

Breaking teens free from substance abuse

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Credit: FRQS

Almost half of grade eight students in Québec have consumed alcohol—an alarming statistic considering that alcohol and drug abuse at a young age can affect the brain, push teenagers to drop out of school, trigger mental illness and lead to long-term addiction. But science has a solution: cognitive and behavioural therapy workshops for at-risk teenagers.

As part of the Co-venture Project, which thus far has been tested in England and Canada, Patricia Conrod, psychiatry professor at Université de Montréal and researcher at the CHU Sainte-Justine Research Centre, has found that certain personality and [behavioural traits](#) such as anxiety and impulsiveness can drive teenagers to abuse [harmful substances](#). By learning to better manage their psychological profiles without drugs or alcohol, students experience a 30% decrease in their symptoms of

depression and anxiety, a 40% improvement in their behavioural issues and a 50% decline in their binge drinking.

For the past four years, Patricia Conrod has investigated the approach in 32 Montréal-area high schools, where she recruited some 4,000 12-year-olds based on their risk behaviours, consumption habits and mental health. The students take part in psychosocial therapy sessions with trained school counsellors, who teach them how to handle their emotions and risk behaviours.

Conrod hopes to change the adolescents' temperaments and curb their drug and [alcohol consumption](#) by 50% by the time they finish their schooling. In the long term, she aims to develop an intervention model that will be offered in all schools to ensure students' cognitive development and prevent long-term substance abuse.

Provided by University of Montreal

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