

Alternative to Suspension

Vaping & Tobacco

A supportive, restorative, and educational approach for schools



Student suspensions have historically been used to manage problematic student behaviour, including vaping and smoking tobacco on school grounds. However, research shows that suspensions rarely lead to behavioural change while having unintended negative consequences for students, families, and the school community. Schools and administrators have the opportunity to improve these outcomes by implementing evidence-based alternatives that focus on prevention, skill development, and meaningful engagement.

Key Reasons for an Alternative Approach to Suspension

- Suspensions are punitive and don't change behaviour.
- Suspensions lead to academic disengagement, increased behaviour issues, and weaker youth-adult connections.
- Students suspended for substance use face higher risks of dropout, mental-health challenges, and long-term negative outcomes.
- Suspensions create stress for families and increase staff workload.
- Suspensions have disproportionate impacts among racialized students, males, students with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ students.
- Restorative, education-based approaches help keep students connected, supported, and building skills to change behaviour.

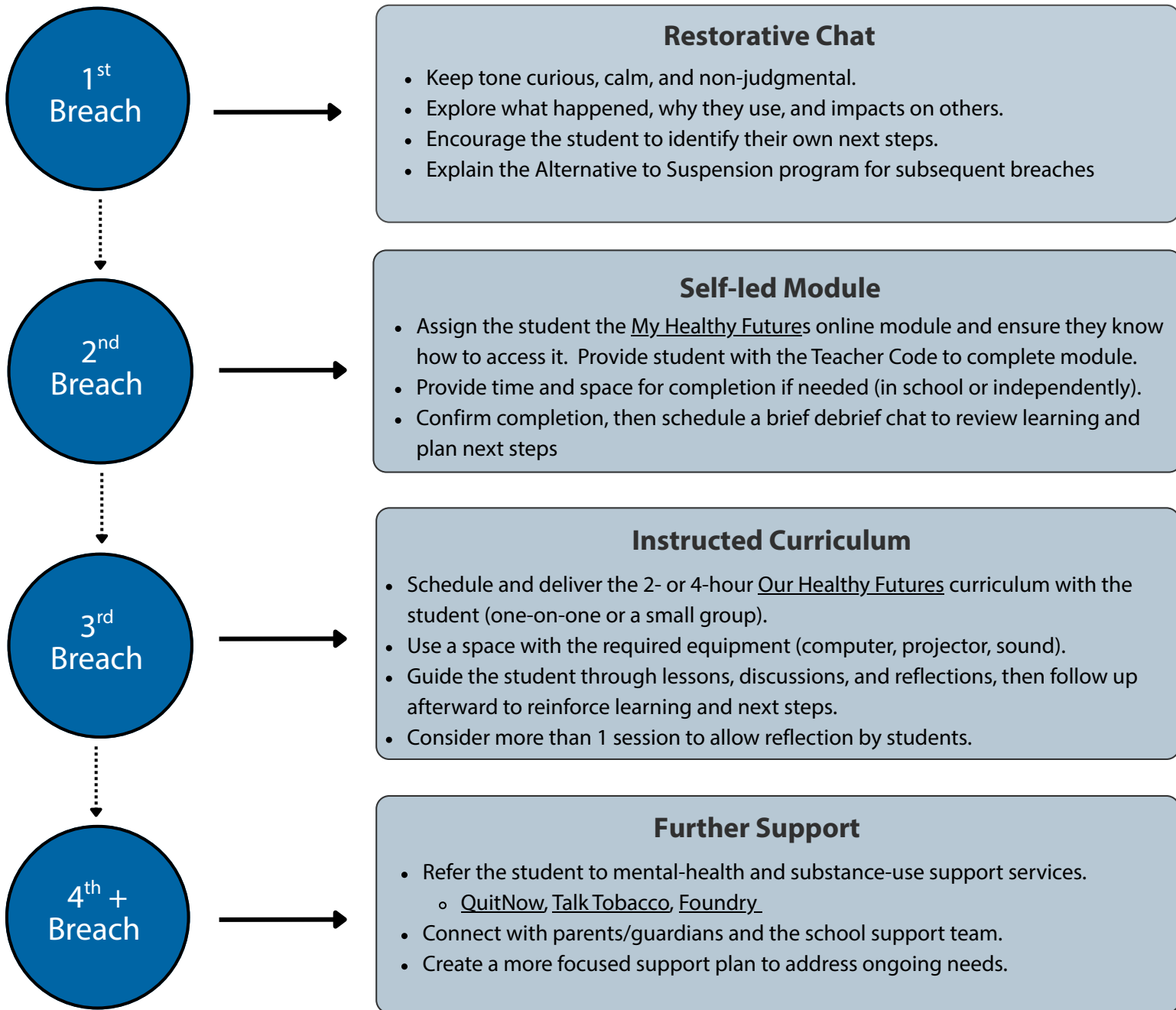
Steps to Implement

Designate a lead at your school (an administrator, teacher, counsellor, or support worker) to:

1. Receive referrals
2. Assess student willingness to participate
3. Facilitate restorative conversations
4. Assign or instruct educational modules via [Stanford Healthy Futures](#)
5. Track follow-up and support needs

Benefits of an Alternative Approach to Suspension

- A standardized, restorative response across the school
- A focus on education, not punishment
- Opportunities for skill-building and self-reflection
- Connections to trusted adults
- Access to cessation supports, mental-health services, and community resources
- Ability for schools to enforce policy without excluding students



Restorative Chat

- Keep tone curious, calm, and non-judgmental.
- Explore what happened, why they use, and impacts on others.
- Encourage the student to identify their own next steps.
- Explain the Alternative to Suspension program for subsequent breaches

Self-led Module

- Assign the student the My Healthy Futures online module and ensure they know how to access it. Provide student with the Teacher Code to complete module.
- Provide time and space for completion if needed (in school or independently).
- Confirm completion, then schedule a brief debrief chat to review learning and plan next steps

Instructed Curriculum

- Schedule and deliver the 2- or 4-hour Our Healthy Futures curriculum with the student (one-on-one or a small group).
- Use a space with the required equipment (computer, projector, sound).
- Guide the student through lessons, discussions, and reflections, then follow up afterward to reinforce learning and next steps.
- Consider more than 1 session to allow reflection by students.

Further Support

- Refer the student to mental-health and substance-use support services.
 - QuitNow, Talk Tobacco, Foundry
- Connect with parents/guardians and the school support team.
- Create a more focused support plan to address ongoing needs.

Healthy Futures

Healthy Futures is a free, evidence-based program from Stanford University in California designed to help students who vape or use nicotine/tobacco. It provides a self-paced lesson and teacher-led sessions that support reflection, skill-building, and healthier choices. No student data is collected/retained by Stanford.

1. Register on the Stanford Data Dashboard.
2. Log in and retrieve your Teacher Code.
3. Optional: Register for the free 90-minute online educator training on the Healthy Futures Program.

