STORY OF CHOICES
A Guide for Educators and Schools
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We’ll be happy to provide further information on this method and receive feedback. Contact us via [www.klaarihelsinki.fi](http://www.klaarihelsinki.fi)  

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Introduction

The Story of Choices is a substance use education method targeted at 6th grade pupils and their parents or guardians. The objective of the Story of Choices is to offer pupils a high-quality method based on continuous assessment and development. The Story of Choices is implemented in cooperation between various professional groups working with local children and young people, third-sector parties and young people themselves. The Story of Choices consists of an orientation session for educators, a Story of Choices lesson for pupils, a parents’ night and a feedback lesson for pupils given by a teacher. The Story of Choices lesson includes a story, action-based exercises and discussion. The idea is to ask the right questions instead of providing answers that we think of as the right ones. In Helsinki, the party responsible for the Story of Choices is Klaari Helsinki.

This guide deals with issues on which substance abuse prevention, substance use education and the Story of Choices are based, and their objectives. The guide also presents an overview of how the Story of Choices is implemented in practice. The guide and its appendices are available online at www.klaarihelsinki.fi.

A warm thank you to those who have contributed to the development and implementation of the Story of Choices over the years.

From the early days to present

The Story of Choices method (prior to 2014, the Tunnel of Choices) was launched in 2001 at an experiential substance use education event called the Tunnel of Choices, organised in north-eastern Helsinki. The method received positive feedback from both children and school staff. In summer 2002, a multi-professional planning group was set up. It was comprised of a school welfare officer and public health nurse, as well as representatives of the youth services, social and health services, the parish, the Finnish Red Cross, Youth Against Drugs, YMCA Helsinki and Klaari Helsinki. The Tunnel of Choices was tested at Jakomäki primary school in May 2004. In the 2004–2005 school year, 6th-grade pupils in the north-eastern area participated in it. In 2005–2006, the method was expanded to the northern school district, and since 2006, schools from the southern, eastern, central and south-eastern districts have been using it. The Tunnel of Choices was implemented at schools and, since 2012, youth centres.

In 2013, there were a total of 4,979 6th-grade pupils in Helsinki, of whom 3,390 participated in the Story of Choices. The Story of Choices was enabled by 324 educators representing four administrative branches, parishes and several organisations. From autumn 2013, this substance use education method has been called The Story of Choices – Substance Use Education for Youngsters. The name of the method has been selected from among thousands of proposals made by 6th-grade pupils in the 2012 feedback survey. In the 2013 survey, both teachers and youngsters hoped for more action, so the 2014 Story of Choices includes methods that will add some action, while being based on discussion. If you wish to read more about the feedback given in 2013 and the areas for development, please refer to the report on feedback surveys, available on the Klaari Helsinki website at www.klaarihelsinki.fi (in Finnish).

Peer influence on substance use

One of the starting points for the development of the Story of Choices was knowledge of how experimenting with drugs and alcohol is a social activity, and of how drinking almost exclusively takes place in groups of friends, hobby groups and other groups. Young people find it hard to say no to drugs and alcohol, since they feel that they are part of having fun. Substance use is glorified, because when all friends do it, it is thought that all young people do it in their spare time. The primary goal of drinking is to experience and share social emotions within a nice group of friends. Drinking raises spirits and creates a feeling of unity. Substance use involves features related to pursuing new experiences, such as seeking adventure, trying to obtain a feeling of being socially uninhibited, hunting for experiences and preventing boredom. Young people’s curiosity, willingness to experiment and aspiration to grow up are based on
a model of alcohol use handed down by adults. It is important to highlight these issues, which are the actual objectives of drinking, and to consider whether it is necessary to drink in order to have these experiences. It can also be discussed together if young people themselves think that the lack of certain matters, frameworks or experiences in everyday life can lead to problems with drugs and alcohol. (Maunu A. (2012), Mäkelä P., Mustonen H., Tigerstedt C. (2010), Pirskanen M. (2007).)

