the bottle?



5. The teacher ends the lesson by reminding the students that
  - a. Trusted adults and health helpers are people who care about them.
  - b. Trusted adults and health helpers keep students safe and help them when they are sick or injured.
  - c. Trusted adults and health helpers are people students can go to for help when they are not feeling well or feel unsafe.

### Example 2

The unit being taught is Safety, and the HBO for the lesson is *S-3: Using safety equipment appropriately and correctly* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. This activity focuses on helping students build the protective factor of correctly wearing a bicycle helmet when riding a bike and learn the risks that could happen when not wearing a helmet.
2. The teacher begins the activity by showing pictures of children correctly and incorrectly wearing helmets while riding bicycles. The teacher leads a discussion with students to answer the following questions:
  - a.. What do all the children in the pictures have in common?
  - b. What are some of the children doing to help keep them safe while riding their bicycles?
  - c. Why is it important to correctly wear a helmet when riding a bicycle?
  - d. What could happen if a student crashes their bicycle if they *aren't* wearing a helmet?
  - e. What would most likely happen if a student crashes their bicycle and they *are* wearing a helmet?
3. The teacher models how to correctly wear a bicycle helmet.
4. The teacher ends the lesson by asking the students a question.
  - a. Why is it important to always wear a bicycle helmet correctly?



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## Grades 3–5 Examples

### Example 1

The lesson that is being taught is avoiding experimenting with or using tobacco and alcohol. The HBOs for the lesson are *T-1: Avoid using (or experimenting with) any form of tobacco* and *AOD-3: Avoid the use of alcohol* (HECAT Appendix 3).

1. The focus of this activity is on the role of family rules as the protective factor for not using or experimenting with tobacco and alcohol.
2. Prior to this lesson, the students have learned about the risks associated with using tobacco and alcohol, the benefits of not using tobacco and alcohol, and the dangers of experimenting with tobacco and alcohol.
3. The teacher begins the lesson by writing the word “protect” on the whiteboard and asks the students to write down how they would define the word “protect.” The teacher and students discuss their definitions of the word “protect.”
4. The teacher explains:
  - a. There are many things that families, schools, and communities can do to help to protect children from using or experimenting with tobacco and alcohol. (See <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/risk-and-protective-factors>.)
  - b. For example, when tobacco and alcohol rules are created in the family and school, they help build a wall of protection for children from tobacco and alcohol.
5. The teacher divides the students into small groups to develop a list of rules that they think families should have to help build a wall of protection for them to avoid the use of tobacco and alcohol. The teacher then has each group write its rules on a large sheet of paper and then posts the rules on the wall. Next, the teacher leads a discussion in which they compare the lists of family rules related to avoiding tobacco and alcohol use.
6. The teacher concludes the activity by having the students complete an exit ticket explaining how family and school rules protect them from using tobacco and alcohol.
7. The teacher distributes a questionnaire survey for students to complete with their parents, caregivers, or guardians. This take-home activity encourages discussion between students and their family members about avoiding the use of tobacco and alcohol. Sample questions could include the following:
  - a. What are our family rules related to the use of tobacco?
  - b. What are the consequences of not following our family rules related to the use of tobacco?
  - c. What are our family rules related to the use of alcohol?
  - d. What are the consequences of not following family rules related to the use of alcohol?



**Note:** Include a space for a parent, caregiver, or guardian signature confirming that they and their child discussed family rules about tobacco and alcohol use. This signature will help make sure that the students discussed the questions with their parent, caregiver, or guardian. It is not meant to judge the family rules about tobacco and alcohol use.

**Note:** If a school has a student population where teachers think most families would have family rules that would encourage tobacco and alcohol use (e.g., if you have a drink, ask me to join you), this take-home activity would not be appropriate to assign. Instead, teachers might ask students to create a list of family rules that would help them stay tobacco and alcohol free.

### Example 2

The unit that is being taught is Mental and Emotional Health, and the HBO for the lesson is *MEH-4: Prevent and manage emotional stress and anxiety in healthy ways* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. This activity focuses on helping students identify the risks associated with not managing stress in healthy ways. The students have already learned about healthy and unhealthy ways to manage stress as well as the benefits of managing stress in healthy ways.
2. The focus of this activity is on the risks of not using healthy ways to manage stress.
3. The teacher begins the activity by asking the students to complete a journal entry in which they identify at least one risk or negative outcome associated with using *unhealthy* ways to manage stress.
4. The teacher posts four pieces of chart paper in the room, and labels them as follows: physical health risks, emotional health risks, social health risks, and thinking/learning health risks.
5. Students are divided into four equal groups and assigned to one of the chart paper stations. Each group is given a different color marker.
6. Each group will have 2 minutes to brainstorm and write the negative consequences or risks of managing stress in unhealthy ways for their assigned category.
  - a. For example, negative consequences or risks under the physical category might include sleeplessness or loss of appetite.
7. After 2 minutes, students rotate to the piece of chart paper to their right. They read the items on the list and add to it. After 2 minutes, the students rotate to the next piece of chart paper and add to that list. They continue this process until they are back to their original piece of chart paper.
8. Students then review the list on their original piece of chart paper and circle the five risks or negative consequences that would most likely convince a teen to practice healthy ways to manage stress.
9. Each group reports its answers to the entire class. The teacher and the students discuss the students' responses for each poster. The teacher emphasizes the physical, emotional, social, and learning risks associated with not using healthy ways to manage stress.
10. The teacher concludes the activity by asking students to identify at least two ways to avoid risks associated with managing stress in unhealthy ways.



