



Version 3.0

Reality Check Mentor (RCM) Handbook

Introduction / Overview

The Reality Check curriculum is designed for grades 4, 5, and 6, although, depending upon the configuration of your community's elementary and middle school grades, you can certainly adapt it to fit your needs. The curriculum was designed by Northern Lights SADD using input from our state advisory board students.

The idea behind Reality Check is to give elementary school students the tools they need to address the issues they are facing, or soon *will* face as they approach middle school age. Using SADD members as *teachers* for the curriculum will make the lessons have more impact than if they heard the same message from adults. Another advantage to the students receiving the lessons is that they will have the support of the existing SADD program as soon as they reach middle school. They will be fully prepared to become productive chapter members.

The key thing to remember is that the most important part of the curriculum is *you* – the student facilitator. These lessons will give you a rare opportunity to make a significant difference in the lives of the young people you are working with. This is also a significant responsibility. Be sure to take your role very seriously. Be professional in your approach. But, we also want it to be fun for you and for the students you work with. There are certain points in the lessons that it is important to highlight, and those points, in particular, will be explained in this handbook. However, we want you to use your creativity in the presentations. If there is something that you want to do differently, do it.

Reality Check is intended to go hand-in-hand with our existing Get REAL program, which is designed to correct misperceptions that teens have regarding the behavior of their peers. Skim through the Get REAL “factoid” sheets available to be viewed and downloaded off our web site, www.nlsadd.com. Use these facts to back up the points made in the lessons.

Implementation Changes in Reality Check Version 2

RC v. 2 includes two important changes to the suggested implementation structure:

- 1) A parental component. We want to engage parents in supportive dialog on the issues raised by the lessons so that the material presented can be reinforced at home. It will also serve the purpose of educating parents about the issues identified as important by high school students who know what is going on at the local level.
- 2) Subtle changes to the lessons to better enable them to be used in an out-of-school setting. There are a lot of school and community factors that may indicate that an out-of-school setting would work better for implementation of the lessons than taking class time away from either the high school or elementary students.

Preparation

It is important to visit with your school administrators, guidance counselor, and elementary teachers to familiarize them with the curriculum and what we hope to achieve through the program. Tell them that the curriculum and evaluations have been designed to use a new and exciting way to apply proven scientific prevention principles. Originally

introduced in 2003, Reality Check has been presented to thousands of students, with proven positive effects. Version 2 includes rewritten lessons and a more youth-friendly evaluation tool, building upon experience gained from the initial release of the program, and the changes should produce even better results.

Be sure to visit with school personnel early in the school year so that you can arrive at a workable plan for implementing the program, including evaluations. There are seven lessons for each of the three grades.

In-School Lesson Settings:

If the lessons are presented during class time, the lesson schedule should be designed to cause minimal disruption. The lessons should be spaced out throughout the school year, not given “all at once.” On the other hand, we should not have too much time between lessons, either, because we want to be sure the students are still familiar with the previous lesson(s).

Out-of School Lesson Settings:

Reality Check can also be presented in an after-school or out-of-school format. Depending upon local circumstances, lessons can be presented in the evening or during weekends. Some lessons can be grouped together and be covered during the same session. We would suggest that all of the lessons be completed during three sessions, combining the lessons like this:

- *Session 1: Respect for Self and Respect for Others (Lessons 1 and 2)*
- *Session 2: The Effect of Alcohol on the Brain and Other Drugs (Lessons 3 and 4)*
- *Session 3: Other issues, peer pressure, etc. (Lessons 5-7)*

Lessons should be taught by teams of two or three facilitators. Naturally, you need to be properly prepared to give your lessons. Allow yourselves adequate time for planning and rehearsal, and practice your lesson in front of your advisor and other chapter members first.

Remember that some of the lessons involve a brief art project, and you will have to arrange for supplies to be on hand prior to the lesson. Visit with the classroom teacher and/or SADD advisor about this. Also, it may help the effectiveness of the lessons if the teacher can come up with a class project that follows the completion of particular lessons. In some schools, the art project component has been completed by the classroom teacher at some time after the lesson has been taught, and the teacher has used this opportunity for further discussion on the lesson topic.

