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# BRAIN POWER NEWS

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PARENT NEWSLETTER

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## Introducing the NIDA Junior Scientists Program

Your child is working on the first module of the *National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) Junior Scientists Program*. NIDA is a component of the National Institutes of Health, the largest supporter of health research in the world. Geared to students in fourth and fifth grades, the program discusses the following topics:

- Impact of illegal and legal drugs on our society;
- Different functions of the brain;
- Process of neurotransmission;
- Effects of stimulants on the brain and body;
- Effects of alcohol, marijuana, and inhalants on the brain and body; and
- Addiction.

The overall purpose of the program is to lay a foundation for students to make better decisions about their own health in the future. This newsletter is designed to provide you with information so that you can reinforce at home what your child has been learning in school. Each module has a parent newsletter that includes the following:

- The content of the module;
- Activities you can do at home with your child; and
- Additional resources for more information.

We hope that you and your child enjoy working on the program together and that the knowledge gained now will serve your family well in the future.

## Drugs in Society

Module 1 is designed to encourage students to think about what drugs are, and the impact they have on our society. For this module, we define a drug as any substance that changes the way the body and brain work; examples include medicines, alcohol, caffeine, nicotine, and illegal drugs like marijuana and cocaine. Students will learn the differences between legal and illegal drugs and find examples in the media that show how information about drugs is presented. Students may be surprised to discover that drugs are mentioned often in all types of media. After making this observation, students will have a better understanding of why drug use is such a serious problem to our society.



During Module 1, students will look in magazines, newspapers, on the Internet, and in movies to find out how drugs are portrayed in our society. Students will discover that often drugs are shown as being enticing and appealing. Both men and women shown using drugs are, in some cases, attractive, well dressed, and look successful. The fact that drugs are paired with such positive qualities sends a confusing message to kids. Once the students learn how drugs are presented in the media, they will have a better understanding of why drugs pose such a serious problem to our society.

This activity aligns with a standard identified in the *National Science Education Standards*, guidelines developed in 1996 by the National Academy of Sciences to help schools know what information should be covered in kindergarten through high school. This standard, science in personal and social perspectives, stresses the importance of understanding what drugs are and how they are used so that the students can learn how to make decisions that affect their health.

## **Science at Home**

Ask your child to help you find examples in the media that show how drugs are portrayed. Watch TV or a movie with your child, look through magazines and newspaper articles, listen to music, or surf the Internet. Discuss how the drugs are portrayed, and how the people look who are using these drugs. Talk to your child about these drugs and the confusion that can happen when the media portrays them in a positive manner.

## **Additional Resources**

### **National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA)**

[www.drugabuse.gov](http://www.drugabuse.gov), 301-443-1124

This Web site contains information about drug abuse and a section designed specifically for parents, teachers, and students. Publications and other materials are available free of charge at [drugpubs.drugabuse.gov](http://drugpubs.drugabuse.gov)

### **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information (NCADI)**

<http://store.samhsa.gov>, 1-800-729-6686

NCADI provides information and materials on substance abuse. Many free publications are available here.

*Why Do People Take Drugs?* [Westcott, P.] Chicago, IL: Raintree Publishers, 2001. Students will find this book to be a good starting point when beginning to answer the question of why people take drugs. It covers the various cultural and individual perceptions people have about drug use and how laws governing it differ around the world.

*Drugs and the Media.* [Lee, M. P.] New York: The Rosen Publishers, 1994. In a straightforward, concise manner, this book presents a variety of propaganda techniques in the media, including advertising, entertainment, and news.