Objectives of substance abuse prevention

The objective of substance abuse prevention is to promote health, safety and well-being by influencing substance use and its effects, and to implement and promote basic human rights in substance-related issues. This objective can be achieved by contributing to substance-free ways of living, preventing and reducing the detrimental effects of drugs and alcohol and increasing knowledge and awareness of substances.

Substance abuse prevention has an impact on:

- information, attitudes and rights related to drugs and alcohol
- risk factors and factors protecting from the detrimental effects of drugs and alcohol
- the ways of using, availability, supply and detrimental effects of drugs and alcohol.

“Substance abuse prevention aims to bring about changes in communities’ social habits, cultural ideals and economic systems. Paying attention to an individual problem or individual risk factors is not effective. Also, change cannot be effected top-down. Preventive work must be connected to fixed structures, and the work must have a positive note to it.” (Larme L. (2013).)

Good, high-quality substance abuse prevention is a network effort involving multiple sectors. Actors have different interests, resources and opportunities to make an impact, but cooperation can usually produce better results than working alone. Building cooperation is possible and useful only when agreements and negotiations are voluntary. Actors are expected to be capable of constructive collaboration in spite of different views. (Verkostoituminen ja yhteiseen strategiaan sitoutuminen. (2013).)
Effective substance use education

Substance use education provides young people a unique opportunity to talk and hear an adult’s opinion. This is helpful for a youngster living in an environment where experimenting with and using substances are present in many ways. Children and young people appreciate the knowledge and views of adults around them and often want to know what adults think about issues related to substances. It must be remembered that substance use educators should view young people as individual subjects and respect their own views and experiences. Practitioners of preventive work cannot just go and change young people’s drinking or experimentation with drugs and alcohol, but they can offer new horizons, views and tools with which young people can influence their own drinking. (Maunu A. (2012), Mäkelä P., Mustonen H., Tigerstedt C. (2010), Pirskanen M. (2007).)

Tips for discussion in substance use education

- Ask questions openly and be prepared to hear answers you don’t like. Reserve time for answers that worry you. If necessary, share your concerns with the teacher.
- Comments or views that seem insignificant at first may lead to interesting discussions, so use time, listen actively and have the courage to ask questions.
- Show your interest by, for example, making a short summary of what a pupil has said or by repeating some things.
- Try to prevent the discussion from focusing on a single substance and its effects; although illegal substances, such as drugs, often sound like an exciting and interesting subject, the Story of Choices concentrates on substances and phenomena that are the most relevant for pupils and that they encounter first, in other words cigarettes and alcohol.
- Although some young people experiment with drugs and alcohol, you should not assume that all of them, or the young people participating in the discussion, do so.
- In order for substance use education to be truthful, you cannot provide too simplistic a picture of substance use.

(Adapted from: Handbok till rusmedelarbete i Helsingfors skolor)
Objectives of the Story of Choices

The objective of the Story of Choices is to offer pupils a high-quality method based on continuous assessment and development. In addition, the Story of Choices uses a story, discussion and action-based methods to achieve the following goals:

- Supporting substance abuse prevention and health promotion in schools
- Reinforcing adults’ collective responsibility for substance use education for youngsters
- Encouraging young people to make independent decisions that add to their well-being
- Reaching the target group before the first experimentations with drugs and alcohol
- Delaying the experimentations of children and young people
- Equipping young people with the skills they need when they encounter drugs and alcohol

The idea of the Story of Choices is to discuss the influence of young people’s communities and their members (acquaintances, friends and parents) on young people’s decisions, not so much the substances or their health effects. In other words, the aim is to talk about how friends and family affect young people’s attitudes towards experimenting with substances.
Implementation of the Story of Choices

The Story of Choices is implemented in cooperation between various professional groups working with local children and young people, third-sector parties and young people themselves. It is a good idea to assign a person in charge of the Story of Choices to bear the overall responsibility for the implementation of the method. The duties are listed in the Appendix “Annual cycle for the person in charge”. Even if you have not been appointed as the person in charge, take a look at the annual cycle to view the different elements of the Story of Choices as well as tasks that are not mentioned elsewhere in the guide but are essential for the implementation of the Story of Choices. It is recommended that you agree on a standard week during which the Story of Choices is implemented, so that both schools and educators know the dates in good time and communication related to the parents’ night, for example, can be taken care of in autumn.

