

Do2GetThru

Using Forum Theatre and Community Dialogue to Engage the Culture of Substance Use at Camosun College



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What do you see when you look at this picture? A good time? The potential for trouble?

Is everyone in this photo having as much fun as they appear? Several people may be feeling overwhelmed by school and family obligations. Others may feel uncomfortable with the amount of drinking that is taking place. Some may be using substances to the extent of negatively impacting their health.

The relationship between substance use and a campus community is an important issue to explore. If we take a closer look and dig deep, what else might we discover?

About the Do2GetThru Project

Do2GetThru is a project at Camosun College in Victoria, BC that looks at the culture of substance use on campus.

Since Camosun College is a commuter campus, the landscape around substance use is different from that of many other post-secondary institutions with on-campus student residences. To understand this difference, our college community brought together a small group of student educators to use drama and theatre techniques to both raise awareness and identify key issues that might help facilitate a shift in culture.

To reflect the idea of exploring campus culture, the students involved in this project created a tool that went beyond simply asking questions, writing a survey or seeking input—the tool was designed to be interactive and supportive of having a real conversation from a place of curiosity and non-judgment. The aim of these conversations is to increase awareness about the often-unacknowledged benefits people may derive from using substances, while also considering the drawbacks of overuse.

Goals of the Project

- Reduce stigma related to substance use and mental health
- Develop a partnership with the larger Healthy Minds community of practice at Camosun College
- Increase awareness of supports and resources for substance use and mental health issues
- Find community solutions to harmful or substance use on campus

As part of this project, Camosun also sought to develop a tool that could be shared with other campuses interested in engaging in a similar process. These tools include:

1. The Do2GetThru video and dialogue facilitation guide
2. A brief sample forum theatre script and accompanying forum theatre scene guide



The DoToGetThru blog asked students what they do to cope with academic pressures, relieve stress and identify supports.

The responses received started the conversation about healthy relationships with substances at Camosun and informed the development of project video.



Watch the Do2GetThru video at community.healthycampuses.ca/resource/dotogetthru-video/

A Facilitation Guide for the Do2GetThru Video and Dialogue Session

The Do2GetThru video can be used in a variety of ways as an engaging tool. The following is one way that has been effective on the Camosun College campus in generating thoughtful dialogue about mental health and substance use. The video was constructed in three segments:

1. the Opening Texting Sequence
2. the Party Scene
3. the End Texting Scene

At our institution, we showed the video to a group of campus members and engaged them in an open, non-judgmental dialogue about their views on substance use and the culture of substance use on campus. After each segment, there is a *Pause and Poll* moment offered as an opportunity to stimulate thinking and open up discussion.

1. Opening Texting Sequence

Background: The opening texting sequence in the video is meant to highlight the various pressures that students have spoken of in our discussions of campus life. The scene offers some of the different expectations, demands and deadlines that students find themselves juggling in an attempt to balance their various roles in school, family and work. Students often present at counselling services and report significant stress as a result of competing demands. Staff and faculty at the institution are sometimes unaware of the various challenges students face outside of their academic responsibilities and may unintentionally contribute to stress. As a result, students may use substances to relax or temporarily escape the pressures they are experiencing.

Pause and Poll #1

The Pause and Poll is an opportunity to engage the group in a dialogue about what they have just witnessed. Here you may pause the video and open up the discussion. We have developed the following prompt questions to facilitate discussion, but feel free to create your own!

- Is this a typical situation for students on your campus?
- What pressures were not represented that students often face or could face?
- What are some of the first signs of stress you identify within yourself?

“There are no good drugs or bad drugs. There are only good or bad relationships with drugs.”

—Dr. Andrew Weil, *American physician, author and holistic health professional*¹

2. Party Scene

Background: The Party Scene aims to stimulate discussion around multiple topics. Firstly, the scene spotlights the use of various substances identified by students at Camosun College through an informal poll. The most frequently cited substances include alcohol, cannabis, energy drinks, caffeine and prescription drugs. While not a comprehensive list of the substances used within a post-secondary context, the students in the project felt these were the most commonly used at Camosun.