Parent Involvement

There are many ways in which parents can be involved in the process, whether you are presenting the lessons on an in-school or out-of-school basis. Talk to your SADD advisor and school personnel about the best ways to accomplish it in your school or community. Some of the methods include:

- *High school teen panels for students to discuss issues going on in your school, taking questions from parents. (This can be a great way to raise interest for your first parent meeting and establishing the importance of the Reality Check lessons.)*
- *Parent meetings that run concurrently with the youth lessons (for out-of-school settings). These meetings can be led by the SADD advisor and a couple of SADD members where the topics being covered at the same time with the elementary students.*
- *Educational videos*
- *Parent handouts accompanying some of the Reality Check lessons (provided in this workbook)*
- *An information table set up at Parent-Teacher conferences*
- *Online parent tools on the www.nlsadd.com web site*
- *“Graduation” parties for students completing the curriculum*

Evaluations

The evaluation process is a vital part of the curriculum. Not only will it show if we are achieving the desired results out of the program, but they may also pick up trends that will help us keep our programming current.

The evaluations can be administered either by student facilitators or the classroom teacher. Visit with the school administrators and teachers to decide upon how you want to handle this.

The evaluation system is a pre and post-curriculum evaluation. In other words, the students will receive the same set of questions before the curriculum starts and after the final lesson has been given.

The evaluation answer sheets are considered confidential information. Return them immediately to your chapter advisor, who should then send them to the designated address as soon as possible so that the results can be compiled. After the results are scanned and processed, you will receive an analysis of the effectiveness of the Reality Check curriculum.

Do not have the students put their name on the evaluation forms. Tell them the information they give is totally confidential, so we want to make sure they are completely honest in their answers.

Individual Lesson Notes

Grade 4

Lesson 4-1: Self-Image

Low self-esteem is at the heart of virtually all “destructive decisions.” People usually resort to using ATOD or engaging in other destructive behaviors because they feel they are “lacking” in some way. One of the primary purposes behind the Reality Check curriculum is to convince young people that they are exactly the person they were meant to be, and that although we all have individual characteristics and strengths and weaknesses, this is the way it is supposed to be. We all have a very special purpose and we have all the tools necessary to do our jobs. No one is lacking in any real way. We want the students we are working with to become comfortable with who they are and recognize the potential they have.

In this lesson, we try to get the students to realize the importance of self-image, and we try to get the students thinking about themselves in a positive way. Another important part of this lesson is *you*. Tell them about feelings you have had about yourself and how you have overcome them. The students will remember this.

Key points:

- Self image isn't the way we look or what other people think of us. It's how we see or picture ourselves.
- Self-image can either positively or negatively influence decisions.

Lesson 4-2: Bullying

This lesson is self-explanatory and gives you a lot of room to use your creativity in role-playing! Be sure to consult with the classroom teacher in advance of the lesson in case a bullying situation is already present involving some of the students. If so, there may be a special way he or she wants to handle the topic.

Key point:

- Bullying is a widespread problem that can lead to other problems for both the victim and the bully if it isn't dealt with. Students need to learn ways to deal with bullying, and they need to help each other not to allow bullying to take place. If we can get everyone to feel better about themselves, a lot of bullying can be prevented.

Lesson 4-3: Alcohol and the Brain

Lesson number three in each of the three grade tracks focuses upon the effects of alcohol on the brain. It is one of the most important lessons of all. Beginning at about age 11 and lasting until about age 22, the brain undergoes a very important development stage. During this time, the brain literally “re-wires” itself, with nerve endings interconnecting

with each other. At this time, young people learn complex problem-solving skills, develop a better sense of memory, and learn behavioral responses. Studies conducted in the past year or two have shown that alcohol use during these years can interfere with the brain's development. In addition to this, alcohol use can become ingrained into a person's normal behavior pattern, making serious alcohol problems a very real possibility in the near future. In addition, the center of the brain responsible for regulating risky behavior isn't fully developed until about age 25, adding to the susceptibility of youth to the negative consequences of alcohol. In this lesson, we use examples to show how alcohol can affect the way the brain works.

At the end of this lesson we have added a special message. We have to be aware that some of the students have parents who drink, and we don't want to turn them against their parents. (If we can get them to question their parents about their alcohol use, fine, but we don't want to encourage them to do that.) We don't want to create dozens of irritated parents! Therefore, probably the best way to address the "legal drinking age" problem is to say that there are good reasons why it is illegal for young people to drink, and that we are giving the students information that we simply didn't have until the past few years. We have just gotten smarter and found out that it is very dangerous to drink at any time during the pre-teen and teenage years. And, best of all, if a person doesn't drink during their teen years, they probably won't drink when they get to be an adult, either.

Lesson 4-4: Saying "No" to Drugs

This is a logical follow-up to the lesson about alcohol. (Be sure to remind the kids that alcohol is a drug, too, and remains the #1 drug problem in the country.)