The Story of Choices method consists of the following elements:

1. Orientation for educators
   All educators participate in a three-hour orientation session before the implementation of the Story of Choices. Refer to the end of this guide for an outline of the session.

2. Story of Choices lesson for 6th-grade pupils
   The Story of Choices lesson is held at a youth centre for one class of 6th-grade pupils at a time. The class is divided into small groups, and two educators (a pair of one adult and one young person) are normally assigned for each group. In other words, the Story of Choices lesson is implemented by adults working with local children and young people, together with local youngsters. Educators play an active and important role in the Story of Choices. They create a safe atmosphere for discussion. Young educators (e.g. peer supporters) should have a meaningful and manageable role in the Story of Choices: the kind of responsibility they want and are able to take. Adult educators must ensure that a suitable role is found for young educators. Adults always participate as equal facilitators. Adult educators have the ultimate responsibility for the implementation of the Story of Choices.

The Story of Choices lesson includes a story, action-based exercises and discussion. The story is about a sister and brother, their friends, a house party, its preparations and consequences, and choices. Action-based exercises are performed when going through the story, to consider the events and spark discussion. Situations in which the young people in the story (Eetu, Karim, Emma, Sofia, Helmi and Daniel) encounter alcohol and cigarettes are discussed together:

- How do the young people act in these situations?
- How do they feel in these situations?
- What things influence their decisions?

What you need in order to teach the Story of Choices lesson:
- A link to the opening video (www.klaarihelsinki.fi)
- The story (www.klaarihelsinki.fi ➔ Contacts ➔ Planning officer)
- Name tags
- A large pile of Post-it notes (five colours)
- Pens
- Cards describing feelings (Tip! Take copies so that you have several cards with the same adjective)
  Adjectives for the cards: Crazy about him/her, feeling great, in love, brave, confident, satisfied, determined, cool, cheerful, happy, calm, excited, curious, relaxed, jealous, worried, bitter, lousy, irritated, unhappy, angry, furious, frustrated, frightened, insecure, uncomfortable, tense, tired, disappointed.
Valintojen stoori -tunti

Start

- Opening video ca 5 min.

- Nane tags
- A round of feelings
- Discussion: Why did Eetu have a party?
  ca 7 min.

- Start of the story
- A line of opinions
  ca 15 min.

- End of the story
- Cards describing feelings
- Discussion: Why did Eetu have a party?
  ca 15 min.

- On Post-it notes:
  - Saying no
  - Questions for guardians
  - How are you feeling?
  ca 10 min.

End

- Putting Post-it notes on the wall
  ca 3 min.

3. Parents’ night
During the implementation week of the Story of Choices, a parents’ night is held for the guardians of the 6th-grade pupils participating in the Story of Choices. Refer to the end of this guide for an outline of the parents’ night.

4. Feedback lesson for pupils
After the Story of Choices visit, the class teacher gives a lesson related to the theme, during which pupils provide feedback on the Story of Choices electronically. The pupils also write their own follow-ups to the Story of Choices. Refer to the end of this guide for an outline of the feedback lesson.

Note! The class teacher is present at the Story of Choices lesson and discussion of one small group. The teacher’s role as an educator and a person familiar with the pupils’ everyday life is important, and his or her participation contributes to learning in substance use issues. The teacher’s participation supports the discussions and tasks of the feedback lesson of the Story of Choices.

