

Is This Legit? Accessing Valid and Reliable Health Information

*Created by: The National Institute on Drug Abuse
2021*

Introduction

Health Literacy describes a person's ability to find, understand, and use information and services to inform their health-related decisions and actions.¹ Today, finding and understanding health information requires a combination of skills in reading, math, media interpretation, searching online, and familiarity with science and health terminology.² Applying skills in analyzing, evaluating, and comparing different sources of health information empowers teens to reject misinformation and make choices to access content that is evidence-based and supports their overall health and wellbeing.³ Teens get messages about drugs and alcohol from the news media and social media, as well as their peers, families, and extended social networks.^{4,5} Health literacy can play a role in how teens interpret messages about alcohol and other substances, and can shape their expectations about what may happen if they consume drugs and alcohol.⁶

Image



Lesson Plan Highlights:

- Questions for students
- Student activity sheets
- Teacher's prompts

Grade Level(s):

9, 10, 11, 12

Student Skills:

- Analyzing and interpreting information, data, and/or evidence
- Creativity
- Critical thinking
- English language arts
- Giving a presentation
- Health and life skills
- Reading comprehension

Time / Duration:

- 35 minutes

Materials:

- Computer and internet access
- Paper and pencil or pen
- Access to a printer and arts materials, if they wish to make a collage.
- Copies of the *Questions to Ask as You Evaluate a Source of Health Information Worksheet*

Languages:

- English

Academic Standards:

Healthy Behavior Outcomes

- AOD-2. Avoid experimentation with alcohol and other drugs

National Health Education Standards

- 2. Students will analyze the influence of family, peers, culture, media, technology, and other factors on health behaviors
- 3. Students will demonstrate the ability to access valid information, products, and services to enhance health

Student Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Identify and use resources that provide high-quality health information and give one example of a reputable source.
- Describe how various sources of information (e.g., family, friends, peers, schools, culture, social media, news media) influence their personal health behaviors.

This activity is designed for in-person instruction or can be delivered virtually.

Activity

Teacher prompts are in *italics*.

Part 1

(This portion of the activity will take approximately 20 minutes. You can allow students more time to complete their visual representation if desired. The visual representation can be developed outside of class time, for example. This activity can also be used as a standalone activity, separate from Part 2.)

Before you introduce this part of the activity, ask students to think about what health means by saying: *Think about what health means to you, your body, your mind, and the relationships you have with your friends and in your family. How does health affect how you live every day?*

Next, explain the activity: Students will create a visual representation of how family, friends, peers, community, culture, social media, news media,

and other factors influence what they think and do related to their health. Students can design their visual representation as slides or a collage of printed images or use another platform or media of their choosing.

To help students design their visual representation, share with them this list of questions to think about:

Questions to Think About

- If you wanted to find out something about a health topic, where might you look? Who might you talk to?
- What websites do you go to for health information? (These could include news sites, blogs, YouTube, or others.)
- Who are the people or accounts you follow on social media?
- Where do you see people talk about or share experiences with drugs and alcohol?
- Who are some people that you go to for health information that you trust?
- Who are the people you know in real life whose opinions you trust? (Friends count!)

Answer any questions students might have, then allow them to create their visual representation. You might choose to ask students to share their creation in a future classroom meeting or online in your classroom's board.

ID the Site

The ending of a URL provides clues about how to evaluate the content of a website.

- .com = commercial. Often companies that make money
 - .edu = educational institution. Often universities
 - .gov = government. Usually federal, state, and local agencies
 - .net = network. Could be any site
 - .org = organization. Most often is a nonprofit organization
-

Part 2

(This portion of the activity should take approximately 15 minutes. It can be combined with Part 1 on the same day or different days.)

Connect the work done in Part 1 to Part 2 by saying: *As you have seen, we get information from different types of sources: People, the internet, social media, television. Now we are going to talk about how to decide whether a source of information is valid. “Valid” means a source offers correct, factual information that is based on research.*

Why is it important that health information be valid? How can you determine whether or not a resource provides valid health information?

Allow students to share a few answers, then say: *It’s important to think critically about what you read and where you get your information. Asking some simple questions can often help you determine if health information is based on solid data, or if it contains “.”. Bias can mean that a source provides information based on only one point of view or preference instead of presenting all of the facts. One form of bias is monetary bias, which means that a source earns money for sharing information based on a certain preference. This type of bias – and other types of bias, too – can happen on social media, television, or the internet. Bias can affect people if they already believe one thing to be true. When reading and reviewing information, it’s important to ask yourself questions about bias. For example, you might ask, “Does this source have a reason to offer one point of view over another?”.*

Next, hand out or share online copies of the “Questions to Ask as You Evaluate a Source of Health Information” worksheet (see below). Briefly review the questions in the worksheet with the class, then assign students to breakout rooms/groups of 3 to 4 students each. Assign each group one of the sources of information from the bulleted list below (“Sources of Health Information”) and ask students to answer the worksheet questions based on the source you assigned. The goal of this activity is for students to learn how to determine whether their sources can be trusted to share accurate health information or whether information from that source should be viewed with some caution.

Say: *We hear health messages in a number of ways, including through the media we consume and the people we talk to every day. How do you know*

whether a source of information is trustworthy? From turning to the internet to search for information to scrolling through Instagram, it can be challenging to figure out who and what you can trust to give you the facts. Work with your group to fill out the worksheet to analyze a potential source of information.

Sources of Health Information

Assign each group one of the following:

- The first article you find when you search online for the topic.
- An article on the topic from the Associated Press, National Public Radio, or Reuters (reliable national or international journalism sources. You can pull an article for the students or ask the students to go to these sites and do a search themselves.)
- An article on the topic from the website of a local television news station.
- A Wikipedia article on the topic.
- Your parent/caregiver.
- Your coach or club advisor

Is This Legit?

Accessing Valid and Reliable Health Information

Questions to Ask as You Evaluate a Source of Health Information

Question	Answer
<p>Thinking about your assigned source, do you have reason to believe this source has credible health information? Why? How might your relationship with that source cause you to trust or disbelieve what they say? Does this source have a vested interest in you believing certain things, such as to sell you a product or are they receiving or offering monetary (money) compensation to highlight certain products to their followers.</p>	
<p>Does the source make a very surprising claim? Some people have a flair for dramatic stories or sensational opinions. News headlines and websites sometimes exaggerate health claims to catch readers' attention. Does your source provide evidence for or facts to back up their claim?</p>	
<p>What is the original source of the information? Where does your source get <i>their</i> information?</p>	

Question	Answer
<p>Does your source show bias or slant toward a particular viewpoint? Do they stick to “just the facts” or include personal opinion? Do they leave out key pieces of information, such as the health risks of taking—or not taking—an action?</p>	
<p>Can you find this information in at least one other location? Information that is reliable and trustworthy can be sourced from multiple places. Check other webpages or websites for the same information. Talk to someone else about what you’ve learned. Do some digging and see if you can find at least one other source or story to match the one you first found. What did you discover? What is inconsistent (doesn’t match up) across the two sources? What <i>does</i> match up? Does the opinion of this source match what other trusted sources say about the topic?</p>	
<p>When you look at the website address (the URL), what is the ending? Refer to the box “ID the Site” from earlier in the lesson. Remember that the ending of a URL provides clues about how to evaluate the content of a website. Is the ending .com, .edu, .gov, .net, or .org? What does this ending possibly tell you about who or what owns the website?</p>	