Talk to the teacher and/or guidance counselor to see if they have handouts related to specific drugs that can be an additional educational tool.

This lesson also brings up the topic of "natural highs," which are activities and experiences that can create the release of the same chemicals, like endorphins, from the brain.

Make copies of the worksheet to hand out to each of the students.

Lesson 4-5: Cliques

This session is in the track on Peer Pressure & Relationships. I am sure you have had experiences of your own with classmates (maybe including yourself) who have formed a negative clique which tends to exclude others, and which includes extreme pressures to be "like everyone else" to continue fitting in. Too many times, being part of a clique leads to involvement with alcohol or other risky behaviors. This is your chance to try to prevent younger students from having to go through the same thing, or at very least, to let them know this same thing has been going on for years, and to give them advice for how to handle the situation.

This lesson, in particular, is one where we want to give you a lot of flexibility in your presentation. You know better than anyone else what the conditions with cliques are in your school, and virtually everyone has personal testimony they can share related to

cliques among your peers. There are a couple of key points we want to be sure we get across, though:

- Even the “popular” kids have insecurities. They are no different from anyone else in this way. This kind of popularity is also very temporary. Try to get the kids to concentrate on what is really meaningful.
- Learn to handle peer pressure by deciding to say “no” *before* someone asks you.
- If you say “no,” people may react negatively at first, but deep down, they will respect you.
- Find a support group of friends who accept you for who you are, and always try to treat everyone else the same way you want to be treated.

This would also be an excellent opportunity to briefly recap Lesson #1 and #2, about self-image and respect for others, and how those ideals can go a long way toward avoiding the creation of negative cliques.

Lesson 4-6: Respect for Your Body

This lesson can be a fun one, and a good introduction into the issue of media awareness.

Too many people try to be just like their favorite person from TV, or like the male and female models they see in the magazines. While sometimes it can be a positive thing to try to emulate someone you look up to, far too often it can cause problems with body image, including eating disorders.

In this lesson we want to discuss both positive and negative ways a person can enhance their body image. *However, it is very important that we point out that every person is different, including different shapes and sizes, and that’s the way it’s supposed to be.* The key is to help the students stay away from extremes – trying to be too thin and to try to avoid the problem of obesity.

In this lesson, we want to get the students to live with a healthy balance of diet and physical activity, and we bring up the concept of achieving “natural highs”.

Tell the students that if they or any of their friends become involved with an eating disorder, to get help immediately.

Lesson 4-7: Who Wants to Play Follow the Leader? (Leaders vs. Bosses)

This is a pretty easy concept and doesn’t need much explanation. This is another area where you can do some role-playing to illustrate positive and negative ways of being a leader.

Perhaps the most important thought you can leave the students with is the fact that you can be a true leader and influence others by making the right choices. Be very convincing about this and cite some examples of your friends and others in the high school who are true leaders in this way.

Lesson 4-8: Healthy Eating Oh My

(need a synopsis)

Lesson 5-1: Core Values

There is one key point you have to keep in mind before we say anything more:

If this is the first year you are presenting the Reality Check curriculum, the 5th graders will not have received lesson 4-1, which is about self-image and accepting yourself for who you are. Even if they did receive the lesson the year before, you should review the concepts included in the lesson. It is important that we continue to tie these lessons together, as the concepts are all inter-related and dependent upon each other. So, before you get into lesson 5-1 with the students, spend some time to over the key concepts of lesson 4-1. If you haven't read the Facilitator Handbook instructions telling about lesson 4-1, do it. It is important in explaining how crucial self-esteem is to what we are trying to accomplish through this curriculum.

Lesson 4-1 told about how important self-image is to our self-esteem, and that each of us is exactly the person we were meant to be. Lesson 5-1 stresses how our values, to a large part, define the person we are.

Leave the students with the thought that their values are something no one can take away from us, and can serve as a powerful guide to decisions we make in life. Stress to them that the value they place on remaining free of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs, and staying away from other negative decisions is one of the most precious values they can have. It is something they have to work hard at trying to keep, and they should help each other keep that value as well.

Lesson 5-2: Random Acts of Kindness

This is a simple lesson with a very powerful message: Everyone has good qualities that need to be recognized and appreciated, and kindness is perhaps the most powerful tool we all have to make a difference to those around us. Unfortunately, all of us fall short when it comes to expressing kindness whenever we have the opportunity to do so.

The best thing that the student facilitators can do to enhance this lesson is to be as sincere as you possibly can in putting kindness in a very favorable light and describe it as a very normal thing to do.