Note! The most important tool for the development of the Story of Choices is the feedback surveys and their results. Feedback is requested right after the Story of Choices from the pupils, their teachers, educators and guardians. A report drawn up on the feedback is used to plan development measures for the following year.
Literature

Ehkäisevän päihdetyön tavoitteet. (2013)
www.thl.fi/fi_FI/web/neuvoa-antavat-fi/ehkaisevan-paihdetyon-tavoitteet

Handbok till rusmedelarbete i Helsingfors skolor. (2013)
Klaari Helsinki. www.klaarihelsinki.fi/materiaalit

Selvää synergiaa – eettisesti kantavaa päihdekasvatusta. HUMAK University of Applied Sciences.

Reports and Memorandums of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health 2013:16.

School Health Survey. The School Health Survey provides schools and municipalities with information on the health, health habits and living conditions of young people aged 14–20. National Institute for Health and Welfare.
www.thl.fi/fi_FI/web/fi/tilastot/vaestotutkimukset/kouluterveyskysely


www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/80301/371e1e08-9bc1-47ea-81aa-68b04f27088c.pdf?sequence=1

• AHLSTRÖM S. & KARVONEN S. Miten nuoret juovat? In Suomi juo, pages 129–141.

In Suomi juo, pages 85–98.


Useful websites (Tip! Print this list and take copies for distribution at the parents’ night)

www.thl.fi
www.paihdelinkki.fi
www.thl.fi/neuvoa-antavat
www.nuortennetti.fi
www.vanhempainnetti.fi
www.ehyt.fi
www.vanhempainliitto.fi
www.vaestoliitto.fi
www.thl.fi/kouluterveyskysely
www.hel.fi/hki/sote/fi/Perhe-+ja+sosiaalipalvelut/nuoret/nuorisoaasemat
www.lastenseurassa.fi
ANNUAL CYCLE FOR THE PERSON IN CHARGE

Start here!

AUGUST-SEPTEMBER
- Find out the names of peer supporter instructors
  ➔ start cooperation
- Set up a working group of interested people responsible for the implementation of the Story of Choices in the area
- Convene the working group: Agree on practical activities and divide responsibility areas:
  • Matters related to the venue (e.g. props / creating the atmosphere)
  • Who does the orientation?
  • A meal and/or snack for the educators
  • Who organises the parents’ night?
  • Agreeing on peer support activities
  • Who stands in if the person in charge is not present?
- Remind schools of the Story of Choices and parents’ night of the coming spring, ask schools to put information on the parents’ night in Wilma and on the school website
- Contact principals ➔ Registration of classes: Principals provide information on the participating classes, their sizes and teachers’ email addresses
- Marketing to local educators begins (e.g. network meetings)

OCTOBER
- Create a schedule template for classes in Google Docs
  ➔ Teachers check the schedules for their own classes and make the necessary changes by the due date
- Marketing continues

NOVEMBER-DECEMBER
- Create a schedule template for educators in Google Docs
  ➔ Registration of educators via Google Docs begins (the peer supporter instructor takes care of the registration of peer supporters)
- Marketing continues
JANUARY
- Send the material to the educators and peer supporter instructors: the story, the guide if needed, the date of orientation.
- Send the material to the teachers: a checklist, the schedule, the guide if needed, an invitation to the parents’ night.

FEBRUARY
- Teachers inform guardians of the parents’ night
- Guardians send their registration to the person in charge via SMS or email
- Orientation event for educators and peer supporters

MARCH
The Story of Choices Week
- The person in charge is available throughout the week
- Send the following to the teacher right after the visit of the class or to all teachers at the beginning of the week:
  • Links to the feedback surveys for teachers and pupils (an electronic survey has been created)
  • The Story
- Parents’ night (Thursday): collect feedback at once
- At the end of the week, send a link to the feedback survey to peer supporter instructors and educators

