



**Story General Information**  
**Do Drugs Make You Happy? ( An Emotional Health Story)**  
**(5<sup>th</sup> Grade – 10-11 yrs.)**

While we all want to be happy, this story describes how sometimes things that are not good for us – like recreational drugs – can change our ability to feel happy.

- Our brain is designed to let you feel happiness whenever you do a behavior that helps you (or your species) get something you need to survive. The reward system is the part of the brain that allows you to feel happy.
- Recreational drugs activate the reward system, better, stronger and faster than any natural reinforcer – like food or water.
- Recreational drugs, definitely make you happy, but they change your brain. When your brain changes, normal reinforcers do not make you as happy as the drugs. Your brain becomes addicted.

The facilitator begins by introducing themselves, neuroscience, and the program: Brain Health: It's SPECTacular. The facilitator breaks down the meaning of SPEC for the children and discusses how the letter **E** represents Emotional Health. Emotional Health is an important part of keeping the brain healthy and happy. In this story, the children learn about drugs, how they change the brain, and why people become addicted.

The title of the story poses a question to the children from the beginning. The facilitator answers the question right away, "Yes, drugs make people happy." But follows the question with a discussion about why it makes people happy and includes the very important "but." When drugs are used, they physically change the brain. They brain's *happy place* is effected by the drugs and does not function in the proper way. The brain is actually confused. This is not healthy for the brain.

People like to feel happy. There are healthy ways to feel happy. Giving the brain what it needs to survive (food, water, shelter, etc.) make it happy. The brain is designed to reward when it receives what it needs. That reward is a feeling of happiness. The brain also feels happy when people engage in activities they like. Especially if someone is feeling stressed, playing a video game, talking to friends, or hugging their dog can help turn on the *happy place*. However, the brain is able to turn off the *happy place* once the need has been met. The brain knows exactly what and how much of something is needed to activate and deactivate the reward center.

The facilitator helps the children differentiate between wants and needs. They make a list and discuss scenarios to clarify how the *happy place* functions for needs versus wants. Unlike for needs, the *happy place* does not automatically turn off for a want. This is why drugs affect the brain so intensely. Drugs are a want, not a need. When someone uses a drug for the first time, the chemicals activate the *happy place* more quickly and stronger than any other want or need. The *happy place* remains on making them feel very happy so happy their brain now thinks they need the drug to feel happy. The brain is confused. The brain gets even more stressed. The brain craves the feeling of happy that came from the drug.

This craving is addiction. The facilitator defines *addiction* for the children and describes the feeling of addiction. They emphasize that addiction is a disease. Although people know drugs can harm their bodies and know it is

dangerous, the addiction or disease does not allow them to think clearly. They can only think about the feeling the drug gave them and how they want to feel that happy again. The facilitator also shares that addiction is different for different people. Everyone's brain is different, therefore, responses to drugs are unique to each individual. Sometimes people become addicted right away. Others use drugs for a long time before addiction sets in. Scientists do not have a cure for addiction yet. People who are recovering addicts must work really hard to maintain their sobriety. When addicts stop taking the drug, they do begin to feel happy by normal behaviors again. However, sometimes they *relapse*. The facilitator defines *relapse* and helps the children understand why a relapse occurs.

Finally, the facilitator and children discuss the importance of *moderation*. Whether its playing video games or eating sweets, for any want, moderation is key. Wants help alleviate stress. Too much stress is bad for the overall health of the brain. Therefore, identifying healthy ways (in moderation) to eliminate stress is an important part of taking care the brain and its Emotional Health. When the brain is happy and healthy, its SPECTacular!

**Story Objectives:**

- Students will explain how and why the “happy place” in the brain is “turned on and off.”
- Students will identify specific (healthy and unhealthy) ways to “turn on” the “happy place.”
- Students will describe the difference between needs and wants.
- Students will describe why recreational drugs make you feel happy.
- Students will define *addiction*, *craving*, and *relapse*.
- Students will explain how recreational drugs can become addicting.
- Students will describe the negative effects of recreational drugs on the brain.
- Students will explain the importance of understanding the effects of recreational drugs on their Emotional Health and overall Brain Health.