Secondly, this segment is intended to showcase some of the motivations behind substance use, as well as the benefits and harms such use can offer. The students who created the video felt that the potential negative consequences of use needed to be counterbalanced with the positive outcomes that motivate use in the first place.

The goal of this segment is to present a non-judgmental view of substance use and explore the diverse relationships individuals can have with substances. This approach differs from simply presenting the dangers of substance use.

Pause and Poll #2

This second Pause and Poll is another opportunity to have a discussion about what the group has just seen in the video. The following are some possible questions to facilitate discussion:

- What substances do you think are most commonly used at your institution?
- What benefits and/or drawbacks do you think people experience from using these substances?
- What are other ways in which people on campus could be supported to maintain their well-being and/or manage their stress?

3. End Texting Scene

Background: The second texting segment demonstrates the aftermath of the party and the return of everyday realities. Here the student realizes that the pressures of family, relationships and school remain. This can often be a time when students feel so overwhelmed that they might consider just giving up. The dialogue at this point is to encourage an awareness of resources and supports, and foster some discussion of what can be done when we feel like it's just too much.

Pause and Poll #3

For this discussion, you might invite the group to talk about ways they can cope with existing pressures, better support one another and access various resources available on campus and in the community.

Forum Theatre Scene Workshop Guide

Overview



Forum theatre is a type of interactive, dialogue-centered theatre in which individuals can explore social/emotional/

cultural struggles, issues or conflicts with the intention of collectively working through ideas for a potential resolutions. It is an approach that encourages groups to dive deeply and explore the complexities of an issue at both a mental and emotional level. Augusto Boal, a Brazilian artist/activist, originally developed this method. Please see the resources at the end of this manual for more detailed information on forum theatre.²

In addition to the video and dialogue tool, facilitators can present a short scene using either the attached script, or by creating a small two- or three-person skit about a specific issue or situation identified by a campus member—a “what would you do if...?” type of scenario.

The purpose of the script provided is to highlight a situation in which students are faced with the discomfort of approaching someone who they suspect may be dealing with depression or harmful use of substances. The following are some basic guidelines for a short forum theatre experience.





Facilitator

There is one person who will help facilitate the dialogue between the audience and the members who are playing characters. Unlike traditional theatre, the audience members are not spectators, but participants; what Boal would call “spect-actors”. It is important not to judge the various ideas or interventions offered by participants, but to open up dialogue for the whole group to consider a particular idea or intervention. The facilitator must make all individuals feel comfortable, and invite them to take part in the scenario. Audience members should not offer direction as an observer. They should act out, rather than simply voice, their ideas by taking part the scenario.

Characters

The scene must have at least two participants, but can also include additional characters. Please see the guidelines below:

- Character 1: The person experiencing the challenge
- Character 2: The person that leads the challenge
- Character 3, 4, etc.:*

*Additional characters are encouraged to enter the scenario in an effort to support the person experiencing the challenge in response to the person leading the challenge.

Scene and Dialogue Process

The scene is usually about 3-5 minutes and is presented twice in its entirety with no interruptions. This gives members of the audience an opportunity to identify issues being presented and to observe and experience some of the tensions enacted.

The audience is then instructed to watch the scene again. If they notice something that causes them discomfort or a moment whereby they think they could intervene and change the situation, they are encouraged to call out, “STOP!”

After calling out “stop”, the audience member who spoke is then prompted to come up on stage and take the place of the actor who is in a position similar to their own—either the individual experiencing the challenge or a potential actor.

Rules for Spect-Actors

- The audience member who steps in is not allowed to simply “make the problem go away” or do something “magical” to resolve the challenge
- Original actors are left on stage
- No physical interventions are permitted
- An audience member is never to take the place of the person leading the challenge

The person stepping in can choose the spot where the scene starts again and run through the scenario using their new idea to respond to the situation.