APRIL-JUNE
- Send:
  • Certificates to peer supporters
  • If necessary, send a reminder of the feedback survey (to teachers, educators and peer supporter instructors)
  • Rewarding educators and, if possible, revealing the preliminary results of the feedback surveys
  • Collate the feedback into a report to support assessment and development
  • Assessment: use the report on the feedback surveys and the “Quality Star”, for example: www.julkari.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/104420/KID2013_021_verkkojulkaisu.pdf?sequence=1
    ➤ Select areas for improvement
- Send the report on the feedback surveys to the teachers and educators, along with information on next year’s Story of Choices
- Updating of material/development of the method on the basis of the feedback surveys
1. A round of introductions
   circulate a list of names, coffee

2. Go through the objectives of the method, described in the Story of Choices guide, and other parts if necessary

3. What to do...
   before the class arrives at the youth centre...
   • You are there already (with the story), since you have arrived in good time before the start of your turn.
   • Select the pairs of instructors

when the class arrives at the youth centre, go to the starting room and...
   • Ask the teacher if the class has been divided into three groups (if not, the teacher can do it here)
   • Tell the teacher that he or she can follow the story sitting in one of the rooms, in order to hear the whole story (subsequent instructions in the story document)

when you move into the rooms...
   • every pair of educators has one third of the class (if the class is small, divide into two groups)
   • the same group is with the same instructors in the same room for the duration of the entire lesson
   • go through the story, discuss and do exercises
   • the photos of the people in the story are found in every room

if I fall ill or cannot make it for another reason...
   • call the phone number agreed in advance as early as possible.

if I am present but notice that there are not enough other educators...
   • if two instructors cannot be assigned for some groups, a single instructor will do. It is advisable to change single instructors, so that the same person does not have to give the lesson alone many times (unless he or she wants to).
   • if there are not enough educators present (fewer than three) for some reason and nothing else can be arranged, the whole class can participate in the same lesson. In this case, what is most important is that the Story of Choices is implemented.

if I feel that I have told the story too many times and don’t know if I can do it any more...
   • tell the other educators if you can’t do it, if you want to change roles, if your voice is tired, etc.
PARENTS’ NIGHT

During the Story of Choices week, a parents’ night is held for the guardians of pupils who have participated in the Story of Choices. It enables them to learn about the Story of Choices and discuss matters highlighted by young people with the educators and other guardians. At the event, matters related to young people’s experimentation with substances and adults’ attitudes towards under-age drinking are discussed together. The parents’ night can be held at the youth centre or the school.

Duration: 2 hours
It is important to have a loose timetable in order to have enough time for discussion. Some sections can be left out if it seems that time is running out.

Key ideas for the parents’ night

The age of alcohol use initiation matters

Early exposure to cigarettes and alcohol shapes the pleasure centre of the central nervous system, increases sensitivity to the detrimental effects of substance use and heightens the risk of substance dependence.

The later a young person begins to experiment with alcohol, the smaller the risk of consuming large amounts of alcohol and other substances during adolescence.

A clear and consistent negative attitude and intervening in minors’ experiments promote children’s abstinence from drugs and alcohol

Youngsters whose parents have offered them alcohol also drink more in other situations, on average, than those whose parents have not done so.

Restricting availability is also a form of substance use education: parents do not offer alcohol to their children, shops do not sell it, schools intervene in experiments, and substance use is not allowed in leisure activities.

Good relationships between children and parents protect children from experimenting with and using drugs and alcohol

Talking, listening, showing interest, encouraging, forbidding, respect, concentration and affection create trust.

Spending enough time with the family contributes to agreeing on things, intervening in problems and finding solutions.

Cooperation between the parents can create mutually agreed practices that promote the children’s abstinence from drugs and alcohol.