## Grades 6–8 Examples

### Example 1

The unit that is being taught is Mental and Emotional Health, and the HBOs for the activity are *MEH-1: Express feelings in a healthy way* and *MEH-4: Prevent and manage emotional stress and anxiety in healthy ways* (HECAT Appendix 3).

1. The teacher begins this activity by posting the words “grief and loss” on the whiteboard. As students enter the classroom, they are given a slip of paper and asked to write down what comes to mind when they hear the words “grief and loss.” What emotions may a young person feel when they experience a loss of something important to them (e.g., family member, pet, breakup of a friendship)? The teacher processes their responses and explains that we all have experienced a loss of some type in our lives that can sometimes make us feel stressed, anxious, and sad. It may also be very difficult to manage our emotions and feelings in a healthy way.
2. The teacher introduces the term “protective factors,” which refers to the kind of things that help protect us from risky or dangerous things. Protective factors create an environment that supports us in managing emotional stress and anxiety. Protective factors can be related to the individual (e.g., connectedness), family (e.g., feeling loved by family), school (e.g., getting good grades), and community (e.g., engagement in extracurricular activities).
3. The teacher pairs students into groups of three and asks students to brainstorm a list of protective factors in each area (individual, family, school, community) that would help them to express their feelings and manage emotional stress and anxiety in healthy ways.
4. Students are then asked to report on their answers. Examples of mental and emotional health protective factors can be found at <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/youthviolence/riskprotectivefactors.html> and <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/about/copingwith-stresstips.html>.
5. The teacher engages in a discussion on the benefits of talking with a trusted adult about feelings and emotions, and the class discusses strategies to help identify a trusted adult. The teacher should emphasize that the more protective factors a young person has in their life, the more likely they will be able to prevent and manage emotional stress and anxiety in healthy ways.
6. The teacher asks students to list on their slips of paper one protective factor they could include or add in their lives and explain how it could help them live healthy and happy lives.

### Example 2

The unit that is being taught is Personal Health and Wellness, and the HBO for the lesson is *PHW-4: Prevent damage from the sun* (HECAT Appendix 3).

1. The focus for this activity is on preventing damage from the sun. Prior to this activity, students have been taught about the risk of sun exposure, the seriousness of protecting oneself from the sun, and sun safety measures:
  - a. Wearing sunscreen
  - b. Wearing a sun-protective hat
  - c. Wearing long-sleeve shirts and pants (covering arms and legs)
  - d. Wearing UV-blocking sunglasses



2. Students have also started personal wellness plans in which they will identify healthy behaviors they want to practice.
3. Students are asked to respond to several questions to assess their risk for sun exposure. They are asked to circle the answer (Never, Sometimes, or Always) that best describes their sun safety behavior for each item. Examples of behaviors include the following:
 

a. I wear sunscreen of SPF 15 or above.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
b. I reapply sunscreen every two hours.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
c. I follow the recommended sunscreen dose on the bottle.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
d. I wear a wide-brimmed hat when I am outside.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
e. I wear long-sleeve shirts and pants.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
f. I wear UV-blocking sunglasses when I drive.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
g. I avoid sunlamps and tanning beds.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
h. I minimize exposure to the sun between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable
i. I seek shade when I can.	Never Sometimes Always Not Applicable

After students have circled their answers, students are asked to choose one item that they have circled as “Sometimes” or “Never.” They are then asked to find a partner who has selected the same item. Each pair is then asked to brainstorm reasons why their selected activity contributes to skin damage and what they are going to do to prevent their skin damage from the sun. Students share one strategy they will incorporate into their personal wellness plan.