Lesson 5-3: Dreaming Big

Read the handbook entry for lesson 4-3, and it will underscore the importance of this lesson track on alcohol and the brain. It is one of the primary reasons for this entire curriculum. Be sure to review the main points of lesson 4-3 in the handbook, which will help to explain the effect alcohol can have on the nerve endings of the brain. And because we have replaced the 5th grade lesson on drugs and replaced it with Internet safety, it is important to mention marijuana and other drugs in this lesson, as the effects and underlying causes are so similar.

It would be wise to support this lesson with Get REAL factoid pieces to help illustrate the points we make in the lesson.

Obviously, the primary goal of this lesson is to stress to the students that if they use alcohol during their teen years, it is possible that they may not become the person they could have been had they stayed away from alcohol. Do everything you can to convince them not to use alcohol. Don't preach at them, just be very firm and convincing. We **KNOW** you can make a difference. Be confident in your ability.

You will note in this lesson that we list a web site that we would like you to access at the proper time in the presentation. This site has some great images of teen drinker and non-drinker brains as well as some information that supports the content of this lesson. *Check with the classroom teacher to make sure you are able to access this web site and show it to the students during the lesson.* We have also recommended this link in the Parent Connection handout.

Lesson 5-4: Online Safety (Internet and Social Media)

Obviously, you don't have to be reminded that a huge part of daily life for youth revolves around the Internet and social networking platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as video sharing services such as YouTube. Unfortunately, there are many people lurking in cyberspace who are looking for innocent, young people to exploit. Internet safety has become a very real issue.

This lesson contains some common-sense guidelines for safe usage of social networking sites, as well as some important information for parents.

Lesson 5-5: V.I.P. (Very Important People)

It is very important for all of us to have people in our lives whom we can trust unconditionally. Perhaps never is this more true than when young people are growing up, experiencing changes and pressures they have never had to face before. It is also a time when the foundations for lifelong behavior patterns are set. If a young person feels uncomfortable turning to people for help, becomes reclusive, and finds it hard to be honest and open with others, chances are that person will have those same tendencies for the rest of his or her life. This can be particularly tragic if that person finds him or herself mixed up with alcohol and other drugs, becomes sexually active, develops an eating disorder, is depressed, or is contemplating suicide.

Probably the most important thing you can add to this lesson is your own testimony about how important it is for you to have someone you can turn to.

Studies, including some conducted by national SADD and Liberty Mutual Insurance, in their *Teens Today* surveys, have found that there is a definite lack of communication between teens and parents concerning important issues such as ATOD use, sexual activities, etc. We need to do everything we can to help establish a trusting relationship between the students we are working with and adults they can feel comfortable with.

Lesson 5-6: Mad, Sad, or Depressed?

This lesson is a natural follow-up to the previous one about adult relationships. Many people suffer from feelings of depression, and one of the most important points we can make is that it is *nothing to be ashamed of*. Young people have a lot of things going on in their lives, and they are facing a lot of changes – in their bodies, among their friends, facing peer pressure, and maybe other things they have no control over – divorce, death, moving to a new school, to name just a few. If it goes unchecked, depression can lead to such things as substance abuse or suicidal thoughts.

We need the students to become familiar with signs of depression. These may be signs they see in one of their friends, or maybe in themselves. Make the students know that depression is a very common thing, but also make sure they know what to do about it.

Lesson 5-7: Dealing with the Media

This lesson can be a lot of fun! This will be a good opportunity to vent your frustrations over advertising, “cool” people on television, cover girls on magazines, and so forth. We want to educate the students about the real intentions behind advertisers, and how they try to prey upon emotions to help sell their products. For instance, beer commercials always show guys getting the “hot” girls, or imply that all “real” men drink beer. *Not quite....*

Have fun with this one, and be sure to save time at the end of the lesson for a review of all of the lessons.

Lesson 5-8: Everyday Fitness

(need a synopsis)

Sixth Grade Lessons

In the 6th grade tracks, it is important to include concepts contained in the 4th and 5th grade tracks that go along the same line. So, be sure that you read over the grade 4 & 5 materials, pick out the key concepts, and include them in your grade 6 lessons. Be sure to read the handbook sections dealing with those lesson tracks and discuss your lesson plan with your advisor. The 6th grade track is when we need to put “all the pieces” together, so be sure you are thorough in your preparation and get lots of in-class discussion going.

Lesson 6-1: My Choices = Me

Lesson 4-1 dealt with self-image, and lesson 5-1 described how our values help define who we are. 6-1 takes this same thought a step further, talking about how our choices – our actions – define the person we are.