It is important to get to know the child’s friends and keep in touch with their parents. It feels good to share responsibility with other adults. You can agree together on principles that will create a feeling of safety for both the children and adults:

- Adults do not buy alcohol for minors
- Spending the night at a friend’s home is agreed between adults
- On weekday/weekend evenings, children must be home by...
- At least one adult must be present at house parties
Outline for the parents’ night

1. Arrival, coffee and activities while drinking coffee
Walls of opinions:
- Guardians place stickers on the walls of opinions:
  - A dedicated wall of opinions for each statement
  - Use the following scale for stickers: -10 = completely disagree with the statement, +10 = completely agree with the statement, choose the position illustrating your opinion on the statement

Examples of statements on the walls of opinions (up to 5 statements, can be modified/changed):
- I know where and with whom my child spends his or her free time
- Cooperation with the parents of my child’s friends is important
- It is not relevant to talk about drugs and alcohol with 6th-grade pupils
- Children should be allowed to try alcohol in the company of adults
- Alcohol can be used independently before turning 18
- It is acceptable for an adult to get drunk when children are present

2. Opening of the parents’ night and introductions
- The person in charge opens the event
- Introduction of educators
- An educator, agreed in advance, explains what the week has been about
- Educators explain the themes that were most talked about among the pupils

3. Pupils’ Post-it notes and discussion about questions
Guardians are given a summary of the Post-it notes, containing all the questions made by the young people. In this way, they can continue to discuss issues occupying the young people’s minds at home.

4. Guardians’ discussion in small groups about the statements on the wall of opinions
Show one statement at a time (PowerPoint) and give the groups a few minutes to discuss each statement.

5. General discussion on the basis of the group discussions
What kind of discussion did you have? What do the results of the walls of opinions look like?

6. Moving to lower secondary school brings major changes to a child’s life
The changes may involve hopes, expectations, worries and even fears.

Young people’s hopes, expectations, worries and fears related to moving to lower secondary school

I hope for or expect:
- Understanding, no nagging, holidays spent together, privacy, freedom, that I as a child can also say what I think
- Spending time together
- More freedom, rights and trust, hanging out with friends, new friends, that other pupils are nice
- Shopping, playing games, great hobbies, chilling out
- New subjects, doing my own things, interesting things to do

I fear or am nervous about:
- The amount of homework, how I’m going to manage, new subjects, exams, getting lost at school and on the way there, being late for class, long days
- That parents will spend too little time at home
- That being different is not accepted
- Boys/girls and dating
- Too many hobbies
- Quarrelling with friends, bullying, friends going to different classes, that friends will leave me, how 7th-year pupils are treated, will I fit in, will I get friends, tough boys/girls
- Teachers changing for every lesson, if teachers are mean, that teachers will talk about my personal matters
- Bullying, being offered alcohol and drugs, being humiliated, division into groups (those who wear make-up, smoke, etc.), discrimination

General discussion
- What will change? How can I best support my child in this change?
- What matters are important in the everyday life of a teenager’s family? What kinds of moments bring good feelings to the everyday life of a teenager’s family?

7. A round-up of the event, feedback surveys and words of thanks
FEEDBACK LESSON FOR PUPILS

After the Story of Choices visit, the class teacher gives a lesson related to the theme, during which pupils provide feedback on the method electronically. The pupils also write their own follow-ups to the Story of Choices. This ensures that discussion can also be continued in class under the teacher's guidance. If a class wishes to do so, it can choose one or more of the stories written by pupils to be sent to the person in charge. These stories can be published on a website that has been agreed in advance.

WRITING A FOLLOW-UP TO THE STORY AT THE SCHOOL (20–30MIN.)

Write a follow-up to the Story of Choices. What happened to the characters after the house party?

To refresh memories, you can watch the opening video of the Story of Choices (www.klaarihelsinki.fi)

Option 1.
Write a story about what is going on in the young people’s lives next autumn, when Emma, Sofia and Helmi begin their 8th year of school, Eetu and Karim begin their 9th year and Daniel begins his studies after comprehensive school. You can write a follow-up to the Story of Choices for one of the characters or for the entire group of friends.

You can deal with the following questions, for example: How is the circle of friends doing? How did the house party affect the relationships between the young people and their parents? What will happen next in the young people’s lives?

Option 2.
Write a story about how one/all of the young people are doing when they have turned 19. You can write a follow-up to the Story of Choices for one of the characters or for the entire group of friends.

You can deal with the following questions, for example: Who has remained friends? What will happen next in the young people’s lives?