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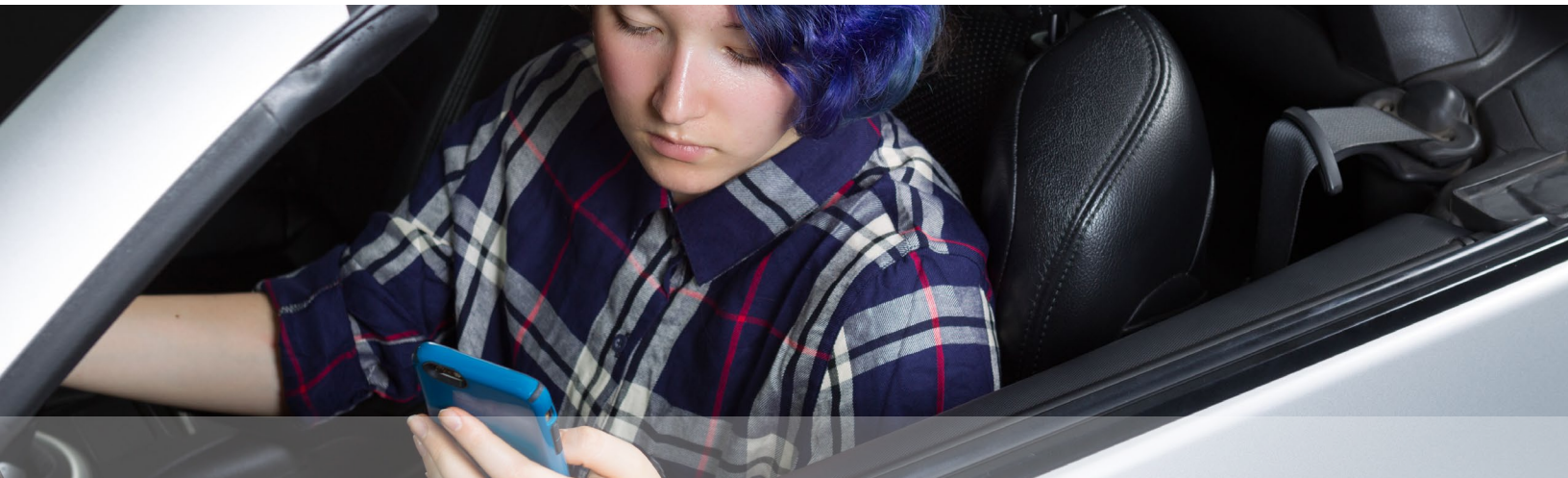
## Grades 9–12 Examples

### Example 1

For this example, the unit that is being taught is Safety, and the HBO for the lesson is *S-1: Follow appropriate safety rules when riding in or on a motor vehicle* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

- The focus for this activity is on preventing distracted driving. Prior to this activity, students have learned about the three categories of distracted driving and examples of each of them.
  - Visual: Taking your eyes off the road
  - Manual: Taking your hands off the wheel
  - Cognitive: Mind and attention is not on driving
- Students are given a list of activities contributing to distracted driving and are asked to circle how often (Never, Sometimes, or Always) they participate in each activity. If students aren't driving yet, they can answer the questions based on the drivers they have ridden with in the past. Examples of activities include the following:

a. I text when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
b. I talk on the phone when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
c. I comb or brush my hair when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
d. I program my navigation system or music when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
e. I eat or drink when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
f. I adjust my heat/air conditioning when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
g. I reach for an object (e.g., dropped phone) when I drive.	Never	Sometimes	Always
h. I look at my passengers when I am talking to them.	Never	Sometimes	Always
i. I look at interesting things along the road while driving.	Never	Sometimes	Always
- After students have circled their answers, students are asked to choose one item that they have circled as “Sometimes” or “Always.” They are then asked to find a partner who has selected the same item. Each pair brainstorms reasons why their selected activity contributes to distracted driving and discusses strategies to eliminate the activity in future driving.
- Students report their lists to classmates.
- Students complete a pledge on reducing or eliminating a distracted-driving activity. Students should include specific activities they will do to reduce or eliminate distracted driving in their pledges. Students will post their pledges in the room to help create a health norm related to reducing or eliminating distracted driving.



## Example 2

The unit that is being taught is Alcohol and Other Drugs, and the HBO for the lesson is *AOD-3: Avoid the use of alcohol* ([HECAT Appendix 3](#)).

1. The teacher begins this activity by explaining the term “protective factors,” which refers to the kind of things that help protect us from risky or dangerous things. Protective factors create an environment that discourages young people from using alcohol. Protective factors can be related to the individual (e.g., has a sense of purpose), family (e.g., supportive family), school (e.g., regular school attendance), community (e.g., clear and consistent rules about underage drinking). This activity focuses on alcohol prevention.
2. The teacher divides students into small groups (three to four people) and assigns each group to a piece of chart paper hanging on the wall. Students should be directed to divide their chart paper into four squares and label them individual, family, school, and community. Students brainstorm examples of protective factors in each category that would help them avoid the use of alcohol.
3. Students report on their answers to the whole class. The teacher can correct or add to the student lists. (Refer to protective factors at <https://ncsacw.acf.hhs.gov/files/TrainingPackage/MOD2/FactorsInfluencingPotential.pdf>.)
4. After the protective factors are clarified, the teacher emphasizes that the more protective factors a young person has in their life, the more likely they will avoid the use of alcohol.
5. The teacher asks students to list two items on their slips of paper:
  - a. One protective factor they already have in their lives
  - b. One protective factor they could realistically add to their lives along with an explanation of how the protective factor could help them avoid the use of alcohol

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