After the new scene has played out, the facilitator debriefs with the group to open up dialogue about the proposed intervention and their overall response to the scene. The following are some potential questions for discussion:

- What did you think of the proposed response?
- Could you imagine this response working in real life?
- What might you do differently if it were up to you? (If someone answers and says they would do something differently, ask them to demonstrate—actions speak louder)

Script Sample

Two or three person—short scene

In the following scene we see two people talking about a mutual friend, Sarah. Carol is quite concerned about Sarah's change in behaviour; whereas Jen calls her out for being too overprotective, going as far as to characterize her as “crazy” and inadvertently perpetuate the stigma around mental health and substance use. In order to address Jen's stigmatizing use of language, audience members are invited to take the place of Carol and challenge Jen directly about the implications of her comments.

Note

If you choose to have 3 people and have someone play Sarah, who will enter at the end of the scene, then you may choose to add a person/friend/ally who can express his or her concern directly to Sarah. Jen would stay in character and tell Carol she is over-reacting for the purpose of letting Sarah off the hook. The idea is to experience how you might respond to Sarah in this situation and find a way to address both the issue of Sarah's change in behaviour and Jen's irresponsible use of language.

Audience members can also add a different character into the scene if they wish to approach the situation from another angle.



Post-scene discussion

Did Jen recognize the effect her choice of words had? Did Sarah reflect on her use of substances? The outcome of this scene will differ depending on the persons involved. After all, the purpose of the exercise is not to find a resolution for the characters, but to reflect on the culture of substance use on your campus.



FORUM THEATRE SCRIPT

CAROL

Hey Jen—did you see Sarah last night—she was so hammered, which is so not like her—and she's been missing her classes—and not connecting with us anymore—have you noticed?

JEN

No, not really—I think she is just finally having a good time—I even saw her outside sharing a bowl with Craig—I always thought she was a bit boring—she's actually having a good time—I think it was probably nice for her to let loose.

CAROL

Um, well she also didn't hand in her draft to me of the final report for the project and we can't pass without her copy, I'm kind of worried about her, maybe we should talk to her—I know she has dealt with depression in the past.

JEN

(rolls her eyes and sighs)

Oh Carol—stop with the drama, we all get a little down, it's not 'depression'—it's not like she is some 'crazy person,' she's just having some fun!—lay off with the mothering thing.

CAROL

I just...

Sarah walks in and they both look at her

CAROL AND JEN

Oh hi Sarah.

END SCENE

ADD THIS SEGMENT IF YOU WANT TO INCLUDE A THIRD PERSON IN THE SCENARIO:

SARAH

Oh hi guys—what are you up to?

JEN

Oh nothing—just hanging

CAROL

(hesitantly)

Well actually Sarah we were...

JEN

(cuts Carol off)

Really just hanging out—I heard you had fun the other night, good for you—letting loose a little!

END SCENE

Further Resources

The following are some further resources about Theatre of the Oppressed and Forum Theatre.

Osburn, Kaitlen M., "Forum Theatre Empowering Students to Speak, Act, and Know" (2010). Honors College Capstone Experience/Thesis Projects. Paper 245.

Retrieved from: http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/stu_hon_theses/245

Taite, John. Ed. Rhona Dunett, "Introducing Forum Theatre: As a tool to explore issues of equality and discrimination". National Association for Youth Drama/ ArtsTrain.

Retrieved from: www.youththeatre.ie/content/files/Theatre-Forum-Resource-web.pdf

Mandala Centre for Change—<http://www.mandalaforchange.com/resources/articles>

"Theatre of the Oppressed: A Tool for Change"

Retrieved from: <http://orccamericorps.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/0/4/13042698/theateroftheoppressed.pdf>



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1. Weil, A., Rosen, W. (1998) From chocolate to morphine. Everything you need to know about mind altering drugs. New York NY. Houghton Mifflin Co.
2. Boal, Augusto. Theatre of the Oppressed. New York: Urizen Books, 1979. (Republished by Routledge Press in New York/ London in 1982.)

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