As will be the case with the rest of the grade 6 lessons, much of the sessions will revolve around open discussion. Therefore, it is important that you develop a good working relationship with the students right away. The best way to do this is to use some of your own testimony. If you are open with them, they will be much more likely to be open with you. This may take a little time, and you may want to make sure their classroom teacher

is there to help “draw the kids out of their shells” a bit. The fact that you are asking the students to do some role-playing should help to loosen them up pretty quickly.

Lesson 6-2: Agree to Disagree

This lesson is about respecting differences between people, regardless of what those differences are. It goes hand in hand with lesson 6-1, which includes accepting *ourselves*. As you get to know the students better and work together with their classroom teacher, there may be particular local issues that it would be helpful to discuss that aren't mentioned in the curriculum pieces. Consult with your advisor about this and feel free to adapt this as you see fit.

The first activity should be a lot of fun for you and the students, and should be something the students remember for quite awhile!

Lesson 6-3: America's Biggest Drug Problem - Alcohol

As we have said before about the track 3 lessons, this subject is one of the primary reasons for this entire curriculum. Alcohol is a huge, yet underrated, problem, and recent scientific studies are practically screaming at us to do something about it.

This is another lesson where it is going to be vitally important to include a good deal of the 4th and 5th grade components, because they provide the background for the grade 6 lesson.

Be sure to include Get REAL factoid sheets related to alcohol use, and get a good discussion going with the students about this crucial topic. Highlight the fact that the same reasons kids use for drinking can be the same reasons they may turn to harder drugs, in search for a “higher high.”

Lesson 6-4: Media Awareness

This lesson will be a lot of fun, both for the students and the presenters. It gives everyone a chance to examine the way the media targets young people for selling their merchandise, going to their movies, watching their TV shows, or going to the concerts by the recording artists tied in some way to the large media conglomerates.

Note: One of the popular youth celebrities from the past mentioned is Hannah Montana. Because popularity fades (which is another point you can bring up in your lesson!), there may be examples of other celebrity figures that you can insert instead.

Lesson 6-5: Handling Stress and Anxiety

Synopsis needed

Lesson 6-6: Influence Literacy

This is the first lesson in which we really strive to put all the pieces together. Self-esteem, respect for others, knowledge about ATOD's, knowing how to face peer pressure, and

knowing where to turn for help are all important components of being strong and being yourself.

In this lesson, be sure to mention key concepts of lesson 4-5 (cliques) and 6-5 (**adult support**), but also stress the importance of being comfortable with the person you are and realizing you are exactly the person you were meant to be.

When leading the discussions about refusal skills, or being able to say “no,” be sure to emphasize the reasons *why* it is the best thing to do. *Try to incorporate as many ideas from previous lessons as possible.*

Resisting peer pressure is a very important skill we need to teach these students. The program evaluations deal with this, too, so it is critical that you do everything you can to teach these skills to the students.

Lesson 6-7: Life is an Adventure

In this lesson, too, we try to put all the concepts together. This time, we use those concepts in a way to help us when we try to convince the students that they can have a good time without jeopardizing their future with ATOD’s, etc. In other words, we want to teach them they can have adventure without risk, and attain “natural highs.”

Naturally, we need to convince the students that “fun” does not require breaking the law or doing other destructive behaviors. Be sure to also emphasize the kinds of dangerous things people can do even when they’re sober – speeding, racing, or not wearing seat belts. Convince them that nothing is more important than making sure they are safe.

Lesson 6-8: SADD 101

At this point, you have done virtually all you can do to give the students the tools to make the right decisions, which become particularly important as they reach middle school / jr. high age. Now, it is time to let them know they are lucky, because they will be able to put that knowledge to use beginning next year in SADD. Tell them about the thousands of members statewide and millions of members nationwide who are committed to making the right choices and making a difference.

Give them your best sales pitch! Even ask them what sort of things they would like to do in SADD next year, and encourage them to think ahead along those lines.

There is an important note listed in the “So What?” portion of this lesson, dealing with the difference between just giving students “knowledge” and giving them “understanding.” As SADD students, you obviously are making smart choices not just because you have “knowledge.” You are living the lifestyle you are and have the passion to work with these younger students because of some feeling deeper inside of you. That feeling inside is what we are referring to as “understanding.” You *get it*. You know what it’s all about. You have been able to tie everything together, you believe in yourself and your choices, and you feel good because of it. This feeling is *precisely* what we want you to do your best to instill in the students you are working with.